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Student Veteran Innovation Workshop: Exploring Purpose-Driven Camaraderie

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STUDENT VETERAN INNOVATION WORKSHOP: EXPLORING PURPOSE-

DRIVEN CAMARADERIE

by

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ABSTRACT

Student Veteran Innovation Workshop: Exploring Purpose-Driven Camaraderie

by

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Utah State University, 2023

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There is only a small, but growing body of research on student veterans, despite having roughly 1 million veterans enrolled in higher education in the U.S. In this work, the term *student veteran* refers to both former and current military service members. The majority of the small body of literature on student veterans is focused on the perceived deficiencies of this population, rather than the strengths they bring to their academic experience. In recent years, academic work has emerged that advocates for an asset-driven approach to research and practice surrounding student veterans. One such approach is Veteran Critical Theory (VCT). Stemming from VCT, the concept of purpose-driven camaraderie among student veterans introduces an asset-driven approach to this population. Purpose-driven camaraderie is rooted in the mission-focused, team-driven environment found in the military that builds a sense of camaraderie.

The objective of this study was to evaluate one potential asset-driven solution to cultivate a sense of purpose-driven camaraderie among student veterans in higher

education. This occurred through an innovation workshop, where student veterans participated as a team to address challenges within the student veteran community at their institution using design thinking. The workshop was developed and analyzed as a single interpretive case study using Communities of Practice (CoP) and VCT with a focus on purpose-driven camaraderie, identity, and the role of community in the experiences of student veterans.

The results of the study identify the role of teamwork and a common goal in promoting community and camaraderie among the workshop participants. It further addresses the lack of interest that the participants demonstrated in working with other veterans, and the role of CoPs, old-timers, and boundary activities in overcoming this hurdle to purpose-driven camaraderie. Finally, the study identifies factors influencing how the veterans felt about their veteran identities and how the workshop played an influential role in shifting their perspectives.

(275 pages)

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

Student Veteran Innovation Workshop: Exploring Purpose-Driven Camaraderie

David Brian Kartchner

There 1 million veterans enrolled in higher education in the U.S., and we know relatively little about them. In this work, the term *student veteran* refers to both former and current military service members. Most of the small body of literature on student veterans is focused on perceived issues found within this population, rather than the strengths they bring to their academic experience. In recent years, academic work has emerged that advocates a shift to looking at the positive traits of the student veteran community. Building on the emerging strength-based perspectives, the concept of purpose-driven camaraderie among student veterans introduces a different approach to supporting and understanding student veterans. Purpose-driven camaraderie is rooted in the mission-focused, team-driven environment found in the military that builds a sense of camaraderie.

The purpose of this study was to explore the application of purpose-driven camaraderie among student veterans in higher education. This happened through an innovation workshop, where student veterans participated as a team to address challenges within the student veteran community at their institution using a problem-solving process known as design thinking. The workshop was analyzed using Communities of Practice (CoP), which focuses on how individuals learn and interact as a community, and the emerging strength-based perspectives with a focus on purpose-driven camaraderie in the

experiences of student veterans.

The study identifies the role of teamwork and a common goal in promoting community and camaraderie among the workshop participants. It further addresses the lack of interest that the participants demonstrated in working with other veterans, and the role of CoPs in overcoming this hurdle to purpose-driven camaraderie. Finally, the study identifies factors influencing how the veterans felt about themselves as veterans and how the workshop influenced their perspectives.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation to my family. First, my parents, David and Sharie, who have been the constant pillars of support, love, and inspiration throughout my life. Most importantly, my incredible wife and partner, Chelsi, along with our four daughters, Bailey, Alexis, Evelyn, and Margaret. These five incredible women bring joy into my life and make me a better person, and I love them with all of my heart. They have sacrificed the most as I have walked this long road.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my fellow military veterans and current military service members—especially those who have taken the leap into pursuing higher education. I am grateful that I can count myself among your ranks in my own small way.

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David Brian Kartchner

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Relatively little is known about student veterans, despite having roughly 1 million veterans enrolled in higher education in the U.S. (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2022; Vacchi & Berger, 2014). The majority of the small body of literature on student veterans is focused on the perceived deficiencies of this population, rather than the strengths they bring to their academic experience (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017; Vacchi & Berger, 2014). In recent years, academic work has emerged that advocates a generative approach to research and practice surrounding student veterans. In order to understand the framing, context, and findings of this study, it is key to define how this document utilizes the term, "student veteran."

A veteran is often defined as "a former member of the armed forces," or "an old soldier of long service" (https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/veteran). While for many years, higher education lumped together current military service members and military veterans into a monolithic group of military-connected students on college campuses (Daly & Garrity, 2017), there has been a recent shift to the use of the terms "military-connected students" or Student Service Members or Veterans (SSM/Vs) (Albright et al., 2017; Barry, 2015; Southwell et al., 2016). This is done to avoid confusion with the variety of individuals who have connections to the military and attend higher education institutions. However, Vacchi and Berger (2014) argue that, regardless of the differences that exist between current military service members and veterans, the student veteran title is still the best fit. Nearly 90% of the military-connected student

population are military veterans, and it is a distinction that other military-affiliated students understand (Vacchi & Berger, 2014, p.107). Therefore, I will continue to use the term "student veteran" throughout this document, while acknowledging that there are other military-connected students that fall within this classification and that there may exist or will exist better ways to describe this unique population.

This study focuses on military veterans in higher education, those who have been separated from military service, but also includes other military-connected students who have completed their initial training with the military. This initial training is a critical, and powerful step in socializing service members into the military (Demers, 2011; Soeters et al., 2006). While differences in initial training for service-members exist, this socialization largely provides a common ground between veterans and current service members. This decision to include current service members was rooted in practicality, due to the difficulty in recruiting enough military veteran participants. Further, the inclusion of non-veteran, military-connected students aligns with the Communities of Practice (CoP) framework used in this study. It is appropriate and beneficial to have a variety of individuals and backgrounds present in a CoP to avoid homogeneity (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 35). A more in-depth analysis of what it means to be a student veteran is found in Chapter II.

Problem Statement

Student veterans account for roughly 6% of undergraduates and 7% of graduate students enrolled in higher education in the U.S. (Holian & Adam, 2020). To put this in

perspective, in 2020 there were roughly 15.9 million enrolled undergraduate students in the U.S., meaning there were about 954,000 (6%) enrolled student veterans (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2022). With roughly 300,000 military service members leaving service every year (U.S. Department of Defense, 2018), student veterans will remain a consistent portion of the student body in higher education into the foreseeable future. Despite having a large number of student veterans enrolled in higher education, the body of literature involving this unique population is relatively sparse, though it has been growing in recent years. More research is needed to better understand the experiences of student veterans in higher education, and the efficacy of current research trends and recommendations for best practices.

Most research on student veterans in higher education has largely focused on the perceived deficiencies of student veterans, with a minority of academic publications focusing on the generative qualities of the population (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017; Vacchi & Berger, 2014). Unfortunately, deficit approaches have been shown to be damaging to students who are perceived to be disadvantaged in higher education settings (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Smit, 2012; Valencia, 2010). There is little evidence these deficit approaches are providing the appropriate supports and services and are likely harmful to student veterans. Further bringing into question the efficacy of deficit approaches focusing on student veterans, in 2018 the U.S. Department of Education reported that roughly 54% of student veteran undergraduates graduated within 6 years, while nearly 62% of all undergraduates graduated with their bachelor's degrees in the same timeframe (Hussar et al., 2020). The reported rates have student veterans graduating at rates 8%

lower than the average, nonveteran undergraduate.

Others have argued that the graduation rate is higher, a 2010 report by the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) has been cited in research literature (e.g., Kirchner, 2015) stating that the number of graduating veterans was much higher at roughly a 68% completion rate (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, 2010). There are two main issues with this VA report pertaining to understanding student veteran graduation rates. The first is that it only considered veterans who had served on active duty. The report does not include military reservists who also use GI benefits to attend school, which are more prevalent on campuses in more recent years (Kirchner, 2015; Cate, 2014), or veterans who used alternate funding sources (Molina & Morse, 2015). Second, the report covered all generations of veterans within the active-duty demographic, which does not provide an accurate understanding of the trends among the current generations of student veterans. There are generational differences between veterans that are still being understood and explored with the current generation (Cate, 2014; Montgomery et al., 2021). Lumping previous generations of veterans into a broad survey does not yield an accurate picture of the current generation of student veterans, as 64% of those responding were over the age of 55 (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, 2010). The results of the VA study skew the data toward the characteristics of previous generations of active-duty military veterans who were using their benefits, thus painting an inaccurate picture of successful completion of post-secondary education among the current generation of veterans.

To further establish more credence to the 54% graduation rate reported by The

Department of Education, the *Million Records Project* that was commissioned by the

Student Veterans of America (SVA) and the VA found the graduation rates to be around

52% for student veterans (Cate, 2014), or 10% lower than the average undergraduate

student. The *Million Records Project* used the records of one million student veterans

who were using their benefits between 2002 and 2010, thus providing a better window to

understand the graduation rates of more recent student veterans. While even these

numbers seem to have more credence, they still may not accurately reflect the actual

graduation rates, as there is not a great way to track veterans outside of their benefit uses

in higher education (Molina & Morse, 2015), or consider those who transfer between

institutions (Sansone & Segura, 2020). With a generous educational package and

experience from their military service (Vacchi & Berger, 2014), military veterans should

be ideally positioned to succeed as they enter higher education. Yet, student veterans are

graduating at a rate that is 8% to 10% lower than the average student.

Phillips and Lincoln (2017) posit that much of what civilian-based academic

institutions provide to student veterans as supports and services actually serves the

institutions' civilian-based interests—rather than those of student veterans. At the same

time, veterans have indicated a distrust for institutions, such as universities and the U.S.

Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), instead preferring to engage with and support

other veterans (Blaauw-Hara, 2016; Luchsinger, 2016). These differing interests between

institutions and student veterans set up tensions and conflicts that may hamper the

educational experiences and outcomes of student veterans. Potentially because of deficit-

based services and supports offered by institutions, there remains a cultural divide

between student veterans and institutions of higher education that is ill-understood and without a concrete solution. Student veterans find themselves bumping into institutional structures that are distinct from what they experienced in the military, and they are graduating at a lower rate than their undergraduate counterparts, perhaps due to the disconnect between student veterans' needs and the deficit-based services provided by institutions of higher education.

To counter deficit approaches and to provide a generative lens to better understand the experiences of the student veteran population, Phillips and Lincoln (2017) introduced Veteran Critical Theory (VCT). Rooted in existing critical theories, VCT is intended to provide a critique of the institutions of power that border student veterans in higher education and to shed light on the narratives and counter-narratives of student veterans. By eliciting the narratives of student veterans, the understanding gained from their experiences can be used to address practices and gaps in research surrounding this population. To further build a generative perspective of student veterans, Kartchner and Searle (2023) conducted a VCT-informed narrative inquiry into the experiences of student veterans in higher education. Findings from the study highlighted the value student veterans placed in purpose-driven camaraderie, something they experienced during military service. The definition of purpose-driven camaraderie goes beyond what is found in the dictionary: "a feeling of friendship and trust among people who work or spend a lot of time together" (https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/camaraderie). Rather, purpose-driven camaraderie is founded on the idea that the "friendship" and "trust" that are developed among service members are complementary

to the shared purpose, or goals associated with military service. As student veterans leave service, they find themselves without a shared purpose, like the one that binds the military community together. Taking into consideration purpose-driven camaraderie, which is highly valued by student veterans, and the preference to help, and to seek assistance from other veterans—there emerges a confluence of themes and traits indicating the need to create opportunities for student veterans to develop camaraderie with each other. This boosted level of camaraderie among student veterans has the potential to yield opportunities for student veterans to mutually support each other in their educational pursuits. As we consider this confluence of themes, additional research is needed to determine how purpose-driven camaraderie found in military service can be adapted to support asset-driven student veteran experiences in higher education.

Purpose and Objectives

The current study, based on pilot data from Kartchner and Searle (2023), was designed to evaluate one potential solution to cultivate a sense of purpose-driven camaraderie among student veterans in higher education and to explore the explanatory power of VCT and CoP with the student veteran population. This occurred through an innovation workshop, where student veterans participated as a team to address a complex need, found within their academic institution's student veteran population. By conducting the student veteran innovation workshop, this study provides a better understanding of:

- purpose-driven camaraderie among student veterans and by extension, the role of a community among student veterans in higher education.
- the shaping of student veterans' diverse identities through participation in a purpose-driven community of practice.

I selected VCT (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017) and CoP (Wenger, 2018) as the workshop design framework and analytical lenses to evaluate the resultant data from the study. Social learning theory has been used for decades in military training and is a familiar learning environment for student veterans (Grossman, 1996). As defined by Wenger (2000), CoP is founded on social learning theory, where communities are the "basic building blocks of a social learning system" (p. 229) and are driven by a common purpose or domain. Playing a central role in CoP is the individual's identity as they engage in their community using identity resources (Nasir & Cooks, 2009). Student veteran identities, among the other identities that student veterans possess, is established as one of the core tenets of VCT (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017), thus providing a salient connection between the two theoretical perspectives.

Through the examination of student veteran experiences and identities, as they participated in the innovation workshop, this study contributes to a better understanding of how purpose-driven camaraderie can be leveraged to support student veterans in higher education. The understanding acquired through this study furthers the explanatory power of VCT and CoP for understanding student veteran experiences and identities through a generative perspective.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study focused on the student veteran innovation workshop, which had the intention of promoting purpose-driven camaraderie among the participants. These questions are rooted in CoP and VCT, which were used as

the analytic lens and design framework for the innovation workshop. VCT places

emphasis on the simultaneous identities student veterans juggle (Phillips & Lincoln,

2017), while CoP provides emphasis on the practice of identity within the community in

the form of participation through identity-resources (Nasir & Cooks, 2009; Wenger,

2000). Additionally, CoP emphasizes not only the identity of the learner, but the

importance of its core pillars of a domain, community, and practice, around which a

community convenes (Wenger, 2000, 2018).

1. How and in what ways does participation in the innovation workshop facilitate the establishment of purpose-driven camaraderie among student veterans? How does the innovation workshop contribute to building a sense of community among student veterans on a higher education campus?

2. How are student veteran identities shaped within the context of the innovation workshop?

Because of the interconnected nature of the three components of CoP, identity, and VCT,

there is overlap in the research questions. Question 1 focuses on the *domain*, or purpose

of the workshop with components of *community* and *practice* interwoven to better

understand purpose-driven camaraderie. Question 1 also focuses on the potential

community implications outside of the workshop environment. Question 2 addresses the

practice of the student veteran participants through the lens of identity. This is

accomplished by using VCT's focus on the multiple identities that student veterans

simultaneously inhabit (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017) and CoP's emphasis on identity

(Wenger, 2000) being a form of practice. Identity-resources (Nasir & Cooks, 2009) was

incorporated to aid in identifying and analyzing the resulting data from the workshops

through the lens of identity, while providing a more substantial link between the uses of

identity in CoP and VCT.

Summary

In this chapter I addressed how the term "student veterans" is used within the context of the study and the prevailing challenge to student veterans through the use of deficit thinking in research and practice. I then presented asset-driven approaches using VCT and the resulting concept of purpose-driven camaraderie. VCT and purpose-driven camaraderie, coupled with CoP, serve as the basis to further study purpose-driven camaraderie and student veteran identities in a generative environment. For this purpose, a workshop environment, based on CoP, was selected to explore purpose-driven camaraderie, community, and student veteran identities. The explored topics are the basis of the study's research questions.

Dissertation Outline

This dissertation largely follows the five-chapter format. Chapter I presents the general background and problem statement, the purpose and objectives of the study, and the research questions driving the inquiry. Chapter II provides background on student veterans, deficit thinking, and asset-driven approaches to practice and research with student veterans. Following the background, the chapter lays out the theoretical foundations of the study and how all those elements coalesce into the workshop format. Chapter III addresses the methods used by the study, including the research design, researcher positionality, workshop design, setting, data collection, data analysis, and trustworthiness. Chapter IV reports the results of the study. The four reported themes are correlated with their respective research question. Chapter V I discuss the findings

through the lens of the theoretical foundations of the study. I then proceed to address the

limitations and contributions of the study.

CHAPTER II

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter is broken down into two major sections, following Maxwell's (2013) approach to developing and presenting conceptual frameworks. In the *Background* section, I focus on establishing a baseline understanding and description of student veterans and deficit thinking, one of most prevailing theories within research and practice in the student veteran space. As I discuss deficit thinking in research and practice, I break it down into two broad categories: *Transition* (Schlossberg, 1981) and *Assimilation* (Tinto, 1975)*,* which are key perspectives used in deficit thinking These categories, and the related literature are intentionally not exhaustive, and are intended to situate the study and theoretical foundations within the student veteran body of literature and practice (Maxwell, 2013). I then turn my attention to the *Theoretical Foundations* of my study, where I focus on VCT, Purpose-driven Camaraderie, and CoP. After I discuss the theoretical foundations, I present how these theories, coupled innovation and equine-assisted learning supported the study's workshop. Together, all these elements compose the conceptual framework of the study.

Background

To develop a broader understanding of the existing literature surrounding student veterans, a review of the current student veteran literature was conducted. The body of research surrounding student veterans is small, though it has been growing in recent years (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017; Vacchi & Berger, 2014). As the literature review progressed,

additional pieces of literature were added to the overall review based on new information discovered through the review process. Peer-reviewed articles were located using PsychINFO, ERIC, the Education Source databases via Utah State University's library system, and the Google Scholar database. I largely looked for literature that was published since 2009, the year after the Post 9/11 GI bill was passed by Congress. This date marks an identifiable generational shift among student veterans (Cate, 2014). By focusing on studies, reports, and other peer-reviewed works after this date, I have aimed to develop a holistic viewpoint of what we currently know about this current generation of student veterans. Additional reports, government resources, and academic work from other disciplines were incorporated to better understand the current body of research and practice surrounding student veterans, and to formulate the theoretical foundations of this study. These additional sources were identified through bibliography mining; resources provided by faculty members and researchers; academic course content; and personal experiences as a student, design professional, and veteran.

What is a Student Veteran?

Before delving into the current body of literature surrounding student veterans and to better understand the research and practice surrounding student veterans, it is imperative to deepen our understanding of what a student veteran is. Further, by developing a broader understanding of student veterans, it will help establish the prevalence of deficit thinking in research and practice. In the introduction, I presented the definition of being a student veteran, and showed how it encapsulates a variety of individuals associated with military service. The definition of a student veteran is a point

of some contention in the literature, where even the term "student veteran" is debated.

Molina and Morse (2015) point out that within the category of "student veterans,"' you

find a variety of individuals with military connections. A few of the most commonly

associated military-connected students include:

- Active-duty and Reserve/National Guard service members.

- Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) students who are working toward a
  commission as an officer.

- Veterans who have fully separated from the military.

- Dependents who are utilizing educational benefits earned by a parent through
  their military service.

Largely, students who are currently serving in the military, ROTC cadets, and

veterans all have a common military socialization which crosscuts other differences that

may exist between these groups and individuals (Vacchi & Berger, 2014)—with the

exception of dependents who have not undergone the strong military indoctrination

process (Soeters et al., 2006).

Increasingly the terms *military-connected students* (e.g., Albright et al., 2017) or

Student Service Members or Veterans (SSM/Vs; e.g., Barry, 2015; Southwell et al., 2016)

are among those being used in place of "student veteran." This is done to avoid confusion

with the variety of individuals who have connections to the military who attend higher

education campuses. While these and other terms referring to the broader military-

connected student community have been floated, I utilize the "student veteran" moniker

because over 90% of military-connected students are veterans who have fully separated

from the military (Vacchi & Berger, 2014).

Echoing Chapter I, I acknowledge that there are other military-connected students

who fall within the student veteran classification—and that there may exist or will exist better ways to describe this unique population. Further, I argue that these distinctions between student veterans and military-connected students should emerge from within their communities. That is, "veterans are more appropriately positioned to inform policy and practice regarding veterans" (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017, p. 662) than nonveterans. To reiterate, it is not the intention of this body of work to attempt to define or redefine the naming conventions of this population. In the following sections I will broadly review the military culture from which student veterans come, their status as non-traditional students, and the role of stigmas and stereotypes in how the population is perceived—which often happens through the lens of deficit thinking.

Culture

Few experiences are as life-altering as military indoctrination (Soeters et al., 2006). Being able to better understand the environment and culture of the military of which student veterans were a part, aids in establishing a foundational understanding of this population, without the preconceived notions that exist in literature and practice. The military is an institution that predates the founding of the U.S. with many of the traditions and practices stemming from that time. For instance, "drill and ceremony," which has the purpose of building unit cohesion, was born from the Continental Army during the American Revolutionary War (Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2012). In addition to indoctrination into the strong culture and tradition of the military, many branches—such as the Army and Marine Corps—subject service members to combat training. This training is intended to replace the "fight-or-flight" instinct with a honed "fight" response.

Such training involves rewiring the responses through intensive and repetitive drills and conditioning (Grossman, 1996). With such a strong institutional culture and intense training—service members have a powerful identity instilled through their affiliation with the armed forces, which can be carried on into their civilian lives and academic experiences.

This indoctrination is foundational to the culture and identities which are instilled when service members enter the military. Elements of the culture and identities that were formed during military service remain as a part of student veteran identities after they leave service. Studies have identified some of the elements brought over from military service, such as communication, management, and leadership (Blaauw-Hara, 2016; Sullivan & Yoon, 2020)—and cultural concepts such as honor, duty, and respect (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017). These elements of culture and identity stem from when a service member enters the military, where they are socialized away from looking at the individual self and becoming mission and unit-focused (Demers, 2011). For instance, the U.S. Department of the Army. (2003) has all of its service members memorize *The Soldier's Creed.*

> I am an American Soldier.
> I am a warrior and a member of a team.
> I serve the people of the United States, and live the Army Values.
> I will always place the mission first.
> I will never accept defeat.
> I will never quit.
> I will never leave a fallen comrade.
> I am disciplined, physically and mentally tough, trained and proficient in my
>   warrior tasks and drills.
> I always maintain my arms, my equipment, and myself.
> I am an expert and I am a professional.
> I stand ready to deploy, engage, and destroy, the enemies of the United States of

America in close combat.
I am a guardian of freedom and the American way of life.
I am an American Soldier.

This creed is drilled into trainees as they undergo their Initial Entry Training (IET). Guided by Drill Sergeants (instructors of new military recruits), the creed is repeatedly rehearsed and often accompanied with strong reinforcement to punctuate the importance of the creed. With time, *The Soldier's Creed* becomes the overt embodiment of a soldier's identity within the U.S. Army. It further stands as a representation of the military culture that veterans were indoctrinated into when they swore their oaths.

Following the departure from their military service, veterans who are students, find themselves bordered by at least two powerful institutions—the civilian-based university, and the military, both of which they don't completely fit into (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017). Anzaldúa (1987) describes this phenomenon as "third space," or a "liminal space" where former armed service members are not quite civilian, and not quite military (Tophøj & Tøffner-Clausen, 2018). They are veterans, with their own unique identities.

Non-Traditional Students

In addition to their unique military and civilian identities, student veterans often juggle a third identity of being a *non-traditional student* (e.g., Cate & Albright, 2015; Dean et al., 2020; Southwell et al., 2016). The Student Veterans of America performed a survey in 2016 where they ascertained from the respondents that 80% were over the age of 25 and 46% of the respondents had children (Cate & Davis, 2016).The National Center for Education Statistics (n.d.) outlines the characteristics of non-traditional students as

having a combination of the following criteria: delayed enrollment or part-time enrollment, financial independence, full-time enrollment while employed, have dependents, single parent, and/or did not receive a high school diploma. Due to their involvement in the military, the majority of student veterans fall into one or more of these categories.

As nontraditional students, veterans face several challenges that traditional students typically do not, such as families, jobs, and other responsibilities that take them away from college campuses (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011). These demands on their time can prohibit student veterans from participating in the typical campus activities, such as clubs, in which other traditional students are more typically involved. Applying a non-traditional student moniker to student veterans helps develop a broader viewpoint of this population, by contributing perspective to the demands on their time, commitments, and resources. While this aids in helping us further identify broad characteristics of this population, we truly don't understand much about student veterans and their unique experiences (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017). This lack of understanding is compounded when deficit perspectives are applied, which assume deficiencies that prohibit student veteran success reside with student veterans themselves and not other external factors. Further, by taking a deficit perspective from the onset of research and practice—there leaves little room to explore and understand the other strengths, challenges, and opportunities that student veterans experience as non-traditional students.

Stigmas and Stereotypes

Veterans are entering institutions of higher education from the radically different

culture of the military. While I generally believe existing stereotypes and stigmas don't originate from a place of malice, stereotypes and stigmas play a role in the educational experience of student veterans (Kato et al., 2016). To illustrate the role of stigmas in the student veteran experience, Parks et al. (2015) found in a study of academic advisors that they relied on stereotypes of student veterans, which had potential negative impacts on the student veteran advisees. There is a strong historical precedent of student veterans being stigmatized on campuses dating back to the Vietnam conflict (Vacchi & Berger, 2014). During this period, veterans who were attending universities would often hide their identities to avoid the backlash from the institution and their fellow students due to the anti-war political climate of the day (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). Over the years, this extreme response toward student veterans has dramatically diminished. However, elements of old stigmas remain (Vacchi & Berger, 2014) and new stigmas surrounding the current generation of student veterans have arisen, as reflected in the perceptions of institutions, faculty, and staff (Gordon, Schneiter, & Bryant, 2016; MacLean & Kleykamp, 2014). To illustrate how the stereotypes and stigmas play out, the following two sections address the focus on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and the role of the media and politics.

   Focus on PTSD. As I have addressed stigmas and stereotypes, arguably one of the assumptions about the veteran population that seems to loom the largest is the prevalence of PTSD. There is a great deal of interest in the mental health of military veterans, and a noticeable portion of articles found within student veteran literature focus on service-related disability, such as PTSD, which is closely associated with military

veterans. The association is so close that the National Center for PTSD is housed within the Department of Veteran Affairs. A meta-analysis of research studies focusing on PTSD rates amongst Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), Operation New Dawn (OND), and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) veterans, found that the prevalence of PTSD varied widely amongst the studies (Fulton et al., 2015). This variance ran from 1.4% of the veteran population, all the way to 60%. The authors settled on 23% as the average amongst the chosen studies. One of the largest studies done on PTSD pegged this rate at 13.5% (Eber et al., 2013; Reisman, 2016). For comparison, the PTSD rate stands at 7-8% of the entire U.S. population (Gradus, 2007). While the rate of PTSD amongst veterans may be higher than that of an average American, it would be difficult to categorize it as dramatically higher, especially when the entire OIF, OEF, and OND veteran population is taken into consideration and using the data from the largest study on PTSD that has been conducted to date (Eber et al., 2013; Reisman, 2016). Yet, with such a tenuous grasp on actual PTSD rates, there is a sizable amount of research and practice that is focused on the mental health of veterans without really understanding how widespread it may be. Coupled with political, institutional, and media perceptions and emphasis on PTSD and other service-related disabilities (Taylor et al., 2016), it is easy to see how the student veteran population can be stigmatized as largely suffering from service-related disabilities, such as PTSD. These stigmas, in turn, prompt institutional health supports and research to address these issues that are perceived to permeate a larger portion of the student veteran community than may be the case.

Pivoting back to looking specifically at student veterans, Vacchi and Berger

(2014) hypothesized that the number of veterans with PTSD or other service-related disabilities would be less likely to enroll in higher education due to the demands and stresses they would experience while going to school. Thus, it is safe to assume that a large majority of student veterans enrolled in higher education have been mischaracterized and stigmatized by a sizable portion of practices and research focused on these perceived deficiencies of the general student veteran population. While the needs of those who suffer from service-related injuries are important to address in practice and research, my purpose here is to demonstrate how deficit approaches, such as the focus on PTSD treatment of student veterans (e.g., Aikins et al., 2015; Barry et al., 2012; Elliot et al., 2011; Ellison et al., 2018; Moreissette et al., 2021), are influencing practice, perceptions, and research surrounding student veterans as a whole.

The role of politics and the media. Many of these stigmas and stereotypes surrounding student veterans are fueled by politics and the media (Taylor et al., 2016). One such example is the media coverage surrounding the *Wounded Warrior Project*. Phillips and Lincoln (2017), point out the media attention that was shown toward this organization, whose mission is to help veterans who have service-related disabilities. The media's attention promoted the perception that veterans, as a whole, needed assistance to overcome their service-related disabilities. One can see this perspective that former service members are "broken," or deviant, echoed in much of the current body of research. As another example of how media has shaped the perception of veterans, Callahan and Jarrat (2014) point to a news story published in 2012 on NBCnews.com and the Huffington Post, which claimed that 88% of student veterans dropped out in the first

year and only 3% made it to graduation. This information, which cannot be verified now that the source has been removed from the Internet, has prevailed as a stigma surrounding student veterans and their ability to perform well in higher education (Callahan & Jarrat, 2014). The perpetuation of stigmas and stereotypes of student veterans through media and politics continues to impact current practice and research.

Deficit Thinking

The current state of research and practice surrounding student veterans in higher education is founded on deficit thinking (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017; Vacchi & Berger, 2014). Deficit thinking adopts the stance that student veterans are deviant from society and require remediation to function properly in civilian society and institutions, and it places the individual veteran at fault for their inability to adapt to the institutional environment. Deficit thinking does not assume that fault may lie within the institutional structures themselves (Valencia, 2010).

With research and practice on student veterans largely being focused on deficit thinking, it prompts us to ask *why* deficit thinking has been broadly adopted. To answer this, I refer to the previous section to reiterate that few experiences are as life-altering as military indoctrination (Soeters et al., 2006), where they are socialized away from fixating on themselves and becoming mission and unit focused. This stands in stark contrast to the typical traditional civilian student enrolled in higher education—who has likely not experienced such an extreme shift in socialization away from prioritizing the self over the good of the whole. As higher education students, veterans are now faced with a civilian institution that does not hold the same sense of community and culture that

was experienced during military service (Kartchner & Searle, 2023; Phillips & Lincoln, 2017).

Due to the socialization differences between student veterans and traditional students in higher education, student veterans are viewed as needing assistance with transitioning and integrating into the more traditional student body (Vacchi & Berger, 2014). Transition and integration underpin the use of deficit thinking in research and practice with student veterans. The deficit perspective is reflected in Schlossberg's (1981) theory of adult transitions, and Tinto's (1975, 1993) work on student retention and persistence. Both perspectives have been repeatedly used in research and practice surrounding student veterans (e.g., Dean et al., 2020; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Ryan et al., 2011). These perspectives assume that to have success in higher education, individuals, such as student veterans, require assistance to assimilate into an institution's student body and culture (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017). This perceived notion of assisting student veterans in becoming more like their traditional counterparts promotes an understanding as to *why* the current body of literature largely adopts a deficit thinking perspective. From the higher education institutions' perspective, they are assisting student veterans by providing transition and integration support and services that will make student veterans more like traditional students who are having more success. However, there is little evidence that deficit approaches to research and practice are effective in promoting student veteran success. On the contrary, with the graduation rate of student veterans being lower than the average undergraduate student (Cate, 2014; Hussar et al., 2020), it would suggest that deficit approaches used in student veteran services and supports are

largely detrimental to student veterans, which has been shown to be the case with other disadvantaged populations in higher education (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Smit, 2012; Valencia, 2010).

Deficit Approaches in Research and Practice

Deficit thinking, as applied to student veterans, has manifested itself in both literature and practice. I selected research articles, government programs, and topics as the means to illustrate how deficit thinking is being applied in research and practice to lay a foundation for the theoretical concepts that underpin the student veteran workshop and the study. This is by no means intended to be an exhaustive coverage of the literature, but an effort to provide context and framing for the study (Maxwell, 2013, p. 40).

Focus on Transition and Assimilation

With military indoctrination and life being so different from what is experienced as a civilian higher education student (Soeters et al., 2006), institutions implement programs and supports to aid in student veteran transition into the academic environment. Looking at this through a deficit lens, these programs and supports offer opportunities and services for student veterans to change or adapt to the higher education environment, adopting the assumption of challenges and problems that student veterans face as originating with them and not the host institution. This results in research and practices that have coalesced around potential problems that military veterans may have as they transition into higher education and supports to help ease the transition and integration of the student veteran.

Rooted in deficit thinking, institutions and organizations have created a series of supports and service student veterans. Studies have echoed the need to create, orchestrate, or increase the use of institutional services for student veterans (Bagby et al., 2015; Lange et al., 2016; Oswald et al., 2019). This focus on supports and services aimed at addressing student veteran deficiencies is further illustrated by Ryan et al. (2011) and Griffin and Gilbert (2015). These independently conducted studies, framed by Schlossberg's transition theory, looked at student veteran transitions into higher education to identify the needed supports and services requisite for them to have a successful transition into being a student—while ignoring the potential institutional barriers that precipitated the perceived need for the supports and services.

Having broadly discussed the deficit perspectives related to student veteran transition, I now delve into more specific examples of services and supports offered to student veterans. This is not an exhaustive list, nor is it an effort to "cover the field" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 40). Instead, the following examples contribute to framing a picture of current research and practices impacting student veterans. I selected some examples of services and supports that I felt best illustrated how deficit thinking is applied in research and practice. These services have been broken down into *social support, mental-health services, military benefit assistance,* and *educational/institutional aids*.

Transition programs. To remedy some of the perceived challenges military veterans bring into higher education, institutions have implemented transition courses for student veterans with the intent of promoting smooth transition and integration (e.g., McMenamin, 2016). Vacchi and Berger (2014) point out the overreliance on transition

theory in looking at filling the gap between military service and academic integration. One such example focused on the transition of veterans into higher education and identified elements from their military service, such as their fight or flight responses and attitudes toward mental health, as being a detriment to their educational experiences (Kato et al., 2016). Another study, established on Schlossberg's transition theory, focused on developing learning environments to help shore up perceived issues that student veterans may have as they transition into higher education (Hunter-Johnson et al., 2020). The study suggests that the transition would largely be accomplished by scaffolding learning aids/helps in their courses, and opportunities to be socialized into the traditional student body in spaces deemed to be safe for student veterans. These two cited studies (Hunter-Johnson et al., 2020; Kato et al., 2016) were framed with the perspective that veterans are bringing issues and problems to their higher education that require the individual student veteran to make an adjustment as they transition through the use of services and programs. Deficit thinking doesn't permit a holistic view of the student veteran experience, due to its fixation on remedying the perceived gaps of the individual in transition and not the institutional issues that create obstacles for student veterans.

Social support. Social support from peers, faculty, staff, and family have been deemed as important to the integration of students into higher education environments (Wilcox et al., 2005). Within the research literature, these supports have also been identified as being important to student veteran integration and success (e.g., Campbell & Riggs, 2015; Osborne, 2014). Student veterans often value camaraderie and community (Kartchner & Searle, 2023; Luchsinger, 2016; Phillips & Lincoln, 2017), being social

elements stemming from their military service. Camaraderie is an important part of many student veterans' military experiences—establishing the connection to providing social support from faculty, students, and staff in aiding student veteran transitions into higher education. The main challenge to this approach is that it comes from a deficit position, which assumes that these social supports need to be in place to address perceived shortcomings of student veterans.

Further looking at potential peer social supports for student veterans, higher education campuses offer many social opportunities, many of which are found in student clubs. Clubs can also be a mutual social support for student veterans, with chapters of the national *Student Veterans of America* being available on nearly any higher education campus. One main challenge with clubs as social supports is their inability to fit into the potentially busy lives of non-traditional students, especially if they don't attend a residential campus (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011).

Faculty have been identified as an important social support for student veterans. Dean et al. (2020) used Tinto's theory to frame their analysis of interactions between student veterans, faculty, and the impact on student veteran integration with their fellow college students, while making the argument for greater social supports to be provided by institutions through faculty members. The perspective of social supports used in this study are rooted in the deficit viewpoint of helping student veterans transition from their veteran identities into something that is perceived to be more conducive to success in higher education (Dean et al., 2020). By having the aim of transitioning identity, research and practice focused on social supports assumes that the problems barring academic

success solely lies within student veterans themselves and not the institution—while focusing on perceived weaknesses instead of strengths.

Mental-health services. Access to mental health services through higher education institutions has become a staple in the suite of student veteran services. This emphasis on the mental health of the broader student veteran population can be seen reflected in the perceptions, professional development, and training for faculty and staff. (e.g., Gonzalez & Elliot, 2016; Parks et a., 2015). Further, literature focusing on PTSD among student veterans has called for greater collaboration between health practitioners and staff to better serve student veterans who are struggling with mental-health struggles and challenges (Campbell & Riggs, 2015; Rattray et al., 2019).

In practice, one such example is of a faculty and staff professional development course focused on military cultural competency, with an emphasis on identifying student veterans who demonstrated psychological distress and direct them to psychological services (Cate & Albright, 2015). The focus of the training was on addressing perceived problems with student veterans, while not providing training to identify and support the strengths of the population. As a widespread program with a similar emphasis on addressing student veteran issues, the VA has currently implemented the *Veterans Integration Leadership Program* (VITAL) to assist student veterans in setting up disability services, accessing mental health care, and becoming more integrated into VA services (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, n.d.). There are also other programs for student veterans that attempt to blend these mental health services with mutual social support provided by student veterans (Ellison et al., 2018).

This emphasis on psychological services is highlighted through a pilot program to address PTSD amongst student veterans (Ellison et al., 2018) and is advocated in much of the literature (e.g., Aikins et al., 2015; Elliot et al., 2011; Ellison et al., 2018; Morissette et al., 2021). These programs and perspectives echo the stigmas that veterans are largely carrying mental health issues related to their service and require a suite of interventions to assist with their transition into higher education. With veterans being the proverbial poster children for PTSD, mental-health services have become a ubiquitous part of the slate of services offered to student veterans.

Military benefit assistance. One of the challenges that almost all student veterans who have education benefits encounter, is trying to use their benefits. The policies, resources, and bureaucratic processes can make the process frustrating and difficult (Bell et al., 2013). Further, the challenges of using benefits were a topic of conversation among the student veteran participants during this study. Brown and Gross (2011) list military benefit assistance as a critical service to get right for student veterans. One of the challenges with benefit administration is that it is embedded into the same organizations, such as Veterans Resource Offices (VRO), that administer many of these transition and assimilation programs and deficit-based services (Barmak et al., 2021), therefore giving these programs more exposure to student veterans who are largely relying on their benefits to continue their education.

Educational and institutional aids. As most student veterans are considered non-traditional students (e.g., Southwell et al., 2016), they tend to be further removed from their formal secondary education. Programs and services, such as tutoring, have

emerged to help shore up this gap for student veterans in topics such as English/Writing (Willson & Wright, 2017), Mathematics (Cortez, 2019), Degree Planning (Parks et al., 2015; Richardson, 2014), and the use of institutional resources—like the library (LeMire et al., 2020; Samson, 2016). While there may exist needs to refresh topics after being out of school for an extended period, these programs are specifically intended to shore up the perceived deficiencies in the student veteran population, instead of being a service offered to anyone needing assistance in those topics. The Federal Government provides and supports programs that assist student veterans in higher education using these transition models. Much like the VITAL program (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, n.d.a.), the VA has established the *VetSuccess on Campus* (VSOC) program with the intent of mitigating issues with transition, education, and guiding student veterans to success in higher education (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, n.d.b.). The U.S. Department of Education (n.d.) offers the *Veterans Upward Bound* program, with many of the same aims of the VA's VSOC program for student veterans. While these services and aids can be useful, their focus is often on transition and shoring up deficiencies (Vacchi & Berger, 2014), which singles out student veterans for having perceived issues that need to be remedied to be successful.

Conclusion

While the aims of these institutional programs and services are to provide needed support to members of the student veteran population, these largely fall within a deficit category. These programs are intended to help shore up the perceived deficiencies of student veterans rather than build on strengths or address institutional issues that may

prohibit student veteran well-being and success. Singling out veterans as having challenges that need remediation with these programs and services may fuel the distrust that veterans feel toward institutions (Blaauw-Hara, 2016; Luchsinger, 2016). The perceived issues of student veterans in higher education underlie the deficit and transitional theories that are in practice and research. Despite the challenges and harms of adopting deficit thinking and transitional theories (Garcia & Guerra, 2004; Smit, 2012; Valencia, 2010), they are still in use today as means of framing, supporting, and understanding the student veteran experience. In addition to the challenge presented by deficit-based services and supports, institutionally based services also have to deal with the potential distrust that student veterans have of institutions, which may be fueled by deficit thinking practices.

The bigger question that these deficit-based studies, and ones like them, fail—or are unable to ask—is if these services which address the perceived deficits of veterans contributed to the overall success of student veterans (Borsari et al., 2017). An example of this is found in a study that sought a better understanding of services that student veterans would use if they should need them (Oberweis & Bradford, 2017). While the student veterans in the study affirmed that they would use the services if they needed them, the study does not address if the services would *improve* student veterans' academic outcomes, or if they were services that were largely needed by the veterans. The study adopted the foregone conclusion that there are prevailing issues that need to be addressed with student veterans via services and programs, but failed to ask if these were services that were needed by the majority of student veterans.

Looking at the body of literature focused on student veterans, it is important to consider if student veterans are doing better in school, graduating, and moving on to productive careers due to these deficit and transition-based services. While there is little to no longitudinal data available to effectively answer these questions (Massa & Gogia, 2017; Molina & Morse, 2015), there is no indication that these deficit-based practices and studies are helping improve the outcomes for student veterans (Borsari et al., 2017).

These studies and practices, and others like them, were framed on the assumption that veterans have issues brought on by military service, which prevent their success in higher education. This assumption, often fueled by stigmas and stereotypes, results in services and programs to mitigate these issues, and promote transition and assimilation in order to have academic success—which is the foundation of deficit thinking. This emphasis on issues that are perceived to be widespread in the student veteran community often eclipse the other characteristics and qualities that student veterans bring to institutions of higher education. This deficit approach also prohibits turning the institutional gaze inward to address issues and problems that create challenges and barriers for student veterans.

Pivoting to a Generative Approach

In recent years, scholarship on student veterans has identified the problematic nature of working from a deficit and transitional theories and have advocated for a more generative approach (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017; Vacchi & Berger, 2014). Through their empirical research examining the strengths of student veterans in higher education, Blaauw-Hara (2016) articulates the need to shift to looking at the strengths that student

veterans bring to their academic experiences. Phillips and Lincoln advocate for turning a critical eye away from student veterans and instead focusing on the challenges that institutions of higher education present to student veterans. Harnessing the strengths of student veterans in higher education is echoed across other empirical scholarly work over the past few years (e.g., Camacho et al., 2021; Sansone & Segura, 2021; Sullivan & Yoon, 2020). This shift in viewing student veterans follows suit with other academic disciplines focused on veterans, which have seen military indoctrination and experience as an asset, such as within the spheres of business and entrepreneurship (e.g., Heinz et al., 2017).

This study is founded on the generative perspectives of VCT (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017), from which emerged the asset-driven concept of *purpose-driven camaraderie* (Kartchner & Searle, 2023). This study is an effort to further explore the asset-driven approach of purpose-driven camaraderie, in an effort to continue developing research and practice away from the prevalent deficit approaches. By focusing on the experiences of student veterans in higher education, this study offers the opportunity to delve more deeply into student veteran space. To accomplish this aim, the study pieces together various theories to create a foundation on which the innovation workshop setting was developed and analyzed.

Theoretical Foundations

With the intent to further explore purpose-driven camaraderie and asset-driven perspectives of student veterans, this study was designed as a workshop focused on

developing innovation skills and camaraderie through the generation of a solution for the local student veteran community. The workshop environment provided a common purpose, around which a small group of student veterans coalesced, using their backgrounds as student veterans to aid in promoting a sense of community. The innovation workshop provided the context for studying purpose-driven camaraderie, community, and identity among student veterans in a higher education setting.

This section addresses the theoretical foundations used to develop and analyze the workshop, VCT (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017), Purpose-driven camaraderie (Kartchner & Searle, 2023), and Communities of Practice (Wenger, 2018). After discussing each of these theories within the context of the student veteran space and the workshop, with the inclusion of equine-assisted learning and design thinking (Brown & Katz, 2019) as functional workshop components. I will outline how collectively all these pieces coalesce into the workshop environment that was implemented and analyzed.

Veteran Critical Theory

To remedy the lack of asset-based research on student veterans, and to critique existing research and practice that is founded on deficit thinking, Phillips and Lincoln (2017) proposed VCT. VCT is founded on well-established critical theories (e.g., Anzaldúa, 1987; Brayboy, 2005; Butler, 2000; McIntosh, 1991; Oliver, 2010) that have helped define 11 tenets.

1. Structures, policies, and processes privilege civilians over veterans.

2. Veterans experience various forms of oppression and marginalization including microaggressions.

3. Veterans are victims of deficit thinking in higher education.

4. Veterans occupy a third space on the border of multiple conflicting and interacting power structures, languages, and systems.

5. VCT values narratives and counternarratives of veterans.

6. Veterans experience multiple identities at once.

7. Veterans are constructed (written) by civilians, often as deviant characters.

8. Veterans are more appropriately positioned to inform policy and practice regarding veterans.

9. Some services advertised to serve veterans are ultimately serving civilian interests.

10. Veterans cannot be essentialized.

11. Veteran culture is built upon a culture of respect, honor, and trust (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017, pp. 660-663).

VCT utilizes the narratives and counter-narratives of student veterans to better understand their experiences and stories and to provide the means to critique the institutions and powers which surround the student veteran population. Central to VCT are the identities and cultures that student veterans inhabit as students and military veterans. VCT espouses that student veterans have multiple identities which they concurrently balance in their lives after military service (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017).

Delving more deeply into the topic of identity found in VCT, the practice of identity is addressed by Holland et al. (1998), who argue identity is shaped and practiced through the actions and interactions of individuals within their social environments. Identity as a practice is salient within the military experience. As an example, service members externalize their identity through the uniforms they wear daily. The ranks, qualification badges, and other insignias associated with their military careers are indicators of their identities, and thus help dictate how they are shaped by and are shaping

the identities of those around them. When a service member leaves service, they almost immediately are faced with the internalization of their identity, signified through the loss of a uniform, and their military identity no longer possesses the same prominence and visibility it once enjoyed while serving. This internalization, with the introduction of new identities, such as being a civilian, leaves service members without the familiar structure and culture of the military to practice their identity.

Tophøj and Tøffner-Clausen (2018) present the concept of losing the externalized military identity through the lens of Turner's *theory of liminality*, which argues that veterans find themselves in a "limbo," or a "state between states" (p. 47). This liminal space is a place where the characteristics of the place that veterans left (the military) and the place they are going (civilian world) no longer hold relevance to their identity and is described as "in-betweenness" (p. 47). Tophøj and Tøffner-Clausen's take on liminality is bolstered by the inclusion of identity, arguing that identity is only as effective as its ability to pivot its participation within the spheres of interaction, where veterans find themselves. Being in a liminal space, veterans are faced with the challenge of engaging in different spheres with differing values and practices. The authors also conjecture that these interaction spheres often overlap, which forces multiple identities to become simultaneously salient.

The overlapping interaction spheres and identities tie directly into VCT, which claims that "Veterans experience multiple identities at once (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017, p. 662)." Student veterans balance several identities, ranging from the identity forged in the military, to their civilian identity, and student identity. Most student veterans are also

non-traditional students (Cate & Albright, 2015; Dean et al., 2020; Southwell et al., 2016), which introduces other identities into the student experience, such as employee, spouse, parent, and homeowner. These identities cause tensions within student veterans as they navigate the "third space on the border of multiple conflicting and interacting power structures, languages, and systems" (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017, p. 661). Student veterans occupy a space where they are not quite fully military or civilian (Tophøj & Tøffner-Clausen, 2018), with these identities playing a consistent role in their day-to-day lives.

By reframing current student veteran deficit thinking practices through the lens of identity, we can better understand the problematic nature of the deficit approach. Deficit thinking would adopt the approach of providing the means to assimilate or instill a civilian student identity into a student veteran while rooting out their "veteran-ness" in the hopes of promoting successful completion of their degree program and future employment. Whereas an asset-driven approach, as espoused by VCT, would provide the means to practice their identities as student veterans, which they develop through their experiences and spheres of interactions as they progress through their education. This approach would also adapt Institutional structures, practices, and services, instead of attempting to root out "veteran-ness."

VCT aims to build an asset-driven or generative perspective of student veterans to move beyond the deficit thinking that has driven research and practice, considering the nuances of the varied identities of student veterans. While VCT provides the means to discover the narratives and counter-narratives of student veterans, it does not provide a

framework to support ongoing research and the application of a generative perspective in practice. VCT acknowledges this and suggests the tenets and ideas of the theory are not finite—but are the means to promote further discourse and adoption surrounding the generative aspects of the student veteran population (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017). In the following section, I examine one such elaboration of VCT.

Purpose-Driven Camaraderie

I was attracted to the student veteran field of study after I looked up VCT out of curiosity while covering critical theory in a research methods course. Upon reading, VCT altered the trajectory of my Ph.D. education as I saw reflection of my own experiences within many of its tenets. Following my introduction to VCT, I opted to devote my efforts toward contributing to the asset-driven body of research and practice surrounding student veterans. Before I could design an asset-driven intervention targeted at student veterans, I needed to understand what their experiences in higher education were. With relatively little being known about the nuanced experiences of student veterans in higher education, I used VCT to frame a narrative inquiry into the educational journeys of student veterans (Kartchner & Searle, 2023).

Purpose-driven camaraderie has its genesis in the resulting narrative inquiry, where I interviewed student veterans about their educational journeys, guided by a journey map they created about their respective journeys through higher education (see Figure 1; Nyquist et al., 1999). By interviewing student veterans and having them chart their educational journeys using a self-made map, I intended to elicit the unique experiences of these veterans, and further generate an asset-driven perspective of this

Figure 1

A Sample of the Journey Maps.
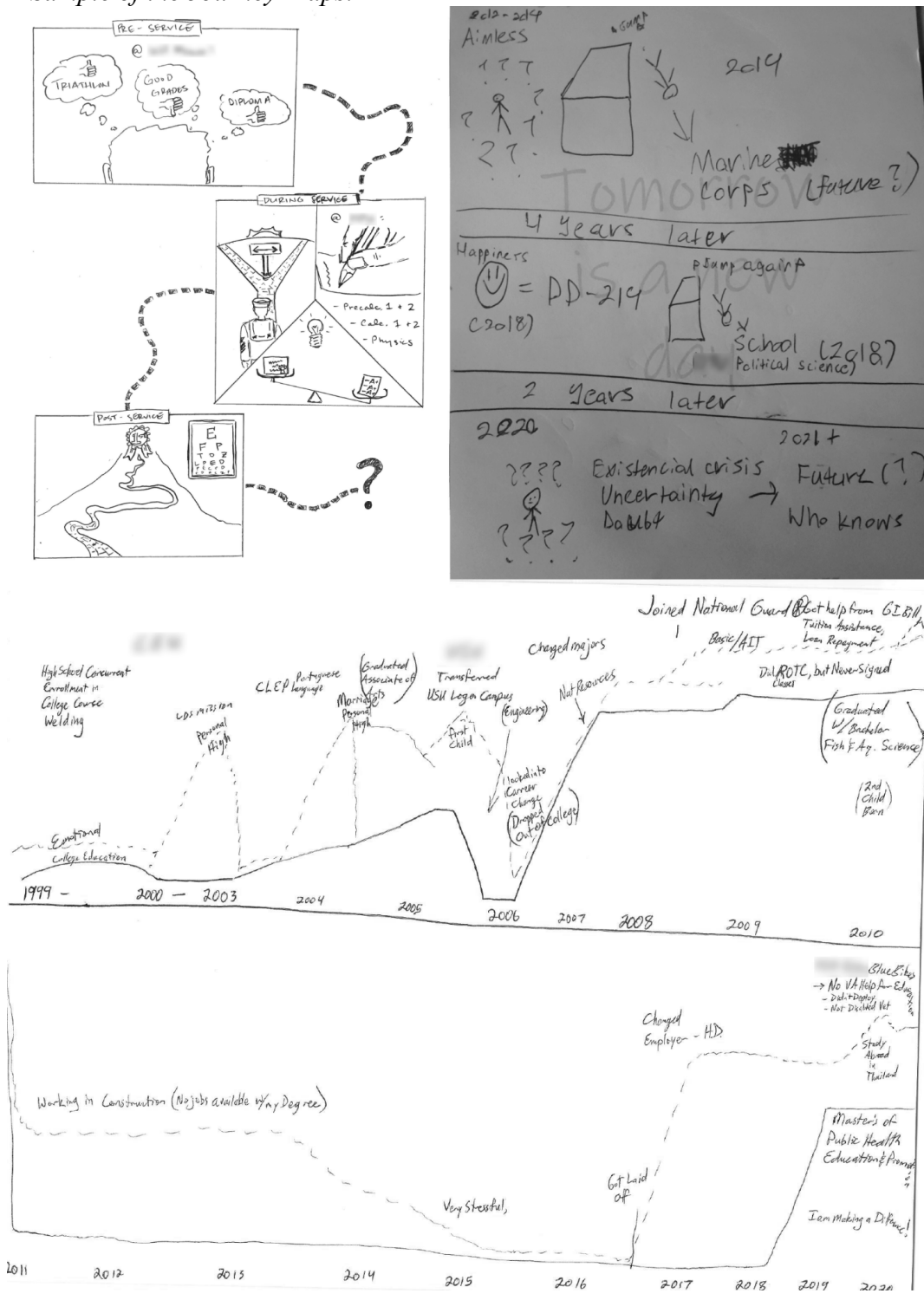
population. This section provides context for purpose-driven camaraderie in order to establish the theoretical foundations that underpin the current study. A deeper discussion and analysis of purpose-driven camaraderie can be found in Kartchner and Searle (2023).

Context of the Study

Four student veteran participants attending a mid-sized intermountain university were interviewed for the study, using journey maps (Nyquist et al., 1999) to guide the interviews. Three of the participants served in the Army, and one served in the Marine Corps. Two of the Army veterans were working on graduate degrees, while the remaining Army veteran and the Marine Corps veteran were working on undergraduate degrees at the time of the study. VCT guided the design of the protocols for data collection and analysis. Collected data included audio-recorded interviews, which were then transcribed, and participant drawn journey maps. These data were analyzed using thematic narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008), which combines elements of narrative analysis with thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012). While multiple themes were identified through data analysis, the principal reported themes that have bearing on this work are *purpose* and *camaraderie* (Kartchner & Searle, 2023).

Discussion of Camaraderie and Purpose

Camaraderie is a topic that has been touched upon in research literature as being of value to military veterans (e.g., Blaauw-Hara, 2016; Luchsinger, 2016). Camaraderie is defined by the online Oxford English Dictionary as being, "a feeling of friendship and trust among people who work or spend a lot of time together" (https://www.oxford

learnersdictionaries.com/us/definition/english/camaraderie). While this is important to

student veterans (Kartchner & Searle, 2023), the dictionary definition of camaraderie

does not address how camaraderie can manifest itself among veterans who never served

together, held the same types of jobs, or been in the same branch of service. One of the

interviewed student veterans illustrated this with an experience where he participated in a

veterans-only yoga class with local veterans in his area. The participant noted how the

sense of camaraderie he experienced in the military returned as he interacted with the

other veterans in the yoga class (Kartchner & Searle, 2023). With military indoctrination

being a powerful influence on service members (Soeters et al., 2006), it can provide the

foundation of a common culture that veterans share, regardless of their military

background. This shared common culture is a key underpinning of the camaraderie that

veterans experienced while serving in the military and it makes sense to leverage that

sense of camaraderie for other kinds of community building amongst student veteran

populations.

Holding true to the dictionary definition of camaraderie where camaraderie

involves spending substantial amounts of time with each other, the Marine Corps veteran

noted that he missed the camaraderie he experienced with his fellow Marines with whom

he shared work and living spaces. Another of the Army veterans noted that he missed the

feeling of everyone moving toward a common goal, and the sense of community that

came from that environment. Despite his efforts, he had yet to find that same sense of

community in higher education. While spending ample amounts of time together can

contribute to building a sense of camaraderie, there still remains a gap between the

dictionary definition of camaraderie and what the interviewed student veterans encountered while serving. All four participants expressed the loss of camaraderie they confronted when they left military service. Even for two of the participants who had clear objectives and friends in the university setting, they still felt the loss of the type of camaraderie they experienced in the military. The participants' experiences converged with the dictionary definition of camaraderie (e.g., spending lots of time together), and diverged (e.g., feeling camaraderie with other veterans, who they just met). These examples of divergences and convergences with the definition of *camaraderie* can be reconciled by applying the concept of *purpose* (Kartchner & Searle, 2023).

Applying purpose to camaraderie. The interviewed student veterans alluded to shared goals or purposes they experienced while they served in the military (Kartchner & Searle, 2023). Whether the purpose was to get everyone home safely from a hazardous area, moving toward a common objective, interacting with other students with similar career aspirations, or to convene to exercise in a yoga studio—all the camaraderie felt by the participants in these instances was underpinned by a common *purpose*. Returning to the dictionary definition of camaraderie of people spending large amounts of time together, purpose adds the driving force to the development of camaraderie within the military. Without the presence of a driving purpose, or goal, spending time with others is little more than just "hanging out." This stands in greater contrast when the mission-driven environment of the military is taken into consideration. Further, any sort of "hanging out," or social opportunities may be more difficult for student veterans to engage with, due to their status as non-traditional students (Cate & Davis, 2016). With

demands on their time from jobs, families, and other responsibilities, student veterans may find themselves unable, or unwilling to participate in social opportunities offered on higher education campuses. Three of the study's participants had families, and another combination of three participants was also working to support their families while they were attending school, leaving little time for other school-related happenings. Further, not having a driving purpose that provides utility to the academic and professional trajectories of student veterans may further impede their desire or ability to find a meaningful sense of camaraderie in a higher education setting.

Having touched upon the genesis of the concepts of purpose and camaraderie, it is important to clearly define what purpose-driven camaraderie is, as it pertains to student veterans. Camaraderie, or the friendships and social relationships that student veterans developed while serving in the military is established around the mission-first or purpose-driven environment of the military. This acts as a common baseline for student veterans, who all have been socialized into similar environments within their respective branches of service. As student veterans depart military service and enter civilian academic institutions, they may find themselves faced with a highly-individualized environment without the familiarity of a common purpose to drive their relationships. To modify the dictionary definition of camaraderie, purpose-driven camaraderie can be simply summed up as *the feeling of trust and friendship that exists among a group of people who are collectively engaged in a common purpose*. With a strong socialization into the culture of the military that focuses on common goals and purposes, student veterans are potentially situated to quickly forge trust and friendships in purpose-driven environments. Being able

to forge new friendships and relationships among student veterans using purpose-driven camaraderie can yield new resources and support—especially taking into consideration the preference to give and receive help from other veterans (Blaauw-Hara, 2016; Luchsinger, 2016).

Summary

A key finding of the pilot study described here was the concept of *purpose-driven camaraderie,* which in the spirit of VCT, provides an asset-driven perspective of student veterans in higher education. In part due to socialization into military culture described above, one of the core aspects of the military experience is the environment of teamwork and camaraderie. Study participants noted a mismatch between the teamwork and shared purpose of their military careers and the strong individualism and sense of isolation many of them felt as non-traditional students in higher education (Kartchner & Searle, 2023). Further, most of the participants in the study did not actively seek out interactions with other veterans or spend time in veteran spaces, but still valued their interactions with other veterans. As primarily non-traditional students, student veterans are busy and have limited time to just "hang out" in an ear-marked space or club.

Applying the concept of purpose-driven camaraderie to student veterans in higher education potentially yields the impetus for student veterans to interact and build new friendships with other veterans. By building a renewed sense of camaraderie among student veterans, they have the opportunity to support each other along their educational journeys. The concept of purpose-driven camaraderie provided the impetus to identify theoretical perspectives and practices to support a team and purpose-driven environment

for student veterans to build camaraderie and common objectives in a higher education setting. Ultimately, Wenger's (2018) communities of practice framework was identified as a promising framework for thinking about the development of purpose-driven camaraderie amongst student veterans. The CoP framework is described in the following section.

Communities of Practice

By bringing together VCT with social learning theory, specifically Wenger's (2018) CoP as an analytical lens for this study, there is an opportunity to better understand and support student veterans who have been socialized by the military into a culture of teamwork and selflessness as they navigate the highly individualized space of higher education. CoP (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 2018) is founded on Social Learning Theory, which posits that learning happens from one another, via observation, imitation, and modeling (Bandura, 1977). CoP builds on Social Learning Theory and provides the means to explore the complex dynamics of social learning. The community aspect of learning in a CoP refers to the building of individual and collective knowledge by participating within a domain of interest, which is one of three main components of the framework: domain, community, and practice (Wenger, 2018).

- *Domain* is the common interest or focus of a community. It requires a commitment to the domain to promote participation and to guide learning within the community.

- *Community* is built around the interactions of the participants, and a shared culture within the community is built upon their common commitment to the domain.

- *Practice* is defined as having a "shared repertoire" (Wenger, 2000, p. 229) of resources and knowledge centered on the community's domain of interest.

Practice allows the passing on of tacit and institutional knowledge (Wenger, 2018).

In addition to these components, identity as practice is a key component of CoP and can provide a strong connection to VCT as their theoretical gaze is turned toward the population of student veterans. CoP places emphasis on the importance of the participant's identity as it applies to practice within a learning community. Wenger (2000) points out that identity is "key to deciding what matters and what does not, with whom we identify and whom we trust, and with whom we must share what we understand" (p. 239). Student veterans come from the military environment which has instilled strong identities that now reside alongside additional identities, such as being a civilian and a student (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017). These shared veteran and student identities provide a shared sense of understanding, and potentially trust, among student veterans—equipping them to practice jointly in a social learning community.

All of the components of CoP can be found within the institutions and power structures (e.g., O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007; Sookermany, 2011) that border the third-space that student veterans occupy (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017). Addressing domain, community, and practice within the military and higher education institutions yields a better understanding of the different means of participation found within these communities. As bordering power structures to the student veteran space, higher education and military institutions impact the third-space occupied by student veterans. By understanding how CoP operates within these bordering power structures, we can better understand the tensions student-veterans experience in the third-space they occupy. These tensions (e.g., between the military and academic institutions) establish how CoP

is well-positioned to provide a generative perspective of student veterans and contribute theoretical support to the role of purpose-driven camaraderie within the student veteran community.

Domain, community, and practice will be considered within the context of the military and higher education communities to illustrate how these bordering institutions interact with and influence the student veteran community. Both communities have been the focus of research and practice using CoP as a theoretical model for social learning (e.g., O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007; Sookermany, 2011).

Figure 2 illustrates a simplified version of tensions between military communities and institutions of higher education. On either side of the student veteran space, military and higher education institutions contribute different elements of CoP, creating tensions within the space. The military contributes to the sense of community that is familiar to student veterans, and harkens to their military socialization (Soeters et al., 2006). After departing military service, student veterans may no longer adhere to the central domain (e.g., national defense or unit-specific tasks) of the military, while still carrying over military-related practices to the student veteran space. The tension lies within the differing sense of community and practice that exists in higher education. With higher education being more individualized, the sense of community and associated practices are different from what is experienced in the military. Student veterans find themselves adopting new practices while pursuing new domains provided through higher education institutions, while butting up against a sense of community that largely may not reflect what they experienced as they served. Figure 2 illustrates how the military and higher

Figure 2

Communities Bordering the Student Veteran Third-Space.
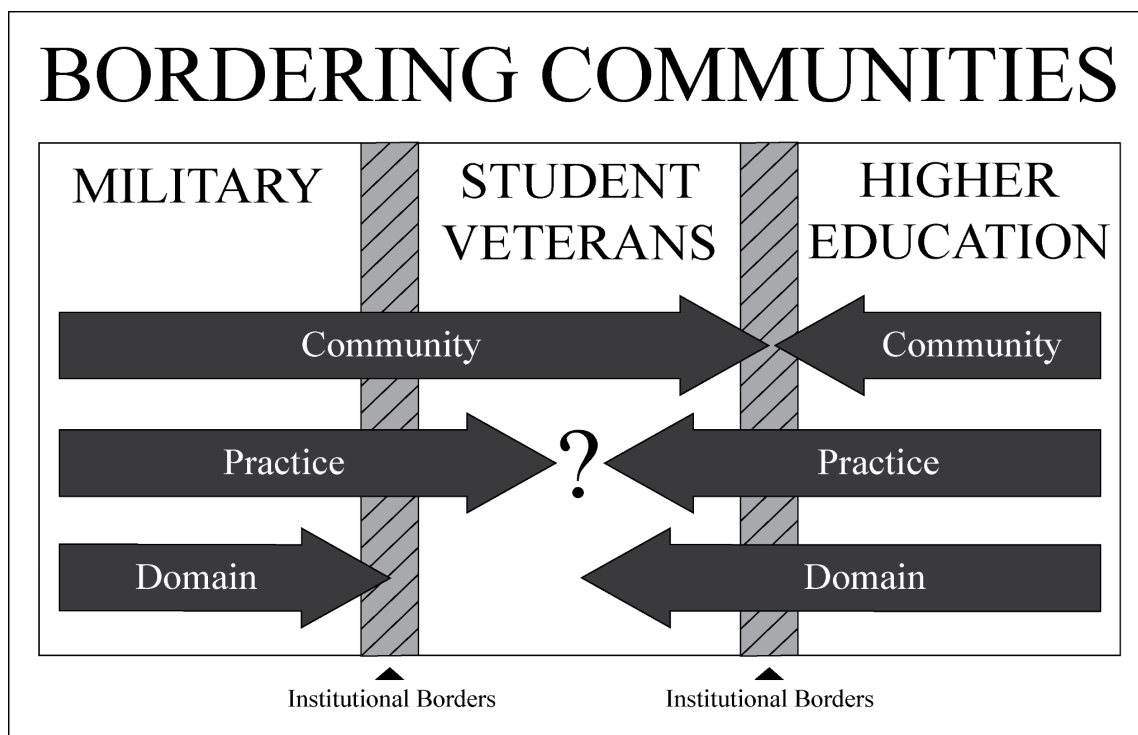
education institutions interact with student veterans using a CoP-based perspective.

The figure highlights how the underlying concepts of community found within higher education and the military are at odds, which creates a disconnect between student veterans and higher education institutions. This is largely due to the importance of the deeply-rooted purpose-driven camaraderie found in the military experience (Kartchner & Searle, 2023), which contrasts with the individualized higher education communities. Alone, the distinction within community participation between the bordering institutions may help explain the importance and role of purpose-driven camaraderie among student veterans and how it may bridge into other communities. Structured around each of these domains are the practices of the community, which both contribute to the practices of

being a student veteran. Due to the differing approaches to community, the manners by which student veterans practice their identities are ill-defined. Using Figure 2 as a guide, we can delve deeper into the interacting components of CoP as they relate to student veterans.

Domain

Within the military, there is a clear purpose around which all activities are structured. The common domain of the military can be broad, such as providing national defense, or localized at the unit level, where a smaller group of service members focus on a specific mission or task (e.g., Banerjee & MacKay, 2020; Sookermany, 2011). CoP, as a deliberate construct, has been applied to great success within the military (Palos, 2007). An example of the application of CoP is illustrated through the widely used U.S. Air Force learning system (Adkins et al., 2010). The U.S. Air Force's learning system supports leadership, skill, and personal development for Air Force service members through online curriculum and community support. One of the key differences between the domain(s) within the military, and higher education is that military domains are all focused on organizational success and building team cohesion to accomplish those ends. In contrast, higher education provides a variety of domains, many of which are encapsulated within particular degrees and professional pathways. These domains are highly individualized and are often oriented toward promoting an outward trajectory from the institution. Student veterans, as higher education students, have alignment with the associated institutional domains, as they are pursuing degree and professional pathways akin to their civilian peers.

Community

As exemplified by the U.S. Army's Soldier's Creed (2003), service members within the military community are highly socialized to focus on the well-being of the whole instead of focusing on the individual (Demers, 2011; Soeters et al., 2006). This contrasts with the individualized nature of higher education. Student veterans note the missing sense of community they enjoyed in the military (Luchsinger, 2016). They find themselves in an environment where they no longer feel like a community pulling together toward a common objective (Kartchner & Searle, 2023). This is not to say that communities focused on helping one another don't exist within the context of higher education (see Orsmond et al., 2013), but they are relatively less common than in the military. Despite having CoPs of higher education students, non-traditional students may face barriers to participating in these communities due to their non-traditional student status, thus limiting their inward trajectory through legitimate peripheral participation (LPP) within the CoP (Lave & Wenger, 1991; O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007).

LPP is the process by which a *newcomer* begins to actively engage in a CoP. This is facilitated by *old-timers,* who impart knowledge, practice, and community to the newcomers. LPP has its roots in apprenticeship (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29). CoP outlines that old-timers can mentor newcomers to boost participation within CoPs (Wenger et al., 2002). The concept of *peer mentoring* among student veterans has seen traction in practice (Kirchner et al., 2014), and echoes the preference that veterans have to work with other veterans, rather than institutions (Blaauw-Hara, 2016; Luchsinger, 2016). The connection between peer mentoring and the role of old-timers holds

similarities, as mentors and old-timers hold greater experience, practice, and institutional knowledge—which creates value for mentees or new-comers of a CoP. By having old-timers/mentors, who share similar backgrounds and purposes as student veterans, it would help promote the LPP of student veterans entering into a CoP. This would also ideally be a launching point for developing purpose-driven camaraderie within that environment.

Being non-traditional students, student veterans potentially face similar challenges and barriers. One solution to addressing potential barriers to participation is situating opportunities for community building within the third-space (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017) that student veterans occupy. Student veterans have shown a preference for associating with other veterans (Blaauw-Hara, 2016; Luchsinger, 2016), who potentially share a deeper understanding of each other through their shared veteran identities. Wenger (2000) provides further support to situating community-building opportunities within the student veteran space by stating, "Identity needs a place where a person can experience knowing as a form of social competence" (p. 241). By virtue of their military and school experiences, student veterans can potentially quickly establish a sense of competence and comfort within a community of like-minded and experienced student veterans. This level of comfort within a group of student veterans may yield opportunities to support and share resources amongst each other. By focusing on developing community within a purpose-driven third space where student veteran identities are salient, student veterans can be positioned to overcome potential barriers as they navigate higher education. To further support the theoretical implications of CoP

with student veterans, Wenger et. al. (2002, p. 35) states that a diversity of thought and background contributes to better learning, interpersonal relationships, and creativity. While it may be easy to think of veterans being largely monolithic in characteristic (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017), there are a wide variety of differences that exist among branches of service, Military Occupational Specialties (MOS), and previous experiences. With the diverse identities, backgrounds, experiences, and interests that student veterans bring to a community through military service, there is an opportunity to yield the aforementioned benefits.

By situating student veterans within a community where their identities and unique experiences provide a sense of competence within the higher education environment, there presents opportunities for them to branch into other communities and opportunities. Workshops have been used to help promote participation in broader CoPs. The use of workshops to promote participation in CoPs grows out of research on the professional development of educators (Jones et al., 2013; Lumpe, 2007; Servage, 2009). With professional development, education professionals will engage with one another through the workshop curriculum. Following the completion of the workshop, educators are introduced to professional development communities to further structure their practice and learning through participation.

Returning to student veterans, situating community development within the student veteran space, where their identities have salience, presents opportunities to bridge their participation into other communities, much like professional development does with educators. Further supporting the workshop approach for student veterans,

O'Donnell and Tobbell (2007) noted that nontraditional undergraduate students have experienced the need to develop LPP to promote the development of the practitioner's identity within the communities they belong. They argue that learning courses and opportunities are needed to bridge greater participation in communities. This bridging can be most effective if facilitated by individuals who possess membership in multiple, boundary-sharing communities. CoP uses the term *knowledge broker* to depict an individual who has multi-membership in boundary-sharing communities and is positioned to facilitate new experiences and opportunities to gain membership in new communities to which the knowledge broker belongs (Wenger et al., 2002). It is also worth noting that *boundaries* within CoPs are not considered to be restrictions within a community, but rather opportunities to interact with other diverse communities and expand membership accordingly. These bridging opportunities are also known as *boundary activities* (Wenger, et al., 2002)*,* which introduce participants into boundary-sharing communities.

Drawing on the ideas behind fostering professional learning communities through workshops that introduce participants into broader communities, this study's innovation workshop was designed with a focus on developing a sense of community and common purpose. Developing a broader student veteran CoP, or intentionally bridging student veterans into a particular higher education community is not the main focus of the study. Rather, the innovation workshop provides student veterans the opportunity to develop a sense of community within a veteran-occupied third space, while boosting potential participation in bordering communities through purpose-driven camaraderie, knowledge

brokering, and boundary activities.

Practice

Arguably one of the more important components of CoP to address is practice. Practice is one of the least understood components of CoP in the research literature (Lundgren et al., 2020). There are a multitude of practices associated with the military, from the broad, such as being a service member, to the narrow with unit-specific practices. CoPs both formally and informally support service member practice at all levels during their time in the military (e.g., Banerjee, & MacKay, 2020; Palos, 2007; Schulte et al., 2020; Sookermany, 2011). While many of the more overt practices of the military are no longer salient, such as being a soldier, or their MOS—student veterans may carry over other practices from their military service. In contrast, institutions of higher education value very different practices associated with being a traditional student, coming from a civilian background. Higher education communities are host to the practice of being a student, coupled with the requisite practices associated with degree pathways and academic disciplines. Inheriting the practice of being a student from higher education, student veterans also juggle being a non-traditional student (e.g., Cate & Albright, 2015; Dean et al., 2020) with the associated practices which can accompany the non-traditional identities.

While it is possible to extrapolate about potential practices surrounding student veteran identities, little is known and understood about what these practices might be, largely due to the relatively small body of literature and the overall focus on deficit thinking and practices (Vacchi & Berger, 2014). Even generative perspectives, such as

VCT's attempt to define veteran culture as being "...built upon a culture of respect, honor, and trust" (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017, p. 663) are insufficient to capture student veteran experiences and lack the nuance to be able to address the practice of being a student veteran. Without providing an environment where the strengths of student veteran identities can emerge through participation, it will be difficult to extrapolate the generative traits and practices of this unique population. Fortunately, research literature involving CoP provides the means to be able to look at identity and practice using *identity-resources.*

Identity as Participation Within a CoP

To better recognize identity in practice within a community, Nasir and Cooks (2009) presented "practice-linked identities," which equate participation and practice within a community as being an "integral part of who one is" (p. 44). To be able to effectively interpret the practice of identity within a community, Nasir and Cooks introduced three identity-resources tied to participation in a CoP: *material resources, relational resources,* and *ideational resources*. These resources interact in concert with the concepts of *inbound* and *outbound* trajectories of participation within a CoP (Wenger, 2018). Participants who engage deeply with the identity-resources would be considered to have an inbound trajectory as they increase their participation within the community. Individuals who opt to not fully engage with the resources in the community sit at the periphery and are considered to have an outbound trajectory. In terms of student veterans, not engaging fully with the available identity-resources may prohibit full participation in both student veteran and academic communities.

By identifying the different identity-resources of a community, it becomes easier to recognize the identities of the participants as they engage in practice around the domain of interest. For the purposes of this study, potential identity-resources have been identified to demonstrate how they may manifest within a CoP-based environment. Drawing on the context of the innovation workshop, I illustrate how these identity-resources may manifest.

Material resources. Material resources are the physical artifacts of the setting. In the case of the workshop, these were the physical supplies, learning aids, equine equipment and classroom resources provided by the workshop.

Relational resources. Relational resources are the connections between the participants within the setting. Within the workshop setting, the student veteran participants, equine instructors (see Appendix A), and the researcher/instructor were considered as relational resources. Another consideration that did not overtly emerge from this study's workshop, would be the friends, partners, peers, and family members of the student veteran participants. The multiple identities (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017), and overlapping spheres of interaction (Tophøj & Tøffner-Clausen, 2018) suggest that student veterans interact with a variety of people who may play influential roles in their participation.

Ideational resources. Ideational resources encompass the conceptions of oneself situated within their practice and the world. This includes ideas centered on what is of value or deemed as being good to the participant (Nasir & Cooks, 2009, p. 47). The workshop provided a space where the simultaneous identities of student veterans (Phillips

& Lincoln, 2017) could manifest in relation to the sphere(s) of interaction (Tophøj & Tøffner-Clausen, 2018) in which they found themselves as they participated. Further, the values and conceptions from their military service, education, professions, backgrounds, etc. had the opportunity to manifest in practice as student veterans participated in the workshop, as it was situated within the broader student veteran and higher education community.

Nasir and Cooks (2009) identity-resources provide the means to analyze the student veteran participants' identities through participation in the innovation workshop. This works in concert with the other core components of domain, community, and practice within CoP (Wenger, 2018). Coupled with the tenets espoused by VCT, these theoretical perspectives provide tools to better understand purpose-driven camaraderie, community, and student veteran identities in practice. The study's innovation workshop was designed to incorporate these theoretical concepts into a format that yielded new generative perspectives of student veterans and their diverse identities.

Bringing it all Together: The Innovation Workshop

Deficit thinking is widely applied to student veterans in research and practice and there are beginning to emerge perspectives and efforts to move research and practice toward an asset-driven approach (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017; Vacchi & Berger, 2014). To continue developing new asset-driven perspectives and approaches using VCT as a basis, purpose-driven camaraderie (Kartchner & Searle, 2023) was identified as a generative quality found among student veterans. The workshop is a direct response to the objective

of further exploring purpose-driven camaraderie, community, and student veteran identities. Various theoretical perspectives and practices were brought together to be able to create an environment where identity and the aforementioned generative qualities would have an opportunity to emerge.

For the workshop to function and achieve its desired results, I identified innovation/problem-solving as a potential generative quality to implement as a core practice in the workshop setting. I also incorporated equine-assisted learning as a "hook" to attract participants, while also providing activities that supplemented the workshop content and acted as an icebreaker/team-building exercise. The equine activities also had the benefit of incorporating a boundary-sharing veteran-centric community into the workshop. All these elements came together in a setting structured around concepts and practices found in CoP.

Entrepreneurship/Innovation

There are many qualities veterans possess which make them excellent candidates to be successful entrepreneurs, such as self-discipline, teamwork, perseverance, and leadership skills (Heinz et al., 2017; Maury et al., 2020). Veterans have been 45% - 88% more likely to be entrepreneurs than the average civilian (Hope, Oh, & Mackin, 2011). While entrepreneurship has been more pervasive among previous generations veterans, it has experienced a decline over the past decade. Currently, veterans of the Millennial generation have lower rates of entrepreneurship than the nonveteran population of Millennials (Montgomery et al., 2021). Despite what is broadly understood about the drop in entrepreneurship, little is known about the up-and-coming (Millennial) generation

of veteran entrepreneurs. There have been calls to better understand the needs of this population and provide better support, education, and opportunities to overcome barriers (Boldon et al., 2016; Maury et al., 2020; Montgomery et al., 2021).

Institutes of higher education can potentially play an impactful role in boosting entrepreneurial tendencies among student veterans. Referencing a 2020 report on veteran entrepreneurship by Syracuse University, 78% of the surveyed veteran entrepreneurs possessed a bachelor's degree or higher (Maury et al., 2020). This also aligns with general trends of entrepreneur education level, with more than 50% of surveyed entrepreneurs holding a bachelor's degree (Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation, 2020). With higher education being highly correlated with successful entrepreneurs, it makes sense for institutions of higher education to promote entrepreneurship education among student veterans.

Innovation, the Heart of Entrepreneurship

While not all student veterans may become entrepreneurs, they all have the potential to develop an innovation mindset, which lies at the heart of entrepreneurship. Selznick et al. (2021) make the case that entrepreneurship and innovation are often confused as being the same thing—where in actuality, innovation is a driver of entrepreneurship and other success within different professional and academic areas. The phrase "adapt and overcome" is commonly used in the military to denote the practice of finding a solution to a challenge or problem. Having a challenge or a problem can lead to innovative problem-solving, which in the case of entrepreneurship, may lead to a successful enterprise. Having an objective, or problem is a hallmark of adult learning

(Merriam & Bierema, 2014), and provides motivation for deeper learning. Outside of entrepreneurship, innovation can be applied in virtually any discipline and career path. With the qualities of entrepreneurs and innovators, student veterans in higher education settings are well-positioned to develop innovation as a skill-set. By providing student veterans with the opportunity to operationalize their ability to innovate, they are well-positioned to bridge their qualities and skill-sets into their personal and professional trajectories.

Design thinking. Design thinking operationalizes the innovation process (Jain, 2018). Design thinking has its roots in design disciplines, such as architecture or graphic design (Martin & Euchner, 2012). Design thinking is a non-linear, iterative process that is well-equipped to address ill-defined problems and challenges (Brown & Katz, 2019). The ill-defined problems are also known as *wicked problems* (Buchanan, 1992). Design thinking is composed of five stages.

1. Empathize: gain understanding of the problem that is attempting to be solved using empathy.

2. Define the problem: take what was learned from developing empathy to create a definition of what is trying to be solved.

3. Ideate: generate ideas using the defined problem as the basis.

4. Prototype: create a simplified version of what it is trying to accomplish, this can take many forms.

5. Test: get feedback on the prototype. Refine. Test. Repeat.

It is important to note that these stages are non-linear, in that they can occur in any order and frequency until the desired solution is reached. These five stages of design thinking are the foundation of the workshop curriculum format. They also provide

additional tools to be able to practice the innovation process in conjunction with their student veteran identities around a central domain to drive their purpose-driven camaraderie.

Design thinking also has been implemented successfully in CoPs as a form of practice, being used within interdisciplinary science communities (Darbellay et al., 2017), and in developing Science Technology Engineering Arts and Mathematics (STEAM) curriculums in a virtual CoP (Jantakun et al. 2021). The successful use of design thinking in a CoP environment ties in well with student veterans' potential propensity for innovation and alignment with team and purpose environments, such as a CoP.

Equine-Assisted Learning

Equine assisted learning (Bilginoğlu, 2021) was selected to attract potential workshop participants and to be able to explore the concept of promoting further community among student veterans outside of the workshop setting; equine assisted learning can be used for team building, concept communication, and forms of therapy. Equine-assisted activities have a strong connection with military veterans (e.g., Arnon et al., 2020; Ferruolo, 2015). Equine-assisted learning is founded on Knowles' *Andragogy* (Merriam & Bierema, 2013), or adult learning, but there is limited information and research in the learning sciences concerning its use. The use of equine supported learning within the workshop stems from a few different situations and demands of the workshop. First, I was looking for something to generate interest in participating, especially taking into consideration the busy nature of student veterans (Dean et al., 2020). Second, I was looking for a CoP that would provide the opportunity to promote bridging practice into

new communities through a planned *boundary activity* where I could act as a *knowledge broker* (Wenger et al., 2002). Having worked with equine assisted learning prior to the workshop, and knowing of a veteran group at the participants' institution that was focused on learning equine skills, I enlisted their assistance. This provided a boundary activity, where I could act as a knowledge broker, to promote participation within the student veteran, design focused components of the workshop. Simultaneously, I was able to connect with the old-timers of the equine group to encourage the student veterans to continue participation with the horses.

**CoP: Boosting Active Participation in a
Short Amount of Time**

One of the most critical pieces to this puzzle was to identify a framework to be able to adapt to student veterans. The environment needed to be able to support purpose-driven camaraderie, in a similar manner to what may have been experienced in the military. Second, the environment needed to possess connections to the asset-driven emphasis that VCT espouses, with special attention to identity. CoP (Wenger, 2018) emerged as a social learning structure that had the potential to support purpose-driven camaraderie, while having a strong focus on identity as practice (Wenger, 2000).

*A Familiar Domain: Improving the
Student Veteran Experience*

To be able to make student veteran identities active components of participation within the workshop, the central domain was focused on developing a solution to improve the student veteran experiences at their academic institution. This central domain

made their identities and lived experiences a critical component to be able to participate, to the extent that not having a student veteran identity and experience would have made active participation nearly impossible.

Practice: Identity and Design Thinking

With the central domain having student veteran experiences at the center of it, student veteran experiences and identities were crucial to being able to fully participate. This also had the benefit of providing an almost immediate level of comfort and competence (Wenger, 2000) to begin practicing around the domain. The other major component of practice was design thinking (Brown & Katz, 2019), as a method of innovation. Having already established the potential connection between veterans and the innovation process, the idea was that they would be able to quickly pick up the design thinking practices. With an almost immediate level of competence in practicing their student veteran identities in the workshop setting, and hypothetically being able to adopt design thinking practices—the participants were well-equipped to quickly engage in LPP at a meaningful level.

Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP)

One of the other core hurdles in developing a CoP-based workshop environment was being able to promote adequate LPP within the short time frame allotted to the workshop environment. To be sensitive to the potentially busy nature of non-traditional students (Dean et al., 2020), the workshop was designed to take place in a relatively short amount of time. Lave and Wenger (1991) present the idea of old-timers and new-comers,

where old-timers can facilitate in-ward trajectory of the new-comers' LPP. To be able to accomplish this, it was imperative that the old-timers within the workshop session had similar backgrounds, identities, and experiences as the student veteran participants. As I was a student veteran and experienced with innovation using design thinking, I was positioned to assume the role of old-timer within the workshop setting. Further, I had experience with horses, and the equine specialists who came to support the equine portion of the workshop activities acted as old-timers from their community.

Knowledge Brokers and Boundary Activities

Another major hurdle to overcome was convincing student veterans to carve out the time to participate in the innovation workshop. To this end, the workshop incorporated equine assisted learning activities that were focused on developing teamwork and *empathy*, which is the first stage of design thinking (Brown & Katz, 2019). Incorporating equine supported activities helped fulfill two major needs and objectives of the workshop, first the equine activities acted as a draw to participate. Regardless of the level of interest that may have existed for other parts of the workshop, the participants came with an interest in the equine domain. Second, the equine activity acted as a *boundary activity* (Wenger et al. 2002), that overlapped with the workshop's primary domain. This boundary activity allowed the equine specialists (old-timers) to bring their equine practices into a space that also included my expertise in design thinking and student veterans. This provided an opportunity for the participants to take their participation in an outward trajectory into the equine CoP, and into an inward trajectory toward the workshop's central domain.

Developing Community

The core objectives of this study were to develop and further explore purpose-driven camaraderie among the student veteran participants, identify how the setting helped shape their identities, and how it established community. With their similar backgrounds as student veterans, the participants already had an edge in being able to develop a sense of camaraderie and community around the central purpose of the workshop. The rest of the community and camaraderie building was reliant on whether the participants would commit to participating around the domain, in addition to all of the other outlined elements being able to coalesce in the short span of study's workshop.

Summary

This chapter focused on developing the conceptual framework of the study. The conceptual framework includes two major components—the background and theoretical foundations. The background addressed what student veterans are and how the term was being used in the confines of this study. It also addressed the current practices and research happening around student veterans, with a special emphasis on the prevalence of deficit thinking and the emergence of asset-driven research and practice to address the challenges presented by deficit thinking. The background helped frame the theoretical framework that focused on the use of VCT and purpose-driven camaraderie to develop the means to further explore student identities and purpose-driven camaraderie amongst student veterans. To accomplish this end, a workshop focused on innovation was developed using communities of practice, purpose-driven camaraderie, innovation/design

thinking, and equine assisted learning. The chapter closes with a section addressing how all these elements come together to create the workshop environment used in this study.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

To better understand purpose-driven camaraderie among student veterans, this study implemented an innovation workshop for student veterans. By providing an environment based on the concept of purpose-driven camaraderie, the study was situated to investigate the explanatory power of VCT, Purpose-driven Camaraderie, and CoP for understanding and supporting student veterans' experiences through a generative, or asset-driven perspective.

Research Design

This study was designed as a qualitative research study, following the definition presented by Creswell and Poth (2018, p. 8), which I have broken down and rephrased into individual segments.

- *A qualitative inquiry begins with assumptions, theoretical frameworks, and research questions focused on understanding a social or human problem, and the meaning ascribed by the involved individuals and groups.* This study was formulated with CoP, VCT, and purpose-driven camaraderie as the driving theoretical/conceptual frameworks underpinning the study. The research questions and constructs are focused on understanding the experiences of student veterans within an environment that was designed to elicit a generative response from the participants, thus satisfying this first requirement.

- *The research utilizes emerging qualitative inquiry approaches in a natural setting that focuses on individuals and groups.* The workshop provides a natural setting for teamwork, student veteran identities, and the other theoretical considerations to emerge through observation, interaction, and interviews. The workshop is focused on the experiences of the participants, and while the resulting innovation that the participants came up with is interesting in itself, it is not the primary focus of the study. The focus is on

understanding the participants as individuals and a group in a teamwork setting.

- *Engages in inductive and deductive data analysis to construct patterns and themes.* While this is covered in more detail in the data analysis section, I have opted to adopt a lean coding approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), starting with prefigured codes based on CoP and VCT, in addition to subsequent *in vivo* coding to be able to help answer the research questions concerning VCT, CoP, and purpose-driven camaraderie. The objective was to inductively encounter new insights, codes, and themes that would not otherwise be detectable using prefigured codes—while also having prefigured codes that overlap the in vivo coding to better understand the connections between the data and research questions.

- *The culminating report incorporates the voice of the participants, influences of the researcher, complex descriptions, interpretations, and contributions to literature and practice.* This dissertation is an effort to incorporate all of these elements in such a way that it yields practical, theoretical, and methodological contributions to meaningfully add to the field of study focused on the experiences of student veterans in higher education. By having critical theory incorporated into the conceptual underpinnings of the study, I have attempted to make my role, influence, and positionality clearly stated—especially as a student veteran, who is studying student veterans.

As I consider Creswell and Poth's (2018) criteria for a qualitative inquiry, I find it important to mention the flexible, rather than fixed, nature of the qualitative research process, as outlined by Maxwell (2013, pp. 2-4). The phrase I often heard while in the military, and from other service members and veterans since then, is *adapt and overcome*. I feel that phrase adequately addresses the reflexive nature of qualitative inquiry, with this study being no different. I have been constantly "adapting" and "overcoming" the new challenges, information, and changing approaches through all stages of the inquiry.

Researcher Positionality and Lived Experience as a Student Veteran

In qualitative inquiry, the researcher is the primary tool of data collection. Disclosing one's relationship to the participants and potential biases in collecting and

analyzing data is one of the ways in which trustworthiness is established. In addition, since this study incorporates critical theory through VCT, it is appropriate to communicate my positionality. As a researcher and a military veteran, there are tensions stemming from my identity that need to be addressed to better understand the influences that I have brought to this study. I am a military veteran, who served in the Army National Guard for 6 years and was ordered to Active Duty service while deployed to Iraq in 2011 in support of Operation New Dawn (OND). As a military veteran and a student veteran, I have faced many things that other student veterans have or are currently experiencing. I have experienced and felt many of the things that have been reported in the literature and heard many fellow service members and veterans over the years echo my own thoughts and feelings. I have confronted trying to balance work, school, and the military while still associated with the National Guard. I have undergone being ordered to active service on multiple occasions, with the most impactful one sending me to Iraq in support of OND. These activations subsequently forced me to drop everything, and then I would have to pick up the pieces of what I dropped when I returned home, often with lives of loved ones and friends having moved forward without me. As I delved into higher education, the feelings of isolation as I got going, and being frustrated by seemingly "immature" undergrads complaining about how hard life was as a college student was omni-present. As I attempted to find my "people" on campus, I was fortunate in locating that belonging within an entrepreneurship club, where I made friends who shared similar interests.

Since leaving service, I have juggled a full-time job while raising small children

and burning the proverbial "midnight oil," as I have studied late into the night and attended classes intermittently throughout the day. I also have experienced how incredibly easy it is to connect to other veterans and service members, which often feels like a breath of fresh air, and my experiences with the veterans in the workshop was not any different. I have also experienced the power of my military experience, in my post-military life, which gave me the grit and determination to succeed in my endeavors, especially when life and school threatened to topple me. It has made me a more resilient person, and if it were only for those things, I would never trade my experience as a military service member for anything.

Maxwell (2013) refers to the personal experiences of a researcher with a certain topic as *experiential knowledge* (p. 44), and places emphasis on how this lived experience is a key component to the conceptual frameworks that underpin a study and is not often explicitly accounted for in establishing the background and conceptual framework. Having been a student veteran for most of the past 15 years at the time of this writing, I have amassed a noninconsequential amount of experiential knowledge during this time. This experiential knowledge has influenced my broader research interests and decisions associated with this study. At the same time, I view the experiences I shared with my participants as a strength that allowed me to build rapport more easily and gain more intimate and unique insights. I recognize that there are a range of student veteran experiences that are different from my own. Further, I recognize that my own experiences may make it more difficult for me to see or recognize experiences that differ substantially from my own within the range of student veteran experiences. For instance, because of

my service and my age, I was viewed as an old-timer within the innovation workshop community. This positioned me closer to some participants and further away from others who were just entering their military careers or were newer to veteran status.

My collective life experiences place me in a unique position as a researcher and a veteran, which allows me to be perceived as both an "insider" and "outsider" to the research setting. My shared military identity built rapport with the participants, which provided insider perspectives to be shared and communicated (Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000). Simultaneously, as a researcher, I was also viewed as an outsider—due to my alignment with a public and civilian institution that is collecting veterans' stories that may potentially be used to serve civilian interests. This combined status echoes the importance of what Brayboy and Deyhle indicate as the responsibility of the insider; it is important to decide what is to be shared and communicated to appropriately balance the insider/outsider status. As a fellow veteran, I am positioned to be able to elicit deeper narratives and present a generative view of veterans in higher education to help inform policy and practice that impact student veterans, while balancing my insider/outsider status.

Workshop Design and Structure

As a brief recap from the theoretical foundations section of Chapter II, this study was designed to implement a CoP-styled collaborative environment, inspired by the shared emphasis on identity with VCT, and purpose-driven camaraderie. The objective was to further explore purpose-driven camaraderie within the conceptual environment,

which took the form of an innovation workshop focused on solving a challenge within their student veteran community.

The workshop was designed as a hands-on learning experience, where the participants developed a solution to improve the student veteran experience within the student veteran community. The study's workshop was situated within a mid-sized university located in the intermountain west of the U.S. Most effective design thinking/ innovation workshops take place over the course of a workday, which roughly equates to the 9 hours of workshop time used for the innovation workshop. The workshop transpired over the course of 3 consecutive Saturday mornings from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm, though the participants stayed up to an hour longer than the 12:00 pm end time of the workshop talking with one another and sharing institutional knowledge. The workshop sessions were focused on learning and practicing the design thinking process to develop a solution to improve the student veteran experience on campus (see Table 1). Through the workshop, the participants identified a challenge they felt was relevant to their experiences as a part of the design process. The workshop sessions progressively built toward developing a testable prototypal solution to the problem statement that was identified by participants through the design thinking process. Food or refreshment served as an opportunity to build rapport and provide an informal environment to observe and collect data from student veteran participants as they socialized.

The workshop activities and competencies were intended to build innovation confidence and provide an environment of teamwork, where student veteran identities would be salient. Further, participant identities as student veterans were central

Table 1

A High-Level Overview of the Workshop

Session	Learning objectives	Activities	Outcomes
1	Broadly understand the *design thinking* process. Build teamwork and purpose to address a real-world problem. Understand and apply the concept of *empathy*.	Icebreaker/Introduction to Empathy using equine-assisted learning: Pony Soccer Participant-led interviews to develop *empathy* for each other as student veterans.	A conceptual understanding of the design thinking process. Cohesion as a team. An empathetic understanding of student veterans through interviews, conversations, and current trends in research and practice.
2	How to define the problem that is being addressed using available data and empathy. The role of empathy in being able to develop an effective problem-statement	Empathy-based equine activity: freeworking with horses. Clustering of findings from *empathy*-related activities and processes. Defining a problem statement.	Utilize clustering to identify themes in the collected data. Revisit Empathy as needed. A problem statement around which to structure the remaining design thinking phases.
3	How the design process is fluid and can lead to developing a well-formed potential solution to a problem. How they can apply the design process to virtually any area of their life.	Worst idea brainstorming activity as a warmup. Ideation phase: brainstorming and clustering of ideas. Identification of a potential solution, and plan to execute a low-investment prototypal solution to test. Sharing of resources and recap of the design thinking process.	Develop new ideas to address the identified problem. Fluidly move between the different stages of the design process in order to refine their solution. Identify an actionable potential solution with a plan to prototype and test the idea.

components to being able to innovate a solution by the end of the short time frame of the

workshop, bestowing upon them a degree of knowledgeability from the onset of the

workshop. To this end, the workshop was designed with CoP in mind, where purpose-

driven camaraderie was given the opportunity to manifest.

Equine-assisted learning activities (Bilginoğlu, 2021) were incorporated to provide team-building and problem-solving experiences focused on developing *empathy* among participants as they engaged in learning and implementing the design thinking process. Further, by associating with the equine-assisted learning staff, the participants were given the opportunity to bridge over into a boundary sharing community of practice. Being similar in composition to the innovation workshop, the equine-assisted learning community is a boundary sharing CoP due to being populated by student veterans, with an emphasis on developing competencies among their respective members. In addition, the equine-assisted activities served as a "hook" to attract student veteran participants to the innovation workshop.

The innovation/problem-solving portions of the workshop were correlated to the equine-assisted learning activities and are founded on *Design Thinking,* which promotes innovation (Brown & Katz, 2019). The first stage of the design thinking process is developing *empathy*, which has similarities to developing rapport with a horse through structured activities. These equine- assisted activities tie into the *empathy* portion of design thinking workshop and serve to embody the concepts and process being communicated to the participants (see Figure 3). Further, the equine activities provided an opportunity to develop teamwork among the participants and act as an icebreaker.

Appendix A presents the detailed workshop plans, schedule, and desired outcomes. The workshop plans are focused on the takeaways, learning, and real-world value that the workshop was delivering to the participants.

Figure 3

How Equine Activities Were used to Supplement the Design Thinking Process
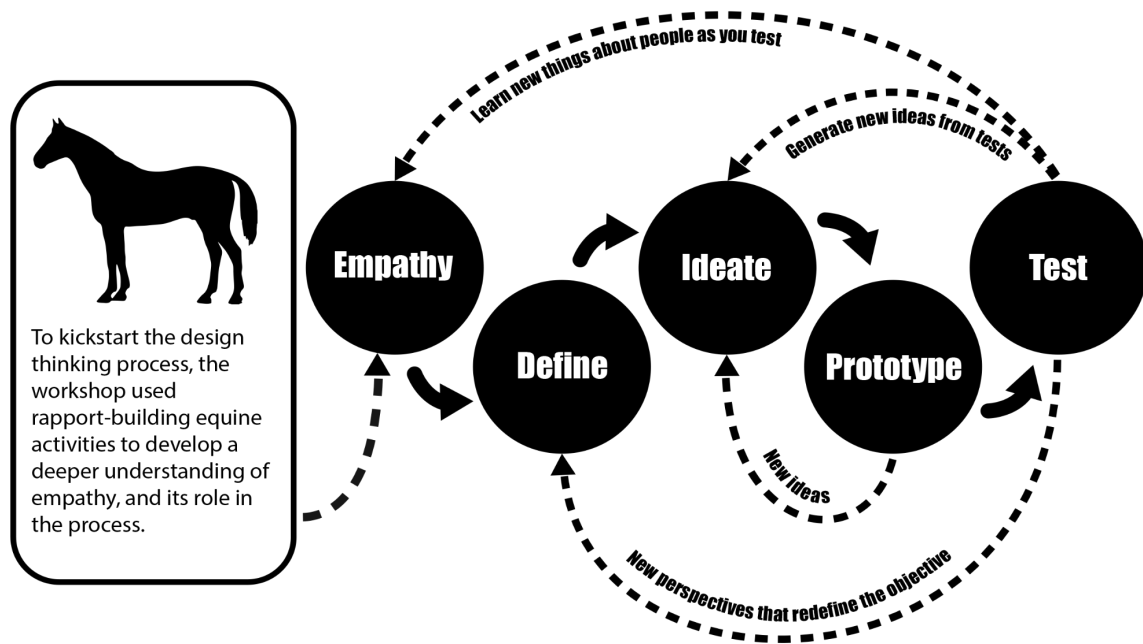
Participant and Setting Background

In this section, I provide information concerning the participants and the settings of the study. As this is a qualitative study, the substantive descriptions of the individuals, settings, and events within the bounds of the workshop are intended to situate the findings and discussion. I begin by describing the ethical considerations of working with student veterans and then describe the participants in detail. Before initiating the study, the university's IRB required a thorough protocol and research proposal, which outlined the procedures for recruitment, data collection, data storage and analysis, and participant protections—among other requirements. IRB Protocol: 12177 was approved and has been adhered to throughout all stages of the research study.

Participants

Four Caucasian males, ranging in age from their early 20's to their mid-30's participated in the innovation workshop. Three branches of service were represented by this group: the Coast Guard, the Marine Corps, and the Army. To protect the participants' privacy, all personally identifying information was removed and pseudonyms were assigned.

Richard

In his mid-30s, Richard was the oldest of the participants. He served for 6 years in the Army National Guard and deployed in support of OND to Iraq in the early 2010s. After having completed his first undergraduate degree a few years prior, Richard returned to school to pursue a second bachelor's degree in order to qualify for employment with a federal agency. Richard chose to participate in the workshop so that he could learn more about horses.

Thomas

Thomas was in his mid to late 20s. After serving in the Marine Corps, Thomas spent the first year after separation working before deciding to enroll in higher education. While serving in the military, Thomas never deployed to a combat arena. At the time of the workshop, Thomas was a few years into his education and was at a juncture where he needed to commit to one of two academic pathways he was considering. Between the 1st and 2nd session, Thomas made his decision and committed to a pathway of study. Thomas decided to participate because he had always wanted to learn to work with horses, and to

a lesser extent, he wanted to help someone out with their research—with the hope that others would return the favor if he were in a similar position in the future.

Cameron

Cameron was in his early 20s. Having left service in the Coast Guard mere months before participating in the workshop, Cameron was the veteran with the least amount of time out of service. Looking at a career that took him outside, Cameron was engaged in finding housing for summer employment with a federal agency. Cameron was generally interested in experiencing new things while attending school and opted to give the workshop a try. In his own words, "I wasn't doing anything, so I figured, why not?"

William

At barely 20 years old, William was the youngest of the participants. The only participant who was still actively serving in the military, William had just barely completed his first year of service in the Army National Guard, while participating in the ROTC on campus, with the objective of becoming a commissioned officer. He felt a bit nervous attending due to his newness in the military compared to the other participants. William was highly involved with various university-affiliated groups and clubs.

Equine Specialists

While not the primary focus of the study, the equine portion of the workshop was conducted with the support of equine specialists. These specialists helped handle the horses and assisted the student veteran participants with their equine interactions. These support specialists are not named or identified within the study. While the equine

experiences are interesting in their own right, and may justify further inquiry, they were never meant to be the overt focus of the study. The equine activities were incorporated to provide incentive to participate and present novel learning and team-building opportunities within the broader workshop context, and to promote a bridging opportunity into new communities of practice, as well as further engagement around the central focus of the workshop.

Recruitment

A convenience sample was recruited using the Veterans Resource Office (VRO), who emailed student veterans using their communication lists. Three rounds of recruitment emails were sent out through the VRO leading up to the workshop. The recruitment emails contained a link to a Qualtrics survey with additional information about the study, collected contact information, and verified that the potential participants fell within the inclusion criteria. Individuals who met all the criteria were then contacted via a provided email with additional information, the consent form, and details about attending the first session. Samples of the recruitment materials can be found in Appendix D. Snowball sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018) was also employed to broaden recruitment efforts by leveraging contacts in the campus's military and veteran community. William's participation was a direct result of leveraging those contacts and relationships.

A small monetary incentive was used to solicit the participation of student veterans in the form of a $100 Amazon gift card. IRB-approved consent forms were provided digitally to the participants and the involved stakeholders once they agreed to

participate in the workshop. Hard copy consent forms were also on hand during the first session of the workshop. The consent forms were collected before the official start of the first session.

Setting

The locations and settings were selected to provide an opportunity for student veterans to engage in an environment that supports purpose-driven camaraderie, much like what they left behind with their military service. The workshop transpired over 3 consecutive Saturday mornings from 9 AM - 12 PM. The innovation workshop took place at two different locations and was focused on the development of a solution to a participant-identified challenge in the student veteran community at the university. The final interviews following the workshop were conducted over Zoom or face-to-face in a private space located on the main university campus.

Workshop Locations

The first workshop location was at an off-campus equine research farm facility a few miles from the main university campus that housed the horses and facilities used in the equine-assisted learning program. The first two sessions occurred at this location due to the associated equine activities. The second location was a collaborative/creative space located on the university's main campus and hosted the third workshop session.

Horse arena and adjoined classroom space. The selected facility included a horse arena and a classroom space, thus providing seamless transitions from equine-assisted activities, used for learning and team-building exercises, to a classroom space for

design thinking activities. As seen in Figure 4, the building was separated into two main

sections, the first being the classroom and restrooms, the second being the horse arena.

The classroom section was a large, echoey, room. The flooring was linoleum, surrounded

by painted cinder block walls on the outside walls and drywalled on the interior walls.

The room was large and could accommodate ~30 or 40 people. At the front of the

classroom was a large whiteboard, a projector screen, and a computer station hooked to a

ceiling mounted projector. There were 5 or 6 rows of tables spanning the width of the

room. All the hard surfaces in the large classroom made for a tremendous amount of

noise from echoing voices, especially when multiple people were talking. This

contributed to later difficulty in transcribing the recordings due to the noise pollution.

Figure 4

The Space Used for the First Two Sessions
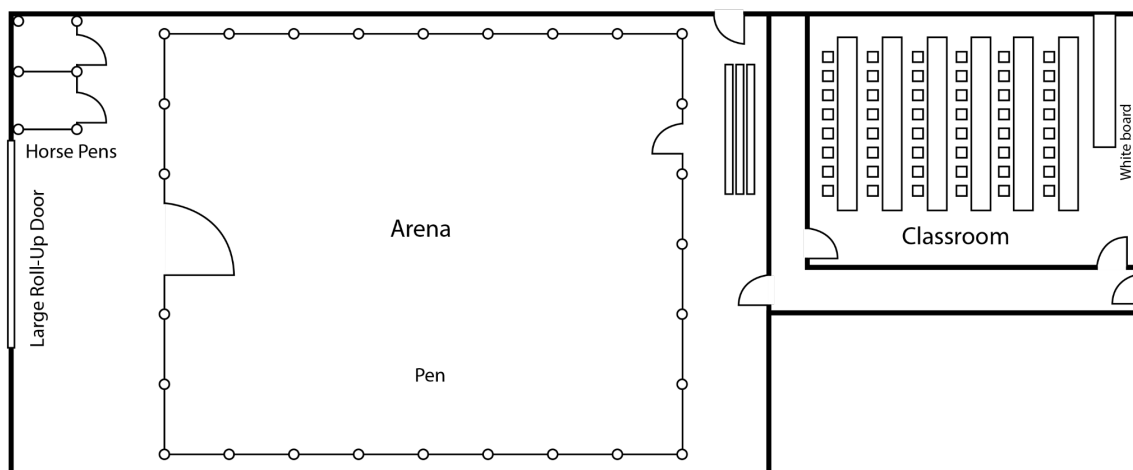
The horse arena was composed of steel support girders, concrete, corrugated

metal roofing, and a deep, soft, loamy mixture of sawdust and sand spread across the

floor. The rear of the arena had a large roll-up door to allow machinery and horses to

enter the space, while the front of the arena sported aluminum bleachers. The central

space was taken up by metal corral railing, shaped into a large rectangular pen, with gates

situated at the front and rear. The bleachers provided a space to gather when not

interacting with the horses. The arena space was much quieter than the classroom,

making recording easier.

Creative/collaborative space located on the main campus. The second location

was a collaborative/creative space located on the main campus, furnished with

whiteboards, screens, couches, and tables and chairs. As seen in Figure 5, The couches

ended up being a popular feature with the participants and were the only seating in the

Figure 5

The Collaborative Creative Space Used for the Final Workshop Session
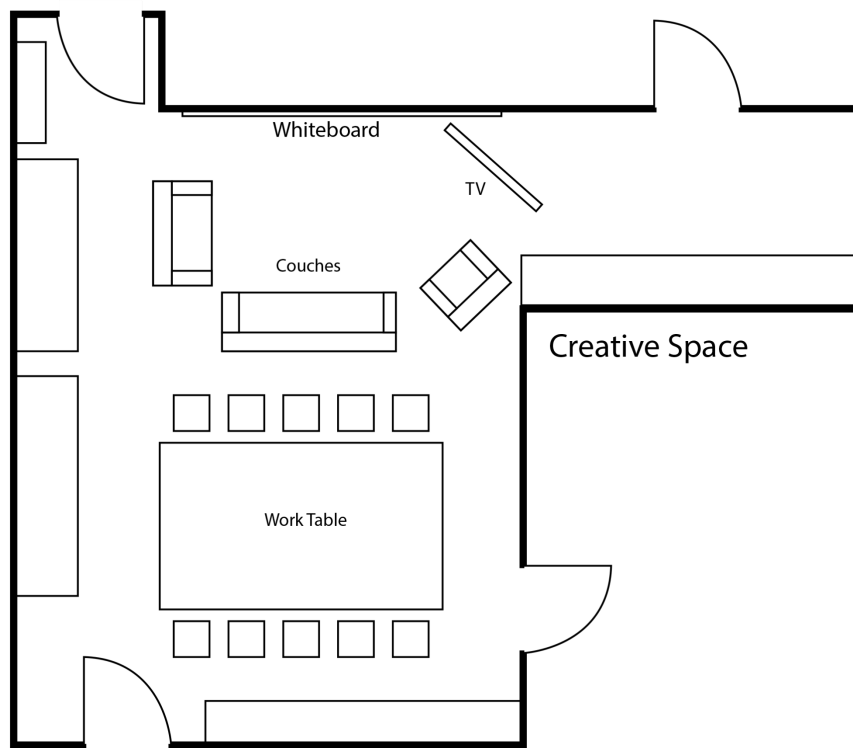
space to be used during the final session of the workshop. The overall space was about a quarter of the size of the arena classroom, which provided a more intimate environment and no echoing. The participants overwhelmingly noted that the collaborative/creative space on campus was a far more comfortable and useful space for collaborative work, compared to the first arena/classroom facility.

Workshop Content

The workshop was conducted using the stages and concepts of *design thinking* to guide the overall workshop experience and content. While not a linear process, I presented design thinking in the order of *empathy, define, ideate, prototype,* and *test* to illustrate how all of these elements work in concert. The equine activities used during the first two sessions were related to *empathy* and general problem-solving, in an effort to help kickstart the design thinking process.

Not everything went exactly to plan, and I found myself adjusting the workshop activities between each session to better address the needs of the participants. Most of the adjustments were to simplify what was covered and accomplished with each session to account for the limited time of the workshop sessions and to better focus on allowing the participants to learn the *design thinking* process by being actively engaged in the process. In many ways, this workshop also embodied the design thinking process as I ideated, prototyped, and tested my way to its successful completion—driven by a better empathetic understanding of the situation and participants. For a complete workshop plan for each session, please refer to Appendix A.

My experience as a student veteran and a designer, which both span more than a

decade, coupled with my briefer experience with horses set me up as an "old-timer" (Wenger et al., 2002) within the context of the workshop. To create a setting based on CoP, it necessitated my involvement to be actively sharing my experience, knowledge, and expertise as a student veteran and designer to the new-comer participants as they began to practice within the domain of the workshop setting.

Workshop Description

This section provides more detail of how the workshop events actually transpired, which in my experience almost always deviates from what you *planned* on having transpired. This section will help provide context to the findings and discussion portions of this document. As a primer, prior to each session of the workshop, I would gather my materials, acquire food and snacks, and attempt to be at least 30 minutes earlier than the participants. This gave me an adequate amount of time to place 3 audio recorders around the space and set up the video camera. While I would show up early to the session, Thomas, who would drive from the city that he lived in, was early each time. This gave us an opportunity to chat about the random things of life while I attempted to get my recording gear set up in the workshop spaces.

Workshop Session 1. Around 9 AM, the rest of the participants began to show up. At this point, I was planning on having 6 participants, but as Richard, Cameron, and later, William arrived, it became apparent that this was my starting lineup for the workshop. I collected any consent forms that had been brought, or had the participants fill out a form once they entered the classroom. Once it was apparent that nobody else was going to show up, we got started.

The first task was to formally introduce ourselves, which was composed of sharing names, branches of military service, and the academic objectives in school. After each of the participants introduced themselves, I took the opportunity to introduce myself as both a researcher and student veteran, my objectives for the workshop and the study and my journey to that point. I then presented the *design thinking* process, with a special emphasis on *empathy*. I was transparent about my research objectives and answered any questions they had. After this brief round of introductions t, we left the classroom and went back to the equine arena to participate in the team building/problem-solving activity that was planned for the session.

Once in the arena, we were met by a pair of ponies, or miniature horses, and a trio of equine specialists. After more introductions, the team building/problem-solving activity, called *Pony Soccer* was explained. The arena had been set up with a pair of 6 - 8-foot timbers, spaced ~ 30 feet apart, to form a goal. This was replicated on opposing sides of the arena (see Figure 6). The participants were paired up into teams, with William and Thomas on one team—and Richard and Cameron on the other team. The objective for each team was to move their pony into the opponent's goal and keep the opposing pony out of their goal without using any form of verbal communication or physical contact with each other or the pony. A penalty for breaking these rules was collectively decided upon by the participants, which was singing the nursery song "I am a Little Teapot," and performing the associated action items.

With rules established, teams formed, and penalties decided upon, the participants stepped out into the arena. The ensuing 10 minutes saw the participants walking around

Figure 6

The Setup for Pony Soccer in the Arena
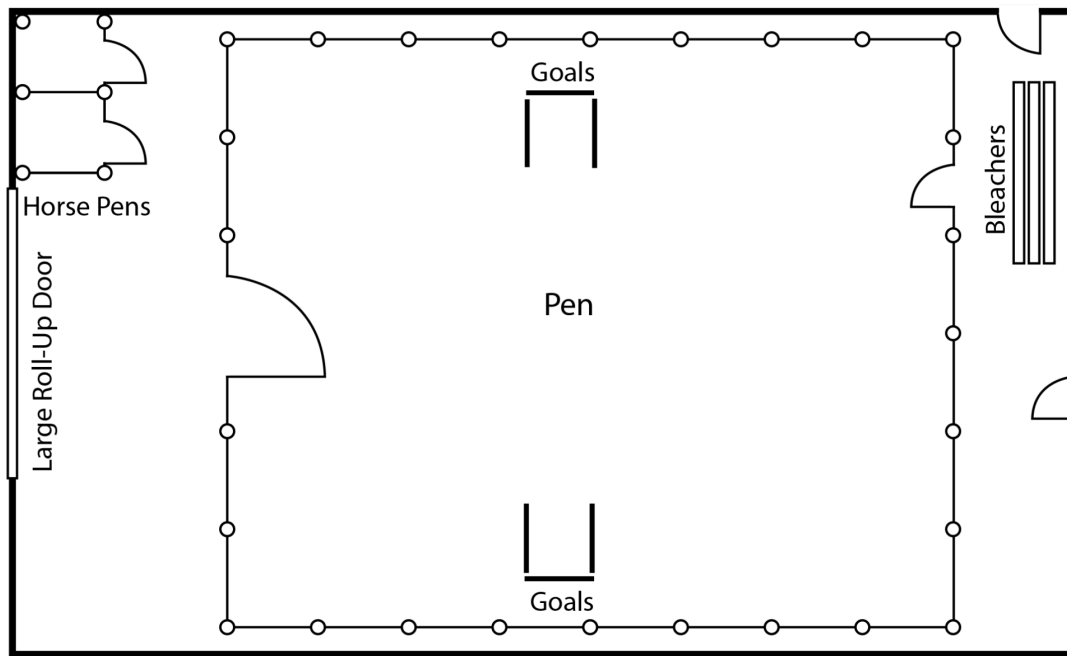
Arena - Pony Soccer

with little idea of what to do, waving their arms and trying to get the ponies to respond.

After 10 minutes of watching the participants aimlessly, and unsuccessfully trying to coax the ponies (see Figure 7), the equine specialists called the participants back to the bleachers to debrief the experience. After hearing the participants explain some of their frustrations with the ponies and not being able to speak during the experience, I took the opportunity to initiate a discussion with the participants about the importance of *communication* and *observation* when attempting to solve a problem. Through the guided discussion, the participants were able to recognize their rigid focus on the ponies hampered their ability to observe the space and attempts to communicate with their teammates.

Figure 7

The Participants Playing Pony Soccer

Armed with their new knowledge, and having the restrictions on communication removed, the participants reentered the arena and attempted to work with their respective teammates and ponies. This second round was far more successful in scoring points, and the level of communication, observation, and problem-solving saw an increase as well. Following the round, the participants reconvened for a debrief of the experience, where I guided a discussion about the importance of developing *empathy* for a situation when trying to problem-solve.

Following the activity, we took a quick break before reconvening in the classroom. At this point, we began a deeper discussion on the role of empathy in the

design process and I introduced them to the concept of the *5 Whys*, which is a questioning

technique to elicit deeper insights from people and situations. I then took the time to give

them some general background on the known trends impacting the student veteran

experiences on campuses. Subsequently, I asked them to come up with a solution to

enhance the student veteran experience at their educational institution, essentially posing

the question of, "what can we do to develop a solution?"

Adhering to the design thinking process, the participants first needed to find out

more about who they were trying to design for before defining the problem and ideating

solutions. While it would have been ideal to have the participants gather data from other

student veterans on campus, the limitations of time and resources for the study prohibited

going down this route. To this effect, they were to stand in for the broader group of

student veterans as they gained deeper empathy for themselves and each other. This

approach also allowed them to quickly become "experts" within their little group. Armed

with this new information about current trends and practices, I prompted the participants

to come up with five questions on the whiteboard to ask each other to elicit a more

empathetic understanding of one another as student veterans.

1. What do you say when someone says, "thank you for your service?"

2. Describe to me what it means to be a veteran.

3. Why are you here in college?

4. Would you have changed your path that you are on if you knew what you
   know now?

5. What are your expectations for your college experience?

Each of the participants paired up, Thomas and William sat in the back of the

classroom, while Richard and Cameron remained seated toward the front of the classroom. Each participant was instructed to take notes of the interview responses, though no one actually followed through with taking notes as they soon got into deeper conversation as the interviews began.

Thomas and William adopted a bit more of a formal approach of interviewing each other, by taking a turn asking a battery of questions before switching roles. Richard and Cameron took a more relaxed approach, where they used the questions to guide a conversation. The conversational approach resulted in a wide-ranging discussion, yet despite the different approaches, all the participants struck relaxed positions— reclining or leaning on tables as they spoke to one another. The initial plan was to only allot 15 minutes for the interviews, but this swelled to more than 30 minutes as the participants became more conversational and comfortable with each other. Due to my objective of helping contribute to the sense of community, I opted to let the interviews run long as they spoke to one another—and to adjust my future workshop plans accordingly.

Around this time, lunch, which was pizza, was delivered. As we sat and ate, our conversations turned to school, work, and opportunities that some of the participants were pursuing. Following lunch, our allotted time was quickly coming to an end. I had initially planned on covering *empathy* and *define* of the design thinking process, yet due to the amount of time we spent interviewing and working with the horses, we ended up not being able to wrap up *empathy* and delve into the *define* phase of the process. Despite this, I had the participants write their findings and thoughts from the session on individual sticky notes in preparation for our next workshop session. The topics listed on

the sticky notes largely stemmed from the interviews, casual conversations, personal experiences, and the information that I presented to them concerning current trends, practices, and research on student veterans.

As the participants wrapped up writing on their sticky notes, we pivoted to a brief AAR (After Action Review), to get the participants feedback on their experience during that session. From the AAR, I learned that the equine activity was a bit underwhelming, and not what they expected. This factored into me retooling the equine activity for the second session to better meet their expectations and help drive home the concept of *empathy.* The participants also opted to have me provide breakfast burritos instead of lunch for the subsequent sessions. Following the AAR and wrapping up the workshop session, the participants wanted to walk over to one of the horse paddocks to see some of the horses housed at the facility. We left the building and walked over as a group, all the while talking about school, outdoor activities, and swapping information about the best businesses, websites, and stores that offered veteran discounts, opportunities, and scholarships.

Workshop Session 2. The second session took place at the same location as the first session. Again, Thomas helped me take all of the materials and equipment inside and helped me get set up. Once set up, the participants trickled in as we ate breakfast and chatted. As we headed out of the classroom and into the arena following breakfast, I told them that I had scrapped the original planned equine activity and had instead opted to have them do freework with the horses in the arena. As they walked in, they were greeted by a pair of full-sized horses and the equine-assisted learning support staff. Richard opted

to go into the pen to free work first, since he had a greater comfort level with the horses. This yielded the opportunity for the participants to be able to watch Richard and ask questions of the equine specialist, who had positioned themself on the bleacher next to the group. As Richard walked into the middle of the pen, accompanied by another specialist and a long "whip" or a 4-foot-long rod with a long piece of cord attached to the end, used to provide commands to the horse by extending it in different directions and periodically whipping it in the air to elicit a response from the horse. The horse, who was meandering free within the pen, is not harmed by the whip and it is never in contact with the horse. The other horse was waiting patiently in a stall outside of the main pen. The staff swapped out the horses between every participant in order to give the horses a chance to rest, eat, and drink water.

As Richard walked to the center of the arena, he was given quiet instruction by the equine specialist accompanying him. He began to lift his arms and provide direction to the horse through his arm movements, body posture, and position within the arena in relation to the horse. All the while, the specialist was teaching him about communication cues that horses express, so that he could begin to start forming a "conversation" with the horse. Simultaneously, the specialist sitting on the bleachers was telling the other participants about equine history, practices, and the horse's communication cues. As he began to get more comfortable, and followed the instructions given to him, the horse began to trot and run around the arena, following his commands. After an extended period of time of doing this. He was instructed to lay down the whip and turn his back to the horse. This acted as an invitation for the horse to approach him, and he was able to

pet the horse, scratch its withers, and start building a bit more rapport with the animal

(see Figure 8).

Figure 8

A Participant Walking Next to a Horse After Freeworking

After being able to pet and scratch the horse, Richard was instructed to start

walking around the arena. As he stepped forward, the horse started to walk closely with

him, off to his right side. The horse closely followed him as he walked around the pen,

until the specialist instructed him to stop and thank the horse by offering more petting

and scratches.

Richard left the arena, and the specialists worked on swapping out the

participating horses. This pattern largely happened with each of the other participants as

they each had a turn to step into the arena. While each participant was in the arena, the

specialist sitting next to the group offered insight into what was happening, the history of

horses, and answered a growing number of questions. Following the freeworking session

we debriefed about the experience and how they had all experienced a form of *empathy*

as they learned to communicate with the horse in unfamiliar ways. The freeworking

illustrated how powerful that ability to empathize can be in being able to problem-solve

and address the needs of others.

After thanking the equine-assisted learning specialists for their time, we all

returned to the classroom, where we began to pick up where we had last left off from the

previous session. To get them back into the mindset of innovation, I did a quick recap of

the design thinking process and gave them a handout outlining the process (see Appendix

C for handout). Armed with their sticky notes, whiteboard markers, and pens—they were

invited to the board to begin the next stage of the design thinking process: *define.*

To be able to define what the participants wanted to address to improve the

student veteran experience on campus, I introduced them to the activity of *clustering* their

variety of ideas, observations, and insights on the board. To do this, I encouraged them to

just start sticking the notes that they had created to the board, without any real concern

about order. Once the notes were on the board, I began to demonstrate how we could

begin to move sticky notes into clusters as we identified similar connective themes. After

a few minutes, the participants understood how fluid the process was and they began to

marshal the sticky notes around the board, while adding new sticky notes, and creating

categories. At this juncture, I was able to step back and let the participants begin to

cluster and move the sticky notes, while I offered suggestions and insights for them to

consider (see Figure 9).

As they clustered ideas, the conversation and categories became more focused on

certain topics, which seemed to have the most resonance to the group. The discussion

Figure 9

Participants Gathered Around the Whiteboard During Session 1

prompted further clusterings of ideas that explored the perceptions/assumptions of others

and themselves, the desire to be non-insular and expanding their associations to other

like-minded individuals (see Figure 10). This clustering was referred to as *Military &*

First Responder Non-Traditional Students or *MFRNS,* which was the term used for the

remainder of the workshop.

As we approached this moment of saturation and our time was running out, I

shared with them a simple way to take the information that they were distilling and apply

it into a problem-statement to help guide the subsequent steps of the process. The

participants took this format, all of their distilled ideas and were able to create a problem

Figure 10

Final State of the Define Activity at the End of the Second Session
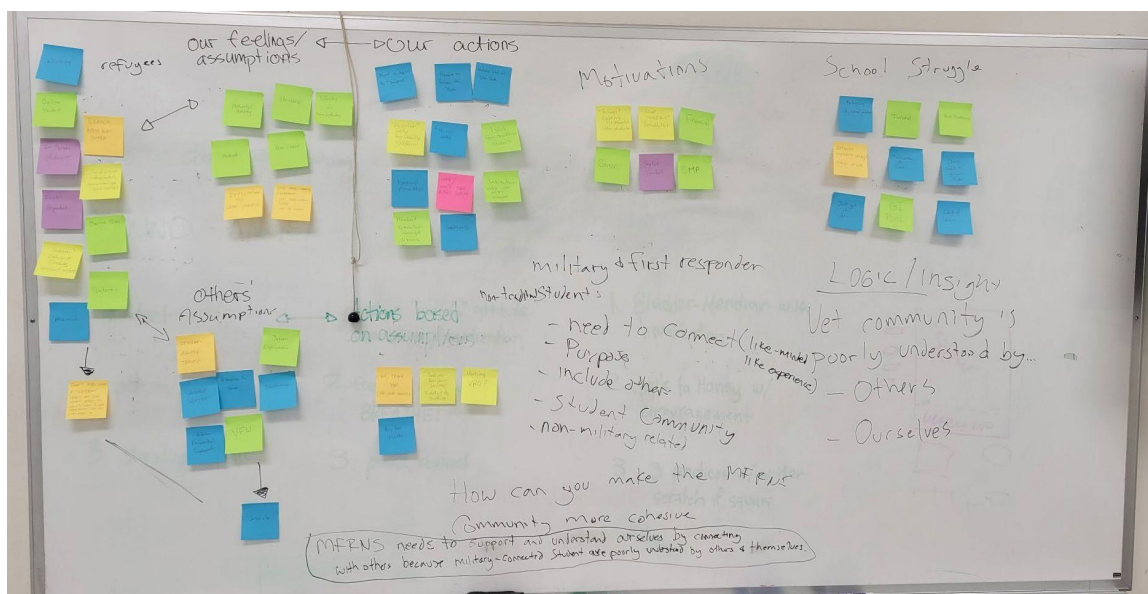
statement to guide the next stages of the design thinking process. Their statement ended

up being: *MFRNS need to support and understand ourselves by connecting with others*

because military-connected students are poorly understood by others and themselves. It

is important to note that this statement emerged after only a few hours of tangling with

the design thinking process. As the participants took all the information, their personal

experiences, and the empathy they developed over the past few sessions, there was a

collective moment where the participants were able to see all these stray pieces of

information turn into an actionable statement. As they excitedly discussed the statement,

they immediately began talking about things they could do to address the problem

statement. I quickly pointed out how fluidly they had just moved between *empathy* and

defining and were now starting to *ideate* solutions. I reminded them that while we moved

through this particular process very quickly, that it would typically be a longer process, where greater emphasis would be placed on developing more empathy, gathering data, and refining the problem statement with new information. We then quickly chatted about how the design thinking process could be used to address any challenges or problems that they may encounter.

At this point, we had expired our time, and after a brief recap and AAR, I reminded them of the location change for the final activity. As I began putting away the materials and equipment, we all started chatting again about other topics, which turned back to horses. Due to happenstance, there was a small horse show taking place at the facility where we were located. We all opted to walk over and see the happenings. As we arrived, some student volunteers were dispatched to give us a tour of the facilities and talk more about the competition. As we walked around the facility, we continued to chat about fun elective classes that could be taken at the university, shooting sports, and other pastimes the participants enjoyed.

Workshop Session 3. The final session shifted locale to a creative space located on the main campus of the university. The space was specifically set up to promote collaboration and innovation, sporting large works surfaces, equipment, and technology. For our purposes, the space most importantly had large whiteboards and comfortable seating surrounding them.

In the morning, the participants trickled in as we ate breakfast and chatted. At this point, everyone was getting very comfortable with each other, and the entire atmosphere was laid back and casual (see Figure 11). In order to help everyone get back into the

Figure 11

Participants Seated Around the Whiteboard in the Third Workshop Space

innovation headspace as we transitioned from the *define* stage to the *ideation* stage of

design thinking, I did two things. I introduced them to an activity called, *the worst idea*

and offered an expanded problem statement that incorporated more of the insights they

arrived at during the previous session. The revised statement was created after I had the

opportunity to review the recordings and memos from the week prior and was an attempt

to encapsulate the main points that spurred the original problem statement. In addition,

the revised problem statement was intended to help bridge the gap of time and remind

participants of previous workshop sessions. I made clear that it was optional for them to

adopt my expanded problem statement for the final session. The revised statement that I

presented, and they all agreed to use for the final session was: *MFRNS need to support*

and understand each other by connecting with others inside and outside of the military-

connected community, because MFRNS are poorly understood by others and themselves, due to the misconceptions that surround those individuals as a population. The activity to get the creative process started involved using sticky notes, pens, and a whiteboard to post all the worst possible ideas related to the topic being discussed. As we got going, ideas, such as *playing revelry in the morning on campus*, and *mandatory thanking of veterans for their service* made it up on the board accompanied by laughter, commentary and jokes.

This activity gave way to the group posting ideas they felt were good. As the participants would place their sticky notes on the board, they would briefly explain what the idea was, which usually spurred other comments and questions. The large bulk of the workshop session proceeded in this manner as ideas were placed, arranged, critiqued, and sometimes removed (see Figure 12). With only a short break as this process continued, the standout idea that the group liked the best began to materialize, and was born from a few different ideas, which included a "bad idea." The idea they identified was creating the *Technically Veterans Association*, which would be a social media hub to facilitate connections and opportunities for veterans inside and outside of the student veteran community. The name stemmed from their lack of feeling like veterans yet wanting to be able to have an avenue to connect with others while being informed of opportunities to get involved in activities, groups, and pastimes that had interest to them.

Just like the previous stages of design thinking, once they had identified an idea that seemed to be a good fit for their problem-statement, they naturally began to move into a *prototyping* phase as they began to discuss the merits, logistics, and processes to

Figure 12

The Whiteboard Following the Third Session
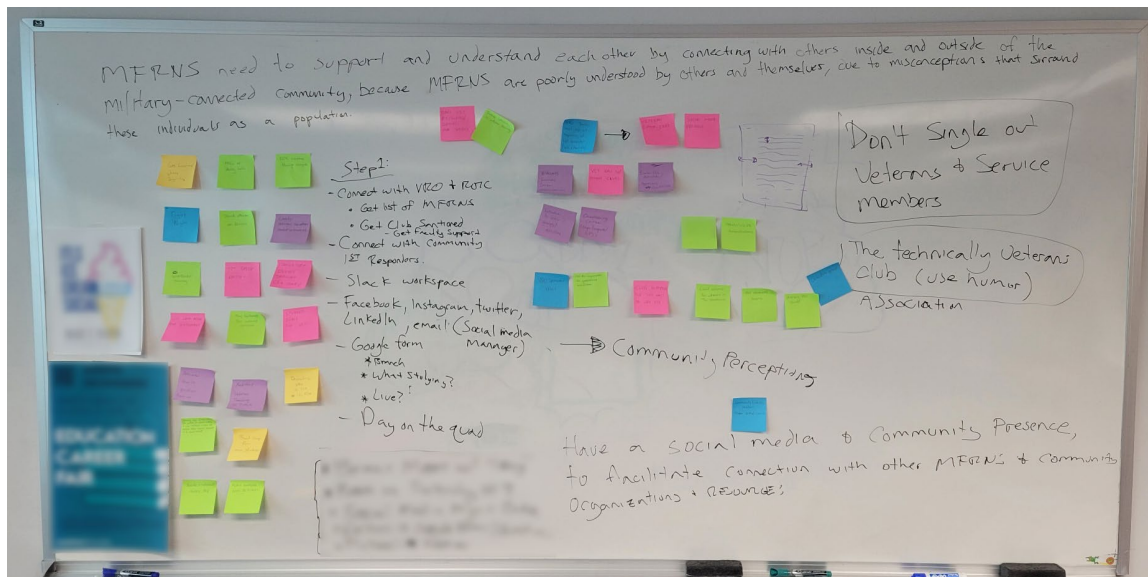
try out the idea. I again pointed out to the group how they had made the natural shift to a

different stage of design thinking, without them realizing the transition had occurred.

While acknowledging that there was no way to truly accomplish the final stage of

test within the confines of the workshop, the participants outlined a course of action that

would allow them to test out their idea without too much time or effort involved. When

asked if this would be a project that they would be interested in shouldering without the

requirement of having it a part of the workshop, all but Richard, who was graduating,

liked the idea enough that they were willing to try to implement their idea to see if it

would work. Around this point, we were running out of time, so we switched gears to me

sharing design resources, aids, and a final AAR—where I asked them about their overall

experience in the workshop and set up times to meet with each of them for an individual

interview. Thomas stayed after as I shared with him additional resources, tools, and information relating to design, education, and future career prospects that he was interested in. After about 20 or 30 minutes of resource sharing and conversation, Thomas left, and I finished packing up.

Data Collection

The type of data collected for the study was derived from the driving research questions and the theoretical perspectives presented by VCT (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017) and CoP (Wenger, 2000). CoP was supplemented with identity resources (Nasir & Cooks, 2009). The relation to the data collected, theoretical lenses, and research questions is demonstrated in Table 2.

Observations

Observations were used to help inform and triangulate the data collected through the interview process. Nasir and Cooks (2009) identity-resources helped provide structure for sense-making of observations within the workshop environment. Observations were written up in field notes and were recorded during each session using guidelines established by Creswell and Poth (2018, p. 96). Field notes were written up immediately after each session and expanded within a day or two of the observations taking place. Observations primarily focused on identifying group dynamics, the manifestation of identities through interactions, identification of generative characteristics of the participants, and the capturing of practice within a CoP. Photographs and video recordings were taken to document certain activities and interactions while the

Table 2

Questions and Methods Matrix

Research question	Theoretical lenses	Data collection	Data analysis
How and in what ways does participation in the innovation workshop facilitate the establishment of purpose-driven camaraderie among student veterans? How does the innovation workshop contribute to building a sense of community among student veterans on a higher education campus?	The workshop is intended to provide an environment where student veterans can: • manifest their generative qualities (stems from VCT), • connect with each other, • and learn in a social learning setting with similarities to their experiences while in service. I aim to understand how purpose-driven camaraderie is promoted through an environment, such as the workshop, among student veterans. CoP provides a framework to look at the components of a group or community to develop a deeper understanding of purpose-driven camaraderie. Purpose-driven camaraderie is important within the veteran culture. Teamwork is integral to the military experience. Veterans have been socialized through their military service to focus on the good of the whole. The sense of community has the potential to be bridged to other communities.	Observations Audio/Video recordings Semistructured Individual Interviews Group interviews (AARs) Artifacts produced: Sticky notes, white board jottings and clusterings Artifacts provided: design thinking handout, personas, graphic design, and project management.	Transcription Coding Data triangulation Theme identification using VCT and CoP. Demonstration of "domain" through analysis of produced artifacts Demonstration of "community" through analysis of produced artifacts

(*table continues*)

Research question	Theoretical lenses	Data collection	Data analysis
How are student veteran identities shaped within the context of the innovation workshop?	VCT emphasizes the importance of the multiple identities student veterans inhabit. The concept of identity is also critical to CoPs as it dictates how effectively participation can occur.	Observations Audio/Video recordings Semistructured Interviews Group interviews Artifacts produced: Sticky notes, white board jottings and clusterings.	Transcription Coding Data triangulation Theme identification Demonstration of "practice" through analysis of produced artifacts

observations were happening. Field notes and photographs were digitally uploaded to

USU's secure Box service and all identifying information remains secure.

Artifacts

Through the process of developing a solution to the ill-defined problems facing

student veterans, there were various artifacts that were documented through photographs

and written notes. These artifacts are almost solely composed of the sticky notes that

were placed on a white board, and any other written information placed on the white

boards. Any identifying information was removed, as applicable, from the photographs or

scans, by blurring identifying information that was present in the artifacts. Artifacts

generated through participation in the workshop stood as a representation of practice

within a CoP and helped document and reconstruct the design process of the participants.

The artifacts provided to the students, principally the design thinking handout (see

Appendix C), stood as an artifact that dictated some of the overall practice that occurred

within the workshop setting. Further, artifacts are an important component to Nasir and

Cooks (2009) identity-resources because they offer the means to analyze the identity within the social environment in which they are situated.

Group Interviews

A brief group discussion lasting no more than 15 minutes was conducted at the conclusion of each session. In the Army, After Action Reviews (AAR) are used to debrief what went right or wrong during an event, and what could be done better or sustained. This general format was used to elicit conversations with the participants about their experiences in the workshop. Following the final session, there was a more extended debrief, where participants were asked to provide their thoughts about the experience as a whole. Group interviews were video and audio recorded for transcription and analysis. In the context of this study, it was important to collect group interview data due to the emphasis on generating a sense of community amongst military veterans. This is important for two primary reasons.

1. First, the workshop was designed to be a group/team effort. Being able to discuss the experience as a group is an extension of the intended workshop environment.

2. Second, military indoctrination promotes focusing on the good of the whole, versus the good of the individual. In a group interview setting, participants were provided the ability to voice their thoughts concerning the entirety of the group experience and find consensus or dissent among the participants. This stood in contrast to the individual interviews, which allowed the individual participant to voice their personal experience.

By being able to offer their thoughts as a group, there existed the opportunity to further discover the dynamics of the student veteran community. A copy of the AAR protocol is found in Appendix A, following each of the session plans.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted following the completion of the workshop and were semi-structured, lasting 30 to 45 minutes. A list of the potential interview questions is included in Appendix B. The interview questions were focused on eliciting themes related to CoP, purpose-driven camaraderie, and VCT. Rapport with participants was built on the shared student-veteran status of myself and the participants, and the shared experience of the workshop, which provided insider perspectives to be shared and communicated (Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000). These interviews were held either in person or via the video conferencing service, Zoom. In-person interviews were audio recorded using two recording devices to ensure redundancy in data collection. The interviews were conducted over Zoom and were recorded using the built-in recording feature on the platform. Following each interview, video and audio recordings were securely stored digitally using USU's Box service until transcription. Once transcribed, participants were identified in transcripts with their pseudonyms.

Data Analysis

I designed this study to be analyzed as a qualitative single interpretive case study using observations, interviews, and artifacts from the innovation workshop. An interpretive case study was selected due to its intent to "support, or challenge theoretical assumptions" (Merriam, 1998, p. 38). This study looks to build support for purpose-driven camaraderie, and the use of CoP and VCT as a framework for research and practice. The study also aims to critique the supporting theories of CoP, purpose-driven

camaraderie, and VCT, in relation to their explanatory power and ability to support further research and practice with student veterans. The main aims of the study were to further the explanatory power of VCT (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017), CoP (Wenger, 2018), and Purpose-driven Camaraderie in relation to military veterans in higher education. An interpretive case study provided the opportunity to delve deeply into an environment designed with those theoretical underpinnings.

In further support of this approach, qualitative case studies are well-suited for educational research (Merriam, 1998, p. 26), especially for a bounded system (Stake, 1995). Merriam (1998) lays out several criteria that need to be met for a qualitative case study approach to analysis in education. First, the case must be considered a single unit, with bounds set around it (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 96; Merriam, 1998, p. 27; Stake, 1995). The workshop is a bounded system, fenced by time, locations, and the participants. With the workshop lasting for only 3, 3-hour sessions plus a post-workshop interview, there was a distinct duration for the study and environment. Second, the case is "particularistic," or it has a focus on a particular event or situation (Merriam, 1998, p. 29). The workshop, as an event, is the focus of the case study. Third, a case study is descriptive (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995). The variety of observations, interviews, field notes, and artifacts collected during the workshop aided in creating a detailed case description and themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 96). Fourth, according to Merriam (1998), the case needs to be "Heuristic" (p. 30), or able to provide new insight to the reader about the studied phenomenon. The workshop was situated in a veteran-friendly space and structured using theoretical perspectives reflecting my

understanding of student veterans. These theoretical perspectives were chosen for their potential generative qualities found within the veteran community and offer new insights about military veterans in higher education. The workshop was analyzed as a single case study (Creswell & Poth, 2015, p. 90).

Additionally, within the context of the study, I was considered an *observer and a participant* due to my level of engagement in moderating the workshop activities, with the participants fully aware of who I was, and my aims as a researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), as well as an "old-timer" according to CoP (Wenger, 2018, p. 90), which necessitated my involvement in the design process with the participants, as I shared my knowledge and experience within the domain of interest.

Data analysis began as I was conducting the workshop. I often found myself taking quick notes on a notepad as something struck me as interesting during the workshop setting. Following each session, I wrote up my field notes immediately following the sessions. I would intersperse epiphanies and potential connections to theory in my notes and memos. Alongside these notes, I would frequently write memos, where I would reflect upon the experience, and any errant thought that might have bearing on the study. This is in line with Merriam and Tisdell (2016), who posit that data analysis begins as data is collected (p. 196). This pattern of analysis continued as I moved past the workshop, and started into transcription, frequently writing thoughts, connections, and musings as memos on my computer, and on scraps of paper if I was not in a position to document them digitally. This often gave way to revisiting the conceptual framework literature to learn more and see how everything was or was not fitting together.

Concurrent with all these other analytical processes, I was steadily writing and revising this document, which gave me the opportunity to implement any new insights, supporting literature, or changes as I progressed with analysis.

Memos

Memoing has been a major part of the analysis portion of this study, to the point that I felt it appropriate to provide a small section addressing this form of analysis. Maxwell (2013) argues that memoing is one of the most important and useful tools in qualitative research, offering a flexible tool that can be used to think deeply about data, be a space for self-reflection, and trying out new ideas—to name a few. I began to write memos as I was preparing the proposal for the study in an effort to have a clear genesis of theories, literature, personal experience, suggestions, and the overall evolution of what all those elements became. I have continued this process through data collection, data analysis, and the writing of this document.

My memos largely took on two forms. The first format was my "brain dump," where I would write down thoughts, feelings, experiences, suggestions, reflections on data and literature, and hold earnest conversations with myself about all the elements involved in the study. These memos are largely dated in a linear format, providing a clear picture of the processes involved in developing, executing, analyzing, and producing the results of this study. The second form of memos was to write thoughts, observations, and connections to other codes, concepts, and literature. These were associated with individual pieces of data, transcripts, interviews, and observations and were linked directly with their unique pieces of data, which largely reside within the MaxQDA data

analysis platform. I often would return to old memos to not only refresh myself on the happenings and thoughts centered on the study, but at times to harvest earlier ideas that had found traction as data analysis progressed.

Analysis of Workshop Artifacts

The observations and artifacts were analyzed in conjunction with the interview data, as they provided context for the audio data and recreated the design process. The recreated design process demonstrated how the participants "practiced" within the context of an innovation workshop. A bidirectional artifact analysis approach was employed to track the evolution of the participant's processes, interactions, and experiences through the design artifacts generated and used by the student veterans (Halverson & Magnifico, 2013). The analysis followed the three steps Halverson and Magnifico outlined.

1. *Identify* the final artifact that was created by the participants. In the case of this study, the final artifact was the prototypal concept, *The Technically Veterans Association*, which was formulated at the end of the final session of the workshop and jotted on the whiteboard.

2. *Document* all of the associated data related to the final artifact. The recordings of the workshops, photos, interviews, and digital reconstructions of the collaborative work done on the whiteboards provided the documentation for the final product and overall experience of the participants.

3. *Construct* all of the connections that bridge the collected data to trace the genesis of the final product. This is where the final products and design artifacts are analyzed in conjunction with the other data chronologically backward and forward to better understand the practices implemented. (p. 410)

Much like transcription of audio data, the first step for me was to recreate the photographs of the collaborative efforts on the whiteboards into a simple visual digital

format using Adobe Illustrator. This stood as the first layer of post-data collection analysis as I stepped through the process of placing ideas in a digital space, much like we accomplished in the physical space of the workshop. This presented me with the opportunity to mimic the design thinking process that we underwent as I considered all of the theoretical implications of the activity. The next step was to break down and label each of the collaborative boards to start reconstructing the genesis of the design process.

Figure 13 is a digital recreation of the collaborative board from the second workshop session, where the participants implemented their empathetic findings from interviews, the background information I provided, and their own personal experiences and thoughts. The numerical sequence depicted on the board generally shows how the activity progressed toward the final statement. Being iterative in nature, conversation and activity would often swing back to previous clusterings that, at times, would prompt changes to the groupings. This process resulted in the formulation of an initial problem-statement: *MFRNS (Military & First Responder Non-Traditional Students) need to support and understand ourselves by connecting with others because military-connected students are poorly understood by others and themselves.* This statement ended up being the connective piece between the activities of the second and third workshop sessions.

The following list breaks down the individual clusterings found on the board and how they were placed in their locations. This represents the individual groups that fall within their defined scope. Note that the participants added in groups, such as refugees and first responders, because of their perceived similarities to veterans.

1. The second cluster is focused on how the participants felt as student veterans and their own assumptions.

Figure 13

Digital Recreation of the Whiteboard from the Second Session with Numbers
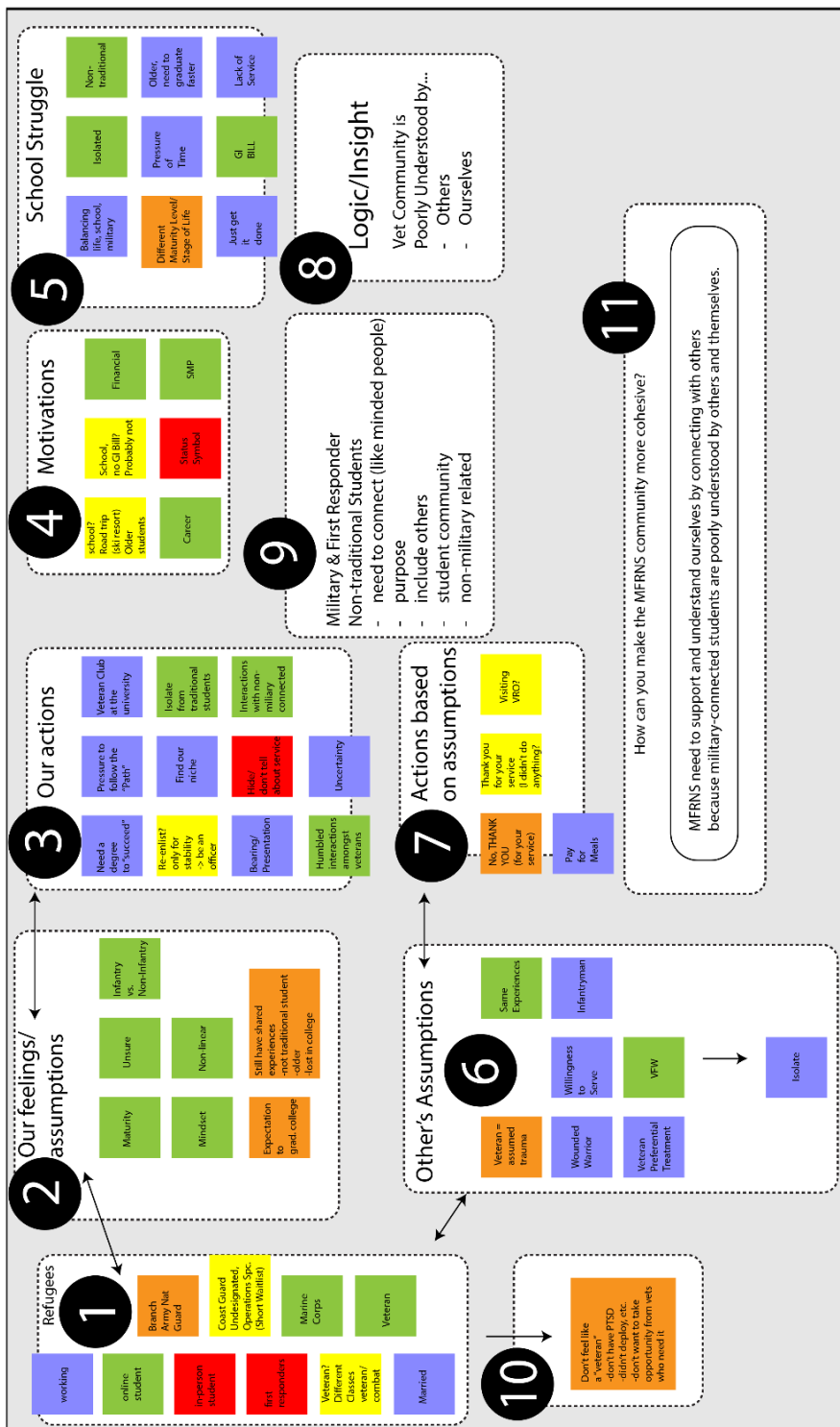
2. The actions taken by student veterans as a result of their feelings, experiences, and assumptions.

3. Motivations for attending a university.

4. The school-related struggles that the participants listed as being prominent in their experiences.

5. The second cluster that focused on the feelings and assumptions of student veterans prompted this clustering of the assumptions focused on how others perceived student veterans.

6. This clustering focused on the actions that are taken, based on the assumptions of others and themselves.

7. As time ran down, I prompted the participants to start looking at the board to find new insights, which prompted the note titled: Logic/Insight, with the recognition that not only was the veteran community poorly understood by those looking from the outside, that they, as student veterans, did not understand it themselves.

8. At this point, the participants began formulating the needs that would help address the insight found on 8.

9. The previous few steps also prompted another sticky-note, distilling down their feelings of being a veteran as an extension to the clusterings found in group 1.

10. As time wound to a close, we formulated a problem statement to carry through to the other phases of the design thinking process, which were to take place during the third workshop session.

Between second and third sessions, I had the opportunity to review the recordings and photographs and suggested to the participants a more detailed version of their problem statement to use as the basis of the final workshop session: *MFRNS need to support and understand each other by connecting with others inside and outside of the military-connected community because MFRNS are poorly understood by others and themselves, due to the misconceptions that surround those individuals as a population.* This was not a departure from what they identified, but added additional details that

spurred the initial problem statement. This was done to help them recall the content and

events from the previous week due to the elapsed time between workshop settings, and to

keep the design thinking process moving forward in our limited amount of time together.

Figure 14 is a digital recreation of the final collaborative board, and much like the board

from the second session, it largely progresses in following the numbered sections.

Referring to Figure 14, groupings 3-8 are largely clusters of brainstormed ideas

that were moved around the board during the activity, but largely fell into their locations

that are noted in the figure in the depicted sequence.

1. This was the modified problem-statement from the previous session, which was written on the board after the participants agreed that it fit what they had generated the previous session.

2. This is where all of the *worst ideas* ended up from the icebreaking/brainstorming session to get everyone back into the innovation mindset. This activity was supposed to be loose and fun, in order to take some of the pressure off the ideation process that followed.

3. This clustering of ideas focused on boosting the visibility of veteran resources, groups, and opportunities.

4. Group 4 emphasized activities and organizations that were interesting to the participants.

5. The clustering focused on action items for the Veterans Resource Office (VRO).

6. A single sticky note stood alone for a "vet day" for university clubs to sponsor.

7. This grouping focused on military history and military demonstrations.

8. This cluster of notes included using the student paper, intramural teams, and better using VRO spaces.

9. This final grouping is where ideas began to be shifted into what became the basis for their solution that they wanted to prototype and test. It began with a VRO meetup at the beginning of the semester for veterans and non-veterans, as a means to build connection, but was joined with the ideas of having a

Figure 14

Digital Recreation of the Whiteboard from the Third Session with Numbers

MFRNS need to support and understand each other by connecting with others inside and outside of the military-connected community because MFRNS are poorly understood by others and themselves, due to the misconceptions that surround those individuals as a population.

Don't Single out Veterans & Service Members

The Technically Veterans Club (use humor) Association

LinkedIn Group

University History Week as part of it, highlight the university's military history

Vehicle/WS/FR demonstrations

Utilizing VRO Spaces

Guest columns for veterans in school paper

VRO Intermural Teams

Club schedule for "vet day" on VRO site

community perceptions

Community Events Rather than School Events

Have a social media & community presence, to facilitate connection with other MFRNS & community organizations & resources.

Social Media Presence

Veteran group chat

similar club activities/ opposite club activities

VRO Social meet up at beginning of Fall semester (vets & non vets)

Vet day w/ other clubs

Orienteering course (maps/compass/ GPS)

wilderness survival course (student/vet/all)

Introduce to new groups/ activities

VRO and VFW cooperation for generational connection

VRO sponsored hikes

Make vet resources/ groups more visible

Include veterans in welcome trainings

Step 1:
- Connect with VRO & ROTC
  - Get list of MFRNS
  - Get club sanctioned
    ○ Get faculty support
- Connect with community first responders
  - Slack workspace
  - Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, email (Social Media Manager)
  - Google form
    ▪ Branch
    ▪ What studying?
    ▪ Live?
  - Student day for clubs

ROTC marches through campus

Classify Veterans, Non-veterans, combat veterans, etc.

Mandatory online training (3+ hours)

Student Evals for Vets

Decorate VRO to look like FOB

Bootcamp for New [veteran] Students

MREs at dining halls

Shark Attacks at Dorms

Vet speed dating

play fortnite around campus

Mandatory veteran thanking w/ t-shirts

Gas lighting/ virtue signaling

Fight Night

LGBTQ/A+ training

University [statement similar to land acknowledgement (but) for veterans

Assume they are [male] training

"Dating" app where MFRNS put a profile picture of service history & non-MFRNS swipe on people they wann connect with and learn about.

Make everyone [military-connected] pass BCT/ACFT

Revelry and retreat every day

Individual Assignments Removed for Privacy

group chat and social media presence to help push out information and opportunities to student veterans.

10. The resulting statement: *Have a social media & community presence, to facilitate connection with other MFRNS & community organizations & resources, i*s a direct result of deliberations that happened around cluster 9.

11. After coming up with a distilled, and actionable idea, there was discussion prompted by the participants about veteran identities and the misconceptions inside and outside of the student veteran community. After some disagreement, there was general consensus from the group that the solution shouldn't implicitly single out veterans and service members.

12. Spurred by the discussion happening around the statement found on 11, the participants began to joke about the issue, coming up with *The Technically Veterans Club*, which later turned into *The Technically Veterans Association* after deciding that one of the best ways to break through misconceptions was to use humor.

13. With interest peaked with their solution to use a social media presence and humor, the participants outlined how they would go about implementing the solution as a small-scale prototype to test. At this point, the workshop time had elapsed, and there was not time or resources to continue further with the design thinking process.

By recreating the whiteboard and sticky note artifacts, and tracing their background using a numbering system, I was able to recreate their overall design process. This recreated process allowed me to see how the design thinking process worked both forward and backward, which was a part of the practice within the workshop setting. This also doubled as the means to analyze the use of the whiteboards and sticky notes as material resources, as laid out by identity resources (Nasir & Cooks, 2009). This understanding was invaluable as I transcribed the workshop recordings and coded the resulting data. It allowed me to visually place the time that different interactions and discussions took place, as I reviewed transcripts, codes, and video recordings throughout the data analysis process.

Transcription and Analysis of Audio and
Video Data

As previously stated, data analysis began as I was conducting the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2018). As I moved into transcription, I kept in mind that I was engaging in analysis as I viewed and listened to the audio recordings as I transcribed. I often paused to write down a note or a memo about pieces of data that I encountered. This is further supported by Ochs (1979), who argues that transcription reflects a level of analysis, both intentional and unintentional. As I took notes and mulled over the study's themes as I corrected transcripts, I was both intentionally and unintentionally engaging in analysis. Further, the transcription of the data followed the guidelines outlined by Ochs (1979).

The transcription started by using Otter.ai to efficiently transcribe the data. While Otter.ai is a powerful tool to help transcribe data, I found myself spending ample amounts of time correcting the manuscripts as I carefully listened to the audio, and at times referencing the video recordings to be able to finalize the transcripts. This was a non-linear process, as I would often review and check the transcripts and take breaks of time to step away from the tedium. This had the effect of offering me a fresh viewpoint as I would return to the transcription. In all, the transcripts had two or three passes for each session. This was largely due to some of the challenging recording the environments presented by holding the first two sessions in an echoey classroom, and some of the military jargon of which the transcription service could not make sense. As each session was completely transcribed, I moved the transcripts from the workshop and interviews into MaxQDA as I settled into a more concentrated phase of data analysis.

As is true of most research, the coding and analysis was not as cut and dry as

textbooks would have you believe. I found myself going through various rounds of

coding, sometimes with substantial gaps of time between each round—often a result of

being a non-traditional Ph.D. student needing to juggle work and a family. As an

unintended consequence of these gaps, I would often return to coding with fresh eyes and

new perspectives to aid me in data analysis. As I would code, I would often step back and

see how my codes were, and were not, fitting into the theoretical constructs that were

guiding the study, and how they aligned with the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This

would force me to delve deeper into the conceptual underpinnings of the study to better

understand what was emerging from the coding process, and to pivot how I was thinking

about the data as I gained additional insights. As the process continued, I found that as I

juggled between breaks of time, reading, and coding, that my perspectives were being

shaped alongside the evolving code scheme.

Coding Process

Once transcribed, data were coded using prefigured codes (Creswell & Poth,

2018) drawn from CoP, VCT, and Identity Resources (Nasir & Cooks, 2009). Creswell

and Poth (2018) and Merriam (1998) suggest starting with *lean coding*, where a small

number of codes, such as 5 or 6, are used for initial round of coding and are later

expanded in later rounds of coding. I began with six prefigured codes to act as large

conceptual "buckets." These are similar to the broad codes that capture overt themes that

Saldaña (2016) recommends as the coding begins. These codes were selected because of

their connection to core research questions and associated theoretical lenses. While not as

common or accepted in practice, the recommendation is that when prefigured codes are

used, that they are followed up with subsequent open coding to be able to identify other

potential emergent themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Table 3 shows the initial codes that were selected for the preliminary round of

prefigured coding. The table lists the associated conceptual framework definition and

research question to correlate with each code. After completing the first round of

prefigured coding, I largely set aside the initial batch of prefigured codes to begin open

coding in an effort to be inductive with my analysis as I captured many of the subsequent

codes *in vivo* (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This process continued while still adhering to a

lean coding approach (Merriam, 1998), until I reached around 44 expanded codes and

was not identifying anything new.

Table 3

Initial Prefigured Codes

Research question	Code	Definition
RQ 1	Community (camaraderie)	Community is built around the interactions of the participants, and a shared culture within the community is built upon their common commitment to the domain (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 29).
RQ 1	Domain (purpose)	Domain is the common interest or focus of a community. It requires a commitment to the domain to promote participation and to guide learning within the community (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 28).
RQ 1 & RQ 2	Practice (broad application)	Practice is defined as having a "shared repertoire" (Wenger, 2000, p. 229) of resources and knowledge centered on the community's domain of interest. Practice allows the passing on of tacit and institutional knowledge (Wenger, 2018).
RQ 2	Ideational resources (identity as practice)	"Ideas about oneself and one's relationship to and place in the practice and the world, as well as ideas about what is valued and good" (Nasir & Cooks, 2009, p. 44).
RQ 2	Relational resources (identity as practice)	"Interpersonal connections to others in the setting" (Nasir & Cooks, 2009, p. 44).
RQ 2	Material resources (identity as practice)	"The physical artifacts in the setting" (Nasir & Cooks, 2009, p. 44).

After reaching the point of saturation with the expanded codes, I began the process of clustering the codes into categories as connections and similarities/differences were identified. For case study analysis, this process is known as *categorical aggregation*, which looks to find examples from the transcript data to identify relationships in the code and for meaning to emerge (Creswell & Poth, 2017, p. 206; Stake, 1995). This often felt like a continual process of "trying it on for size," as considered the relationships between the expanded codes, my observations, memos, notes, data sources, further coding, and theoretical lenses associated with the study. This process resulted in 12 final code categories (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 191). These code categories again followed roughly the same process that resulted in the 12 final code categories arriving at the four themes. As I arrived at the 12 final code categories and the subsequent 4 themes, I again returned to my prefigured codes to see how the coding scheme was aligning with CoP and VCT. This comparison helped aid in the final creation of the themes used to answer the study's research questions. Once the themes were identified, I focus coded the data (Saldaña, 2016) and further identified excerpts from the transcripts to share in the findings and discussion of this document (see Table 4).

Trustworthiness

One of the core threats to the study's trustworthiness is the narrow sampling of the broader student-veteran population. Creswell and Poth (2018) indicate that the purpose of qualitative research typically is not for generalizability, but to delve into the particular and the specific of given situations. The intention of this study was not to

Table 4

Case Codebook with Themes and Allied Research Questions

Themes & affiliated RQs	Codes	Definition	Example
Thank you for your Service RQ 2	Not one of "those" veterans	Pre-existing perceptions and assumptions about their individual veteran status/identities, and that of other veterans.	*Cameron* Yeah. I know that veterans are anyone who served, but even me coming to things like this, I feel like I don't really belong because I was Coast Guard. My first two years were definitely not military related, I was changing lightbulbs on buoys. It doesn't seem at all even close to like, people that have deployed and got shot at. I never got shot at. (Workshop Session 2)
	We all sat around	This represents the shift in the participants' perceptions of self and other veterans through workshop participation.	*Cameron* I think the biggest takeaway was that I felt like that veteran was... I wasn't a veteran, but it turns out, everybody just sat at a desk and didn't do anything! [laughter] So, it changed my view of what a veteran is. So that's the biggest thing. (Post Workshop Interview: Cameron)
For us, Teamwork is Life or Death RQ 1 & 2	This wouldn't have worked if we weren't all veterans	Having a baseline of military experience, thus allowing to effectively operate within the domain of interest.	*Researcher* How useful was your military identity to participating in the workshop? *William* Um, I think it's pretty vital. I think like, if I didn't have any sort of veteran identity, it would have been a little, I would have been like, very out of place. Even if it were only like, four people that were super chill like you guys. If I didn't have that identity, I definitely wouldn't want to have participated. Let alone I wouldn't want to feel awkward in my setting, if I did. (Post Workshop Interview: William)
	Equal Voices	Everyone had equal say and weight. Even when there was disagreement, as shown in the sample.	*Thomas* That's something I kind of noticed throughout the workshop, is that those who serve in different capacities, I don't want to say we're treated differently by others. But we're like, like, okay, he has an idea. I'll let him finish out his ideas. And then, and then I'll wait from my end. And if mine is only a good idea, then I'll bring it up to them. (Post Workshop Interview: Thomas)

(*table continues*)

Themes & affiliated RQs	Codes	Definition	Example
	I have done this before	Familiarity with practices introduced in the workshop settings, largely harkening back to military experiences.	*Researcher* So, what would you say is probably the closest experience you'd have to something like that (design thinking) prior to stepping into the workshop? *Cameron* I've solved problems, but not using design thinking. I put together a whole slideshow brief of how we should be doing radio communications for our fisheries patrol. So, I was talking to the guys in the small boats. I knew what equipment we had, the limitations of all that and just trying to mesh it all together, and what the captain wanted to the people that are actually using it and trying to make it all fit. And that was good. That was kind of the openness because I was roommates with both people that I worked with in the command center and people that drove the boats so I could have those open conversations about, "Yeah, this didn't really work. We need the boarding officer on a separate channel than that guy." And so, I went through, and I guess I was doing like, I was doing all the design thinking steps but not knowing it was designed thinking. It was just the best way to solve the problem. (Post Workshop Interview: Cameron)
	Facing Directions	The diverse experiences and different life objectives, despite having a common military background. Some are focused on school, others on starting into careers, and ramping up their military service.	*Richard* So, definitely feel like those similar backgrounds can have helped us have more empathy with one another. Now, I do know, I think there's different stages of grief right? or whatnot. I think there's different stages of being a veteran, where like, you're in [the military] and you're like, "This is awesome. This is cool. I kind of want to show up." And then it's like, for me, it's like you get out and I'm like, "Yeah, I'm glad I served, but I'm not all about being all that. You know, "back when I was in," right? I'm just done with that. I'm like, yeah, I do my stuff. And I'm doing my own thing, right? And I think it was William or somebody where I was saying how, like, he doesn't mind showing up for things for veterans. But not having been constantly reminded that I am a veteran and the comparisons of my military experience and how that translates to this [topic at hand]. It's just like, can we just learn about whatever it is we're trying to do? (Post Workshop Interview: Richard)

(table continues)

Themes & affiliated RQs	Codes	Definition	Example
Sidebar, and then Back on Track RQ 1 & 2	Swapping Stories	Exchanging stories, comments, and anecdotes relating to the military service, education, and professions.	*Cameron* I enjoyed basic training because it was barely half classroom, and half physical. But I was in good enough shape that I could just watch everybody else crumble. [laughter] The one time I got pt'd [punished with exercise] individually was somebody said that Guam was 28 hours ahead. So, they had to schedule the interview with their new units that early and I just started dying. 28 hours ahead, really? Nobody said anything. shut up. You got to stop laughing, but you can beat me for that, that is fine. [laughter] *William* Someone smuggled peanut butter M&Ms into the barracks from an MRE. So, one of our drill sergeants came out in the middle of the night and they found it. And so, one of our drill sergeants was towards the end of her cycle and so she just, like, didn't care anymore. So, she was kind of just having fun, But, on the back of the M & Ms packet they put all the nutritional information and, like, "find more information at *mym&ms.com*." And she was like, "hey trainees guess what? There's a website you can go to called *mym&ms.com* and when you go down [with your pushup] you're gonna say *my* on the way back up you say *M & M.*" We sort of did pushups for like an hour. [laughter] Like anytime someone got peanut butter M & Ms in their MRE after that they didn't eat them. [laughter]. (Workshop Session 1)
	Bantering	Cracking jokes and poking fun at school, military service, veteran experiences, and each other, often denoting a level of comfort.	*William* This one too [putting it up on the board]. I feel like [the perspective of] everyone is, like, based on Hollywood stuff. Everyone thinks like, we're all Rangers or all Green Berets. *Thomas* Because you guys just chose the wrong job! [laughter] *Richard* Marines are all psychopaths. [laughter] *Thomas* That one is correct. [laughter] (Workshop Session 2)

(table continues)

Themes & affiliated RQs	Codes	Definition	Example
	Staying Mission Focused	Not letting good times, conversations, or distractions derail the principal objective of the workshop.	*This transpired during workshop session 2 while engaging in the clustering activity. Following the interactions below, the group was immediately back on task with the next sticky note to be placed on the board.* *Researcher* Working student up here? (asked in response to a new sticky note being added to the board) *William* Married, or dad status. Fatherhood. Yeah, they just got I mean, you guys probably weren't in when they had the new PT test, but they just got rid of part of the new PT test, too many people kept failing. *Richard* I didn't know they changed the PT test. (Second Workshop Session: clustering activity)
	Like meeting up with Friends	Comfort-level of participants as they interacted throughout the workshop.	*Thomas* It was super comfortable. And like I kind of said earlier, like, I felt like I had, I had known everyone there for much longer than I had. And again, I think that's definitely part of the veteran aspect, because we can, we can all relate in some way, visually, in many ways. So, I think that it pushed those relationships to feel more comfortable, and it made it feel... Yeah, it was just, it was very comfortable, and it never felt like anyone's trying to talk over another person. Very accepting. That is really great. (Post Workshop Interview: Thomas)
Came for the Horses and not the Veteran Stuff RQ 1	I didn't expect to learn anything	Expectations of the experience and motivations before participating in the workshop.	*Researcher* So, why did you participate in the Design Thinking workshop? *Cameron* I had free Saturdays. [laughter] And I gotta go play with horses. So, I came out to [this area for school] to try new things. So, I figured if I'm in the country, I'll go full country and play with horses. (Post Workshop Interview with Cameron)

(*table continues*)

Themes & affiliated RQs	Codes	Definition	Example
	A great resource	The researcher and equine specialists who offered new skills, insights, experiences, and opportunities to further participation.	*Researcher* How do you guys feel about the connections you guys made? Like not just amongst ourselves, but with the equine program and the different opportunities? *William* I'm going to be going to that thing (the veteran equine group) on Monday. I am going to start doing that. *Richard* I went last Monday. *Thomas* This is one of those experiences that I would not have had had I not volunteer for that. I think it's cool to see how connections can come from that, you know? *Cameron* Yeah, I was super, "I'm just going to college." Nothing military related. But, now you've got me trying to run a social media thing… so, sweet! [laughter] *Richard* That is what he (the researcher) was really after. [laughter] (Workshop Session 3 AAR)

generalize to the broader veteran population, but as a case study, its intention was to look at the unique experience of the workshop and its participants and generalize to theory (Yin, 1994). Specifically, this as an interpretive case study which was structured with the intent to "support, or challenge theoretical assumptions" (Merriam, 1998, p. 38). While the study was not able to catch all the nuance from having a diverse representation from military branches, military specialty, and other demographic nuances—it provided a look into some of the core components of military and student veteran culture that potentially crosscuts the various demographics. Even with a limited pool of participants, the findings

yielded actionable information and a framework for implementation in practice and the development of future studies with more robust demographic offerings. Additionally, the participants noted their preference for a small group, as it allowed for an effective environment for teamwork.

Another factor to consider is the insider status that I hold as a U.S. Army student-veteran. While this may call into question how the data collection, analysis, and reporting was impacted by evaluator bias, this status may also help yield deeper insights. Veterans occupy what is known as a third-space and can be very insular to outsiders (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017; Tophøj & Tøffner-Clausen, 2018). By having insider status, I had the opportunity to hear often untold stories that shape the narrative around student-veterans in higher education (Brayboy & Deyhle, 2000). This insider status also brings to light the tension that exists between groups being researched and the institutional demands for knowledge. Additionally, I am in the position of running the innovation workshop as a trained researcher, which may also contribute to an outsider status within the group. This status creates a tension between being an insider as a veteran and an outsider as a researcher. This placed me and participants in a difficult position in determining what stories can and should be told—and to what end those stories are being used to avoid the exploitation of the study group (Simpson, 2014). Triangulation between the interview data, observations, digital conversations, artifacts, and member checking with the participants contributed to mitigating these threats to the study's trustworthiness (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Summary

This study was a qualitative research design, using a case study approach to analyze and present the resulting data. The study was conducted within the setting of the innovation workshop with four participants over the course of three sessions and a final interview at a medium-sized university in the intermountain west of the U.S. The data was interpreted using CoP, VCT, Identity Resources, and purpose-driven camaraderie as interpretive lenses. The workshop was analyzed as a single interpretive case study, with the workshop as its focus. For data analysis, an initial round of prefigured codes was used, followed by open coding and categorical aggregation that resulted in the 4 themes identified by the study. The design materials, composed of the whiteboards, sticky notes, and handwritten notes on the board were first analyzed using bidirectional artifact analysis, and then incorporated into the main analysis of the workshop.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

Data analysis resulted in four themes that address the research questions guiding this study. The first three themes address research question one about how participation in the innovation workshop facilitated the establishment of purpose-driven camaraderie and a sense of community among student veterans. The fourth theme addresses research question two about the shaping of student veteran identities within the context of the workshop. The first theme, *For us, Teamwork is Life and Death,* focuses on community in the workshop setting. The second theme, *Sidebar, and then Back on Task,* addresses the mission-first mentality that helped structure and drive camaraderie. The third theme, *Came for the Horses and not the Veterans,* discusses the draw for the student veterans to participate in the workshop and the role of old-timers and boundary activities in developing a CoP. The fourth theme, *Thank you for Your Service,* addresses how participation in the innovation workshop shaped student veteran identities. While I distinguish between the themes here, they are inherently interconnected, and it is difficult to be able to adequately discuss one theme without alluding to another. One of the most salient connections between the themes is the common background of being a student veteran, which is woven throughout the findings and discussion. As a case study, I present each of the four themes within the context of the workshop, with the conversations, observations, artifacts, and interview results interwoven to illustrate the experiences of the participants within the setting. For a linear description of the workshop events, please see the *setting* section in Chapter III.

For Us, Teamwork is Life and Death

This theme focuses on the development of community among student veterans that is found in RQ 1. The design thinking process provided a familiar practice around which teamwork, and the resulting sense of community could emerge. The teamwork mentality stemming from military service, common backgrounds as student veterans, and experience in solving problems prepared the participants to quickly become comfortable working together as a community focused on a common purpose. Each of the participants entered the workshop with different experiences and directions in life, while simultaneously sharing a commonality of being student veterans. This presented an opportunity to quickly build community, based on their shared student veteran status— while also contributing their own unique qualities to the workshop (Wenger et al., 2002). With their shared military background, the participants all had experience working as teams toward a shared objective.

In order to explore the importance of teamwork within the innovation workshop CoP, I focus on the role of differences and commonalities amongst participants, teamwork, and problem solving. Together, these three sub-themes help us to see how a common background rooted in trust and respect, a predisposition for teamwork, and familiar practices rooted in problem-solving helped promote a sense of community among the participants.

Differences and Commonalities

All of the participants came to the workshop from different stages in life, with

differing objectives for their academic experiences and trajectories. However, in order for

the participants to engage in the central domain of the innovation workshop, they needed

to work together as a team, and this presented a challenge for the participants. William

was the youngest participant, both in terms of age, time in higher education, and military

experience. He completed his Basic Combat Training (BCT) only a year prior to

participating in the innovation workshop. As Thomas reflected about the participants, he

noted the difference that existed between William and the other student veteran

participants:

> I had no issue with anybody. Even those of us that were different, different steps,
> or different points in our military career. Yeah, we had one guy (William) that
> was very new, a year in. And he had very different thoughts and ideas about it
> than we do, but I still enjoyed talking to him. And, you know, I guess I missed
> that. I missed that, like, "gung-ho" mentality [that William had].

William was participating in the ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps) to become a

commissioned officer in the Army and preparing for a potential career in the fire service.

On the other hand, Thomas, who was a few years removed from military service, was

focused on choosing between two academic pathways that would define his professional

trajectory. Despite this difference in experience, career goals, and academic objectives,

Thomas not only enjoyed his interactions with William, but he noted that he missed

having the "gung-ho" attitude that William possessed as someone who was just

commencing his military journey. Thomas was able to see some of the similar elements

from his time serving in William's burgeoning military career.

On a few occasions, Cameron jokingly referred to veterans who had completed

their service as the "grumpy old guys" on campus, which contrasts with the "gung-ho"

mentality of a new service member, such as William. After years of military service and other life experience, the older veterans saw the military in a more cynical light, with Cameron humorously stating that he would only go back out of necessity, as it was "a misery that I understand."

These differences between career and life trajectories can also be seen among the other participants. Richard was working on his second bachelor's degree in order to get into his desired career field and was the oldest of the participants and the only one who was married. Richard's sole objective at that point in time was to wrap up his final semester and land a job, which he was actively interviewing for. Richard was not interested in doing much more with school-related things, but he was open to learning new things that had personal value to him. He reflected:

> My in-laws, my wife's family, they have horses. And so, it was like, well, this will give me more experience to... I, you know, I didn't know what to expect, right? But as far as I was concerned, maybe there were opportunities to meet people who would know more about horse training opportunities. And look what happened.

Richard, having married into a family that had a "horse lifestyle," was looking to gain more experience with horses to feel more comfortable around the animals, and this workshop offered an opportunity for him to learn more about horses and make connections within the equine community.

Addressing Cameron's direction in life, he was just getting going at the university, and had only left service a few months prior to the workshop. Cameron's primary focus was on quickly getting a degree to work in his target career field, but he also wanted to have some fun while attending the university. During the exchange

between Cameron and Richard during their interview in the first session, Cameron

explained how he ended up at the university:

> I took a road trip in July, and I found the school closest to a ski resort. (Laughter)
> It was between [a school in a state further south] and here. They could graduate
> me faster here.

Cameron, who felt he had more in common with the traditional students on college

campuses, was looking to make connections and try new things. He was interested in

having a more traditional college experience.

Within the context of the workshop and CoP, these differing experiences and

motivations provided opportunities and challenges to unite the participants to further

explore purpose-driven camaraderie. Wenger et al. (2002) states that CoPs thrive on

having a variety of individuals, backgrounds, expertise, and experiences. While they have

a common purpose and repertoire around a domain, CoPs are at their best when they are

not a monoculture. For example, while William was the only participant who was still

serving, his perspective and "gung-ho" attitude was appreciated and understood by

Thomas and the other participants. William often asked about military experiences as he

was still trying to ascertain what lay ahead for him in his military journey. For example,

during the first session William asked the group, "Did you guys, like, find your time as

an NCO (Non-Commissioned Officer) worthwhile?" His question garnered a variety of

responses from the other participants about their experiences.

The core challenge this presented in the workshop setting was being able to bring

individuals quickly and effectively with diverse interests and experiences to focus on a

central purpose. Wenger et al. (2002) points out that having similar backgrounds and

experiences can make convening a CoP faster and easier, which turned out to be the case

with the participants. While the participants all came with different backgrounds and

objectives, they all had the commonly held experience of military service. While I am

discussing the importance of the shared military background here, it is a thread that runs

through all four themes and was one of the inclusion criteria to participate in the

innovation workshop. During his final interview, Thomas reflected on how the shared

military background allowed many things to be left unsaid:

> I guess we're all in the kind of like, Global War on Terrorism time. So, we're all
> being taught, like, the same... you know? Like, what to prepare for. And maybe
> we didn't touch on it a lot. But I think it was known, at least it's something I
> picked up on is that, you know, we're all trained for IEDs (Improvised Explosive
> Devices, i.e., roadside bombs).

> We all trained for, you know, like, kind of the same stuff, like small arms fire
> that's gonna be from 400 yards away that is not necessarily not aimed at you, just
> kind of shot at. So, we all knew, we've all been trained on those things. So, we all
> kind of had a similar mindset coming from that, I think into the real world. And I
> don't think it had to be known to everyone that we were trained on those, but it's,
> like… I'm missing the word that I'm trying to say, but like a subconscious idea,
> type of thing.

Thomas's comments illustrate that the shared background of the participants allowed

them to understand each other on a meaningful level, without the need to communicate

the particulars of their experiences. Further delving into the power of their common

student veteran bond, Cameron reflected on the interactions with the other participants

during his final interview where he stated:

> I feel like it was kind of cheating because we all had common ground, because we
> had that pretty easily. And so that made the conversations really easy.

The shared experiences of being students and having served in the military helped

overcome all sorts of differences between the participants as they began to work together

as a team and build a sense of community. This shared background had such a powerful

effect in establishing a baseline of understanding with each other as participants that it

felt too easy to Cameron, as if it were "cheating."

Due to their common experience as student veterans, William took notice of how

easy it was to communicate with the other participants without needing to overly explain

what he was attempting to illustrate. In his final interview he said:

> I knew that if I said something, and used a certain type of language or made a
> certain type of insinuation that like, I knew that they (the participants) would get
> it and I didn't have to worry about, like, what the outcome of that would be rather
> than have to spell it out.

This shared background as student veterans allowed the participants to identify

similarities that they shared, despite being in different places in their experiences.

William, even being a relative newcomer to military service, felt like the other student

veterans understood him on a deeper level that contributed to his comfort level of being

able to communicate freely without needing to "spell out" what he was trying to say.

Returning to CoP, the commonality of military service assisted in overcoming the

challenges of getting a diverse group of individuals to work together (Wenger et al.,

2002). With the common thread of military service, the student veteran participants felt

like they understood each other, despite their differences. With the shared experience of

being student veterans, the solution that they were trying to come up with in the

innovation workshop was focused on the population to which they belonged. They were

able to speak from experience without needing to explain every thought or comment to

one another. The participants were able to be in a space where their student veteran

identities were important elements situated around the primary domain of the workshop

(Wenger, 2000).

The workshop environment also provided an opportunity for the student veterans to share their commonality through imparting institutional knowledge related to being student veterans. Following the first two workshop sessions, the participants opted to stay and chat as I was packing up. As I packed up, the group decided to see the horses and other equine facilities at the workshop location. As this transpired, the participants swapped suggestions for fun elective classes that were offered at the university, such as learning to tie fly-fishing lures (Thomas) and kayaking (Richard). They also shared resources for scholarships (Richard), veterans discounts from businesses (all the participants), and additional funding sources for school (Richard and Cameron). It is of interest to note that the sharing of institutional knowledge stemming from school and veteran experiences was exchanged after the student veterans had the opportunity to identify their common student veteran background through participation in the workshop.

The sharing of student-related experiences and institutional knowledge also happened during the workshop. One such example occurred in the final session during a break. The conversation turned to learning skills of interest that weren't directly tied to their respective educations at the university. This transitioned into discussing skill-building opportunities and spaces available at their institution, which turned to makerspaces:

Richard: Is there another room on campus? That's like the maker lab?

Thomas: They have one over in [the] engineering [building on campus].

Cameron: I saw a poster for that. There's like a night where they teach you how to run the CNC.

Richard: See, like little things like that would be fun.

As the participants became more comfortable with each other they began to share some

of their unique interests, to which other participants were able to contribute their own

institutional knowledge about potential opportunities found at the university. The sharing

of repertoire and institutional knowledge is a hallmark of CoPs (Wenger, 2018; Wenger

et al., 2002). As the participants came to recognize each other as fellow student veterans,

they began to share resources and information that was deemed to be of benefit or interest

to the other participants as they navigated school. In moments like these, the diversity of

experiences as student veterans, and the commonality of their shared identities provided

an opportunity to bestow their unique pieces of institutional knowledge on one another.

This sharing of knowledge and resources provided additional value to their interactions as

a fledgling community.

Taking into consideration RQ 1, the role of the divergent and convergent

experiences of the student veterans presented opportunities and challenges to develop

camaraderie and community around a central purpose/domain. The differences in age,

experience, education, and direction in life of the participants all had potential to

contribute to meaningful and interesting interactions, such as the sharing of institutional

knowledge (Wenger et al., 2002), while simultaneously their commonalities of being

students and veterans helped them coalesce as a community around the workshop's

domain (Wenger, 2018).

Teamwork

Teamwork is an integral part of military service. Reflecting on the teamwork

aspect of the workshop, and why the student veteran participants seemed to work so well

together, Thomas stated:

> Just because not everyone understands the value of teamwork, maybe? Like most people do, whether they played sports or in the military, or whatever. But for us (as veterans), teamwork is life and death, and it made it much easier to jump into that and realize that it's necessary.

Thomas's description of military-based teamwork as a matter of "life and death,"

illustrates the critical nature of teamwork in military service, which is echoed in literature

describing characteristics of military service (e.g., Demers, 2011; Soeters et al., 2006).

While not everyone deploys or sees combat, even military training and readiness can

contain hazards that could prove fatal if teams are dysfunctional. With an existential

mindset towards teamwork, it is not surprising that this came easily to the group of

student veterans participating in the workshop. Teamwork also requires a central

objective around which to work together. The military is goal-oriented, which can be

seen in the Army's Soldier's Creed that states, "I will always place the mission first"

(U.S. Department of the Army, 2003). This mission-first mentality is a core component to

the teamwork that the student veterans experienced while serving in the military.

This unspoken, and unshared understanding of teamwork manifested itself in a

few notable ways. As the participants worked on *defining, ideating,* and coming up with

an actionable prototype of their solution to test, they all took the time to hear each other

out. This also held true when there arose any sort of disagreement between the

participants. At one point during the second session, the participants were gathered

around the board discussing their thoughts on the sorts of connections that student

veterans may be looking for. Thomas spoke out about not wanting to connect with 18-

year-old students:

> *Thomas:* I don't feel like I need to connect with all of the other students who don't fall into this (category on the whiteboard), just because I know, most of them... I don't want to talk to 18-year-olds who... I can't really relate to them. So, it's much harder for me to want to connect with that group, as most of them are probably not on the same path of progression or planning for the future.

> *Cameron:* Right. As a counterpoint for that. I got out of the military for a reason. I didn't want to stay in the military. So, I do want to talk to others (who never served).

> *Thomas:* Yeah.

> *Cameron:* If the veteran community is just, like, I go back and feel like I'm still in the Coast Guard...

> *William:* I think I mean, when I say cohesive (referring to an earlier comment), I don't mean like we're all like the same kind of person. I am just saying we can have our own niches within the veteran community, but we shouldn't try to isolate ourselves between like, the hardcore high-speed, like purple heart vets (veterans who were wounded in combat), and then like the guys that got in and out for four years just to pay for school and then everything in between.

After Thomas voiced his opinion, Cameron offered his differing viewpoint, to which Thomas acknowledged his understanding. This followed with William stepping in to offer some sort of middle ground as they continued to discuss the merits of connecting with others. Finding a way forward after a disagreement reflects the mission-first mentality that stems from military service. For the participants, it was far more important to find a solution to achieve their workshop objectives than to be hung up on a disagreement.

Even with disagreements, the participants were willing to listen to each other and find some sort of middle ground to continue forward with the workshop's objective. This

is in keeping with VCT's tenet 11, which posits that veteran culture is built on honor, respect, and trust (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017). As they disagreed with each other, they did so respectfully and in such a way that allowed them to continue moving the design thinking process toward their objective. As evidenced in the exchange, the participants also displayed a level of trust with each other as they felt that they could easily and comfortably share their thoughts. These elements of respect and trust complemented and enhanced the participants' abilities to work as a team and develop a sense of community.

The predisposition toward teamwork was not the only contributor to the participant's ability to practice and develop a sense of community around the central domain. The main purpose, or domain, that the workshop was structured around was to develop a potential solution to better support student veterans in their educational experiences. Without the basic, lived experiences of serving in the military and pursuing higher education, the participants would likely not have been able to quickly adapt to the workshop's goal and teamwork environment.

Problem-solving Experience

While the participants shared common backgrounds and were experienced in teamwork, to be able to effectively work together toward a central purpose in a short amount of time, they needed both familiar and new practices. Unbeknownst to the participants, another critical aspect of participation in the workshop resided in their collective backgrounds. Innovation, or the ability to *adapt and overcome* is a generative quality that sits at the heart of entrepreneurship, which has historically been an area that has attracted high levels of veteran engagement (Hope et al., 2011). The design thinking

process gave the participants the tools to be able to collaborate as a community using

teamwork, and progress toward their common purpose. As the student veterans began

participating in the workshop, they were unaware that they had already fundamentally

experienced and understood much of the design thinking process through their previous

experience in, and outside of the military. In his final interview, William stated:

> It was interesting because like, as we talked about the process and kinda like
> practiced throughout (the workshop). I realized, like, whether intentionally or not,
> it's something I've done before, just without thinking about it. be like, oh, now
> I'm empathizing with people like, oh, now, I'm like, you know, designing what
> possible prototypes could be. Now I am testing, like revising and redesigning it,
> like, I think I am a super, like STEM guy. So, like the scientific method is
> something like we do a lot of, right? It kind of extrapolates to other parts of our
> lives without really thinking about it just because [it is] a habit.

As we began to engage in the design thinking process, William started to see that this was

something that he had done before. Being a "STEM (Science Technology Engineering

and Math) guy," and pursuing a degree in the physical sciences, William found some

elements of it familiar as he related the problem-solving process of the workshop to the

scientific method. The connection that he made to his experience with the scientific

method helped William to quickly become comfortable with workshop practices over a

short amount of time. Cameron shared a similar sentiment during his final interview:

> Nothing was really foreign; it was all things that I did. I guess getting the empathy
> portion formalized was probably the most foreign, because usually you think you
> know what the issue is, and then you run with how you're tackling the problem.
> You have your problem, and then you solve it, kind of skipping that empathy
> stuff. That was the biggest difference.

With the exception of *empathy*, which was the main focus of the first session and half of

the second, Cameron felt extremely comfortable with the ideation process, as it was

something that he had experienced during his service in the Coast Guard.

The participants' comfort level with the design thinking process was especially noticeable as each different phase of the process started to wind down, specifically between the *define* and *ideate* stages—and the *ideate* and *prototype* stages. As each phase would start ending, the participants would naturally start flowing into the next stage, and I made them aware of when that transition would happen. Thomas noted this transitory moment during the third workshop as we were wrapping up the *ideation* stage of design thinking:

> I saw our transition from no longer coming up with ideas, and we're moving to solutions using those ideas. And it was a really easy flow that we didn't even really realize (that we had started to shift). We'd started talking about how we can do these things for 10 to 15 minutes and then you brought up like, "hey, we've already moved into this next step and look how easy that was." We didn't even realize the transition; it just flows naturally. That is when it (the process) stuck in my head.

As Thomas pointed out, the participants were comfortable enough with the design thinking process by the time that the third session started to wind down that they had begun to seamlessly transition to developing a plan to prototype their idea without any sort of formal transition or prompting from me. Later in his interview, Cameron stated:

> Just because not everyone understands the value of teamwork, maybe? Like most people do, whether they played sports or in the military, or whatever. But for us (as veterans), teamwork is life and death, and it made it much easier to jump into that and realize that it's necessary.

Cameron likened his experience with design thinking to the brief, action, debrief process of the military. As he made the connections from design thinking to his previous experiences, Cameron was able to effectively participate in the innovation workshop as he adapted new concepts, such as *empathy* into his problem-solving repertoire.

Richard also identified elements of design thinking that he saw in his military

service as he reflected on the process during his final interview:

> I do think that they (the military) do have kind of a principle of, you know, we have backup plans, right? Okay, if this doesn't happen, then we'll do this, this doesn't happen, we'll do this. This doesn't happen, then do this, right? I think that can kind of tie in a little bit more to the adaptive nature of this design thinking.

Richard, like Cameron and William, was able to find connections to his previous experiences that helped aid him in adopting the design thinking process while participating in the workshop. This comfort level with design thinking and the connections they made back to their previous experiences led the participants to be able to quickly settle into a mode of teamwork that was structured around design thinking. The design thinking process provided the framework for teamwork and a sense of community to begin to emerge.

Sidebar, and then Back on Task

Returning to RQ 1, this theme identifies how camaraderie manifested itself among the student veteran participants as they worked toward a central purpose. Camaraderie was built alongside the establishment of respect and trust (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017; Wenger et al., 2002) from their common military backgrounds and interactions within the workshop setting. The rapport and camaraderie contributed to open and honest communication among the student veterans, and the ability to speak freely. Being able to speak freely without being guarded while maintaining a focus on achieving the main purpose of the workshop was important to the participants. This seemingly paradoxical pairing of speaking freely and staying mission-focused is captured in the theme of *sidebar, then back on track*. These elements all coalesced to promote a sense of

camaraderie as the participants interacted around the central purpose of the workshop. The camaraderie began to manifest itself in the stories that were shared and increasing familiarity through joking. By the end of the entire workshop, a few of the participants felt as if they were showing up to spend time with friends—despite only knowing each other for a handful of hours. A real sense of camaraderie had begun to emerge as a result of workshop participation.

While the second session of the workshop was where the design thinking process began to really gain traction with the participants, they had already begun to develop a sense of camaraderie from the onset of the first workshop session. In his final interview, Thomas spoke about the evolution of the sense of connection with the other participants that developed over the course of the workshop:

> Yeah, and the second week was a lot of fun. The relationships, you know, progressed to where everyone was more comfortable around each other. And obviously, that horse activity was really awesome. And then the third week, it just felt like meeting up with friends. And like, I had known you guys for much longer than I had, you know? So, it was cool to see how that progressed that way.

Thomas noted that while he was starting to feel comfortable with the other student veteran participants by the second session, the third session felt like he was coming to meet up with friends. William felt much the same way. During his final interview he said:

> But that third day, especially with, like, I'm just walking in (to the workshop) to eat breakfast with the guys and just chat for a little while. Like, that's, that's really when it (the connections with others) clicked for me. I think. Like, again, like I made those connections beforehand. Like, that whole day (the final workshop) was just like, you know, normal, so to speak, just like hanging out with the guys like chatting about some stuff.

William felt that he was just going to go hang out with "the guys" during the final workshop. He felt that the connections that had been forged during the previous sessions

finally "clicked," where he felt like one of "the guys." The workshop presented an environment where William's level of trust and respect for the other participants led him to feel at ease in the group, to the point of feeling that they were becoming his friends.

Building to the point of feeling friendship took time to happen, but it occurred remarkably quickly. To put the short amount of time into perspective, Thomas and William were feeling a sense of friendship and camaraderie after only about 6 hours of interaction with the other participants. During his final interview, Thomas later attributed this feeling to the shared veteran status among participants:

> And like I kind of said earlier, like, I felt like I had, I had known everyone there for much longer than I had. And again, I think that's definitely part of the veteran aspect, because we can, we can all relate in some way, virtually in many ways. So, I think that it pushed those relationships to feel more comfortable, and it made it feel... Yeah, it was just, it was very comfortable, and it never felt like anyone's trying to talk over another person. Very accepting. That is really great.

By having shared experiences as student veterans, Thomas noted how it made it easy to feel like he had known the other participants much longer than he actually had. This served as a foundation where they began to quickly gain a baseline understanding of each other, without too much effort or time, due to being "comfortable" and "accepting." During his final interview Cameron addressed this level of comfort as he considered his manner of conversing during the workshop:

> It just felt easy. It felt like what I've been doing for the last four years (of military service). So, I didn't have to worry about how I spoke or how I acted, really. Just talking to someone normally.

Cameron did not have to watch what he said, or how he said it because he knew that the other student veteran participants understood what he was saying, and that he could "talk freely," which he mentioned at another point of the workshop. William also noted during

the AAR of the first session that he liked "how laid back [the] environment is, I feel I can say anything," to which Richard responded in agreement with a "yeah." Being able to "talk freely" or "say anything" is rooted in their experiences while serving in the military. Colorful language, jokes, and the use of profanities are commonplace in the military and would feel out of place or inappropriate in many civilian-based environments. Coming from an environment where they could speak freely, without worrying about being offensive, student veterans find themselves needing to be more guarded with how and what they say in civilian environments (Kartchner & Searle, 2023). By having the opportunity to interact with other student veterans, the workshop participants felt like they could communicate how and what they desired without needing to be guarded with their words and thoughts. By feeling able to "speak freely," the student veteran participants demonstrated the trust and respect that they had for each other (Wenger et al., 2002), largely stemming from their shared student veteran backgrounds (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017).

The ability to say anything led to joking and swapping stories, which also helped fuel the sense that they could talk freely with one another. Stories and jokes would emerge, not only as the participants sat around eating or taking breaks, but as they were actively engaged in the different stages of the design thinking process. The joking started early on as the participants were introducing themselves. During his introduction, Cameron mentioned that he had just finished 4 years in the Coast Guard. Richard immediately gave Cameron a hard time by asking him about the different pronunciations of the word *buoy*, "so, is it *buoy* and not *boy*?" Cameron quickly fired back, "East coast

versus west coast!" The response drew laughter from the group.

Joking and swapping stories that felt familiar to the more free-wheeling nature of communication that they experienced in the military was a departure to being more guarded about what the student veterans could say in a civilian-based environment. Being able to tell stories and jokes with other service members that would be deemed inappropriate to civilians was something that was noted as being missed by student veterans who participated in the pilot study (Kartchner & Searle, 2023). The workshop environment allowed the participants to joke and speak without worrying about offending or the judgment of others.

Toward the beginning, the jokes were largely self-deprecating, or aimed at military service and school experiences. One such example occurred as we ate lunch during the first session. The conversation turned to student housing.

Cameron: I live a 10-minute walk from campus.

Richard: That is nice. Yeah. I used to do that.

Cameron: Most people I live with are freshmen and 18-year-olds. That's kind of weird. (group laughter)

Richard: It was weird for me too. Like, when I first started (school) and I was a little older, just like everyone just graduated high school, and people are still wearing their like, their high school letterman jackets. And I'm like, really like, do you really care that you went to [that high school]? (Group laughter)

Cameron: My go-to line with girls is to find out if they have an older sister! (Group laughter)

As stories and jokes emerged about school experiences, it became clear that some of the participants shared additional bonds as students, having experienced similar things as

they navigated their education as nontraditional students and veterans. By the final

workshop, the comfort level was reaching a point where the participants weren't afraid to

crack jokes about each other's branches of service (e.g., the Army, Marines, Coast Guard,

and the differences that exist among these and other branches), or poke fun at each other

directly.

Illustrating how the participants had become comfortable enough to directly poke

fun at each other during the final workshop, the participants sat eating breakfast burritos,

chatting, when William walked in a little late, looking rather sleep deprived.

William: (Walking in) Sorry again, I was up until four o'clock last night, so I hit snooze a couple of times. I hung out with some friends for the first time in a while. I have been sucked into school a bunch recently so I kind of just let myself go for a minute.

Thomas: You gotta unplug... or else you will turn out like Richard! (chuckling)

Richard: Yeah, I have no joy in my life. (Group laughter)

At this point, the participants were freely talking and joking with one another and not

worrying about being careful about what they were saying. The joking and stories not

only helped put each other at ease but helped communicate relatable experiences—such

as letting go from mounting stress from schooling to relax.

During the final workshop, we kicked off our brainstorming session by posting

the *worst* ideas that we could think of to help student veterans build connections with

others. Taking turns, they would get up and post an idea, and explain what it was. The

following ensued as Cameron placed a sticky note on the board.

Cameron: Hand MREs (Meals Ready to Eat) out at the dining halls.

Richard: MRE day. Yeah, I like that. I mean I don't like it, but I like how bad

it is.

William: School constipation day! (laughter)

Thomas: People who have never eaten MREs love them.

Cameron: I never had them, well… not because I needed to, my roommate was in the Navy. He brought some back and we tried them, but I never had to eat them.

Richard: Were you allowed to fish off the… [boat?]

Cameron: Uh, huh!

Richard: Really! Cool! I joined the wrong branch (of the military)! (Group laughter)

Cameron: When Hurricane Michael rolled through, we responded, and the Navy Reserves also responded. They were sitting there in tents, and they got their helicopters coming in and sitting on their cots eating MREs, and we were two hours away at, like, the Hilton! (Group laughter)

Researcher: You know, I thought the Air Force had it made!

Richard: And you're like "the Coast Guard is really a joke!"

Researcher: Why did you get out? (Asked jokingly)

Cameron: We were complaining about doubling up on the rooms!

Richard: What, you didn't make six figures at E4 (a lower enlisted rank in the military)? (Group laughter)

This exchange amongst the participants illustrates how stories, joking, and poking fun at each other all came together in a single interaction. Through this experience, Cameron illustrated some of the differences between his time in the Coast Guard, and what the other participants had experienced—principally, having to eat MREs. This erupted into a string of banter and laughter, and as it died down, the participants resumed placing and

explaining their terrible ideas. It was common for these sidebar conversations to happen

as we worked through the design thinking process, and it never derailed the overarching

objective of the workshop. Being able to speak freely and share without judgment while

maintaining a focus on achieving the main purpose of the workshop was important to the

participants.

As discussed in the background of this study, being mission-focused is a pillar of

military service and is a fixture within the *Soldier's Creed* (U.S. Department of the

Army, 2003). Having a mission or purpose created an environment around which the

stories, jokes, and conversation among participants could emerge. These interactions not

only helped build camaraderie among the participants, but also emerged as an organic

part of their overall participation around a central purpose in the workshop setting.

The participants also took note of how the group continued to consistently work

toward identifying a potential solution using the design thinking process, despite having

an environment where they could talk and joke freely with one another. In his final

interview, William addressed the building sense of community that progressively became

more cohesive over the span of the workshop, largely attributing it to "open and honest"

communication:

> I mean, it's a little like, there's a little bit of like, social awkwardness at first, just because we're all just trying to figure out like, what, like, what is this really like? Who are these people? Right? Nothing out of the ordinary, though. But I think we broke down those barriers pretty quick. Well, that and the understanding that, like, we're all here for the same thing, like we're all the same kind of person, right? Like, it shouldn't be (so easy) like that. So pretty quickly, like those barriers broke down. And especially like, as time went on, like, very laid back, like very casual, like, we were still like mission-oriented, and like still focused on the goal. And like, we're still there to learn. But the environment was so laid back and casual, such that there was no pressure to learn, there wasn't a pressure to talk to

each other, there wasn't a pressure to say our ideas or to not say our ideas. It was very open and honest. And like, you know, no one held back, at least from what I saw. I think the environment really helps achieve a lot.

As William put it, the group remained "mission-oriented," even as the group seemed to relax around each other, prompting William and the others to be open and honest in their communication, which aided in a sense of being able to "achieve a lot." Open and honest communication is a trait valued by student veterans (Kartchner & Searle, 2023). Being able to communicate in the military openly and directly is critical in being able to accomplish a mission. Great attention is given in the military to developing the ability to communicate clearly and directly, as it could be a matter of success or failure—and even the difference between life and death. This open and honest communication helps support the mission-first mentality instilled by the military, while helping the participants know and understand what they are all thinking and doing to achieve their purpose at any given moment. Having open and honest communication, and a mission-focus permitted the participants to feel like they were able to "achieve a lot," even when they would digress from the main activity with a quick joke, story, or anecdote.

William also pointed out that the workshop helped achieve that sense of familiarity and connection that happened after "barriers were broken down." This phrasing is evocative of being guarded and protecting oneself, but as a sense of trust and respect began to grow among the participants, the barriers came down and camaraderie began to emerge. During his final interview, Cameron echoed William's observation that the key to successfully working toward a goal is open communication:

> That open communication and everyone working together and having, I guess we didn't even have a clear goal, but we had the goal to identify a goal. And we did

that, so we were making forward progress and working well together. And that's when you're making forward progress, everyone is in a better mood than if you're just bumping against a wall. But open communication is super key.

I want to emphasize the phrase "making forward progress" that Cameron uses, and how it is coupled with the idea of "working well together." These ideas are not mutually exclusive. In fact, having a central purpose that drew the workshop participants together seemed to help facilitate the stories, jokes, and bantering.

Inversely, the ability to "speak freely" may also have contributed to the ability to work toward the problem-solving objectives of the workshop. During the final interview, when asked where the workshop would have gone if there had not been a central goal, Cameron stated:

Where would it have gone? We would have just hung out. I think it would have been a lot less productive if we're not working towards anything. And I don't think we would have got as deep, because when you're trying to figure something out and help people, I'm going to put more on the table than if I'm just sitting there shooting the shit.

Having that central goal, or domain, created an environment where everyone began to invest more of themselves to achieve a goal. CoP states that a well-functioning community around a central domain exhibits the traits of trust and respect among the community members (Wenger et al., 2002). Having a central objective (Wenger, 2018), open and honest communication (Kartchner & Searle, 2023), and a sense of trust and respect stemming from their military experiences (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017) provided an environment where camaraderie was able to grow. As Cameron said, without having something to work toward, the participants would have just been hanging out and sitting there "shooting the shit," which would have prohibited the participants from going as

"deep" with the topic and each other. Being able to go "deep" with each other helped breed the sense of friendship and camaraderie that began to emerge by the final workshop session more fully.

Came for the Horses, not Because of the Veterans

The name of this theme came from a comment Cameron made, where he explicitly pointed out that his domain of interest was working with horses, and not working or participating with veterans. Using architecture as an example, Wenger et al. (2002) referred to the things that draw someone into a space of interest as being *transitions at entrances* (p. 52). The idea is that a transition is like something that draws the attention of individuals passing by to stop in an entryway to peer into a space, or talk to others, before deciding to step into the associated space. Returning to the student veteran participants, the draw of the horses invited the participants to step into the *transition at the entrance* of the innovation workshop space. This theme addresses the initial draw of interest in the horses and participating in the overarching purpose of learning to innovate in the student veteran space as domains of practice.

Following the findings concerning the initial draw of horses, I frame the critical role of old-timers (Wenger, 2018) in promoting Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP) (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in the overarching workshop environment. LPP was an important piece in promoting active engagement in the workshop. I also address my role and that of the equine specialists as old-timers and the adopted role of a *knowledge broker,* or someone who has membership in multiple boundary-sharing communities who can

facilitate a *boundary activity,* or an opportunity for members from the adjacent communities to overlap their interests and practices (Wenger et al., 2002). The boundary activity provided a space to promote greater participation in the workshop's primary domain of using the design thinking within the student veteran space and opportunity to begin membership within the boundary-sharing equine community. Returning to RQ 1, this theme establishes the role of *purpose* in drawing the interest and subsequent LPP of the student veterans in domains that are supported by old-timers.

Initial Purpose: to Work with the Horses

The workshop was designed to focus on developing a solution in the student veteran space using design thinking. To encourage team building, and novel experiences with problem-solving and empathy, I incorporated equine-assisted learning activities into the innovation workshop. These were to act as a draw to participate, alongside the primary focus on innovation. These draws were an effort to create a *transition at the entrance* to encourage student veterans to come participate with each other in the workshop around a common purpose (Wenger at al., 2002). The second equine activity of the workshop soon played a more substantial role than what was initially planned upon as it played an important role to help shift the focus to the primary workshop purpose.

As the second session ended, it became clear that most of the participants were not motivated to participate in the workshop by the opportunity to learn design thinking while hanging out with other students that I hoped would draw them in. Instead, the participants were far more interested in the novelty of the equine-assisted learning activities. At this point in the workshop's second session, the participants began to

construct a problem statement to wrap up the *define* phase of design thinking. As they

were gathered around the whiteboard full of sticky notes, the discussion turned to the

concept of building connections, and Thomas suggested the VRO sponsor events for

student veterans. To this, Cameron offered a rebuttal to having a veteran organization-

based emphasis on building connection:

> *Cameron*: I think connecting with other clubs (not related to veterans) or organizations (is better), because the only reason you have me here is just the horses, not because of the veterans. (laughter)
>
> *Richard*: Yeah, so true. (laughter)
>
> *William*: I got out of drill duty! (laughter)

With this statement, and others like it throughout the workshop, it was extremely clear

that the participants showed up primarily for the equine-assisted activities; they were less

interested in learning how to innovate by solving an issue found within the veteran

community. They also weren't attending to associate with other student veterans. Even

Thomas, who is not represented in this conversation, had the same primary objective of

working with the horses. When asked during his interview about his expectations coming

into the workshop, Thomas stated:

> Honestly, I had no idea (what to expect), I saw that it said, "Bridling Innovation Workshop," and I was like, I don't know anything about horses, but I've always wanted to learn and be around them. So, I guess I had an expectation to do that and that's about as far as I went, I didn't know what else to expect.

While my catchy title of "Bridling Innovation" for the recruitment emails may have

unwittingly caused misconceptions about the entire nature of the workshop, the

participants all showed up with the purpose of working with horses, and little other

expectation placed on the experience beyond that. Above, Cameron jokingly (but

honestly) revealed that he was participating in the experience because of the horses. In the AAR at the end of the final session, Cameron expanded on this point.

> Yeah, I didn't expect to learn anything from it. I was gonna be helping a grad student and I was gonna be like, the subject of your research, or whatever. I feel like I've learned a whole lot.

While Cameron came into the workshop setting without any expectation to learn, he emphasized that he had "learned a whole lot" as a result of his participation. Further, during his final interview, Richard mentioned that he was sharing what he was learning: "I've taken a lot of stuff that you've said, and I've kind of shown my wife for her job." When asked in his final interview about the biggest takeaways from his workshop experience, Thomas stated:

> I really liked the design thinking process, and with the field that I want to go into that's very applicable. So, it's definitely not gonna be something that I'm going to forget about, and you know, brush under the rug.

William gained insights from freeworking with a horse and the overarching theme of *empathy* that ensconced the activity stating, "the leadership, things that [I] got out of that were unique, but also really cool." While the participants had initially come to work with the horses, they were also gaining other impactful things out of the workshop experience.

This shift in interest from the horses to the student veteran innovation portion of the workshop was facilitated through a *boundary activity* (Wenger et al., 2002). CoPs have *leaky* boundaries that help facilitate interactions and opportunities with other boundary-sharing CoPs. In the case of the workshop, the student veteran-focused equine group acted as a boundary-sharing CoP, which presented opportunities for the participants to actively engage in both communities due to their overlap. This was largely

due to the convergence of design thinking's *empathy* stage with the second workshop's

equine freeworking experience. The equine activity took their interest in horses, and the

experience of building connections with the animals to show them how they could utilize

the same concepts to address solving a problem.

As the workshop was planned, the equine activities were structured to act as an

icebreaker and team-building experience. The freeworking activity that kicked off the

second session of the workshop was the most impactful for the participants. There was a

noticeable change in the thoughtfulness of the student veterans as they emerged one at a

time from the freeworking pen. As we debriefed the experiences, each participant

reflected on *empathy* in their own unique way. Richard observed:

> [The specialist] said to, like, we have to understand, like, as much as we might
> want to be the horse, we have to understand like, we're not horses, and the horse
> doesn't see us as a horse. So, like I said, I have to, like, have to cater to their
> needs, we have to cater to their sociality, like understand (them).

Richard gained insight into focusing on the needs of horses, in a manner that they

understood, and not how he thought it should be. This is an idea that he connected back

to his human interactions, which was a concept that Richard addressed during his final

interview:

> I think the empathy and understanding, you know, whether it was for the horses or
> kind of the people who you're working with, trying to design something for, I
> thought that was a huge kind of point that stood out to me. Because I do think we
> tend to just get, I'm just gonna do my thing, and I'm gonna do it. And then people
> don't like that thing, at least in my experience. So, I think that's something that I
> probably need to focus on more.

Richard noted that the empathy and understanding components of both the equine and

innovation activities contributed to recognizing the importance of developing and

implementing those practices into his repertoire. Returning to the follow-up discussion

that happened after the freeworking activity, the group discussed this insight on empathy

and Cameron offered the following:

> What I've noticed for the last two (participants who went in) is that when I'm in there, I can feel myself just focusing on the horse, and like, being able to observe here and watch it, and then go in and do it. But um, I know, I am not observing myself, I don't know if that's something that you can do. But like, while I'm in there (the freeworking pen), I can't think about what I'm doing. As like, what would work better, I'm just so focused on doing it. Right? If I could observe at the same time as I'm acting, that would be like, incredible, yeah. Is it a mindfulness thing or what?

Cameron was making observations about his ability, or inability to focus on what was

happening in his environment, while simultaneously being aware of his own actions.

These experiences opened up opportunities to have discussions about *empathy,* and its

role in effective problem solving.

Having experienced elements of empathy on a personal level with the

freeworking activity, we returned to the classroom where we took their fresh experiences

with the horses and again launched into our problem-solving activities. The freeworking

activity with the horses, and the connections to design thinking's *empathy* stage became a

moment where the perceptions of the participants began to shift in regard to the problem-

solving component of the workshop. The student veterans had a novel, first-hand

experience in developing empathy for a horse, that in turn translated into an interest in

learning how to apply that new-found insight to solve a problem. During the final AAR,

William talked about his expectations for the workshop after every session.

> No expectations, like I didn't know what to expect (coming into the workshop). And so, I was like, I'm just gonna show up and see what happens. After the first week, I was like, alright. And after last week (the second week), I was like, okay,

like, I dig this!

This excerpt from William illustrates how despite their initial lack of expectations beyond working with the horses, the participants' perceptions began to change. William sums the general consensus from the participants of the second session, where he walked away thinking, "I dig this!" Being able to promote boundary activities helped the participants shift their initial interest in horses to seeing how the equine activities that they were enjoying had real-life applications in being effective problem solvers.

The Old-Timers

Having its roots in apprenticeship, CoP looks at old-timers within a community as being able to impart knowledge, practice, and community to newer members (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 29). With the participants being newcomers into the design thinking workshop and with equine interactions, there was a need to have old-timers from each respective community present. I acted as an old-timer for the student veteran/innovation community that we were trying to build through the workshop, and the equine specialists acted as old-timers for their group and expertise with horses. Returning to RQ 1, together, the equine specialists and I provided opportunities and resources for the student veteran participants to begin to practice around each of our respective domains. This process is known as Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP; Lave & Wenger, 1991), and is key to supporting a healthy CoP (Wenger et al., 2002).

My shared background as a student veteran allowed me to begin developing an old-timer relationship with the participants as the first session came underway. As I was preparing for the first session, I was gathering my equipment from my vehicle when

Thomas pulled up. He offered to help me get things inside, and as he assisted, I

introduced myself as a fellow student veteran. In his final interview Thomas noted that

this moment had an immediate effect that began to shift his perception of the workshop.

> Day one I didn't really have an idea of what to expect. And I guess going into
> this, I didn't expect you (the researcher) to be a veteran also. I expected it to be
> someone who wanted to just find out more about veterans or, you know, study
> veterans for whatever reason. So that was really upon walking in and when I
> started talking to you and realized you're a veteran, it made it that much more
> comfortable, right off the bat. More welcoming, I guess.

As soon as Thomas found out that I was a student veteran myself, his perception shifted.

That revelation immediately made Thomas feel more comfortable in participating in the

workshop due to our shared background as student veterans. Returning to the concept of

trust that is found in VCT (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017) and CoP (Wenger et al., 2002), our

shared identities as student veterans helped promote a greater sense of trust and respect

between us.

This revelation of veteran status opened the door for me to share my professional

skill set, resources, and institutional knowledge with Thomas as the workshop

progressed. Over the course of the workshop, he began to see the value of *design thinking*

in the academic pathway that he had settled upon. Following the end of the workshop

series, we had developed enough rapport and trust that he asked for me to share any

additional resources that I felt were useful in design-related capacities. We ended up

spending an additional 30 minutes together following the workshop as resources were

shared and discussed. During the final session, Thomas stated, "I've learned more from

you (the researcher) in the last few weeks than I have in the last year of being in school."

Because of our shared interests in design, and the buildup of trust and rapport between us, Thomas identified resources that were a part of my repertoire to be of value to him and his professional trajectory. Returning to CoP, Thomas was able to further his participation in design thinking-related avenues through LPP and interactions with myself as the old-timer of the workshop environment.

While Thomas had a specific interest in design-related things due to his academic pathway that promoted more interactions between the both of us, the role of old-timer was still key in demonstrating and supporting the design thinking practices of the workshop for all the participants. As we began the process of defining the issue the participants wanted to address, I introduced them to a clustering activity using the whiteboard, sticky notes, and grouping ideas to identify themes. To accomplish this, I began to demonstrate the process that the participants quickly began to pick up.

Researcher: All right, so let's kind of sit back here and take a look [at the board]. You guys might want to have a sticky note in hand. And we can hang out over here (by the board). So, let's start thinking about categories, like where people are coming from, right? (Taking the opportunity to introduce an initial clustering to demonstrate the process.) We have Army Guard (sticky note) here.

Richard: Coast Guard (sticky note), right there.(Moving the note into the new clustering.)

Researcher: Okay, so we do know we have more though. So, we have the Coast Guard (sticky note), we have Army National Guard (sticky note) . (Moving notes while speaking.)

Thomas: Marine Corps (sticky note). (Placing the note on the board.)

Researcher: He's got veteran (sticky note) up here (looking at another sticky note on the board). Veteran up here? (As someone gestured to another spot on the board while the note was being moved.)

> *Richard:*   Veteran different classes (sticky note). (Taking a note and placing it in a growing group of notes on the board.) It is like *assume trauma*.
>
> *Researcher:* Oh, yeah. Do you want to put up it here? (Gesturing to another location on the board.)
>
> *William:*   Do you feel like that could go with the category? (Referring to the veteran labeled sticky note.) I know it's not a branch necessarily, but it's kind of like the demographic, right?
>
> *Thomas*:   I think overall.

Around this time, I was able to step to the side of the whiteboard and the participants began to move, label, and define clusterings on the board as they made progress toward coming up with a problem-statement. As an old-timer of the workshop setting, I found myself providing brief instruction and demonstrations as I introduced the design thinking practices to the participants. After only a few minutes of demonstration or explanation, the participants would largely take over the process, as I would stand to the side and offer commentary, insight, and answer any questions. The dynamic between the participants and myself as the old-timer provided an opportunity to engage in LPP around the central purpose of the workshop.

The role of old-timer was not restricted solely to me during the workshop, but as the student veterans participated in the equine activities, they were able to learn from, and interact with the specialists who had come to assist. While not veterans, the equine specialists acted as the old-timers for their equine-focused community. This was particularly noticeable during the second session as the participants were engaging in freeworking. One specialist entered the arena to provide one-on-one instruction as the student veteran would communicate with the horse using a whip and body language.

Richard noted the positive influence that the specialist's presence had on him as he experienced a new activity relating to horses.

> Well, if anything, something I appreciated was [the specialist] asking, would you like a demonstration, or would you just like to get into it (working with the horse)? You know, because sometimes I think it's like, hey, go do this. Like, I don't know what I'm doing.

The specialist was able to help Richard build his confidence, and to troubleshoot when things weren't working the way they needed to. The equine specialist was there participating and demonstrating alongside the participants. The steady instruction and demonstration of skills and knowledge from the specialist helped Richard and the other participants to have impactful experiences as they became more comfortable with horses. As a result of interacting with the horses and specialists, William and Richard both signed up for and began to attend the local veteran equine group meetings, while Cameron and Thomas were interested in participating at a future time.

During both equine sessions, I was present, constantly interweaving the perspectives from design thinking, specifically *empathy*, into the participants' experiences with the horses. While I was not an old-timer in the equine-focused community, I had experience with the types of activities and a basic understanding of horsemanship. This limited experience with the horses gave me membership in the student veteran/innovation community, as well as the equine community. This dual membership presented the opportunity for me to adopt the role of being a *knowledge broker* (Wenger et al., 2002) and provide a boundary activity for the participants to engage with the equine community, and the burgeoning community through the student veteran innovation workshop. A knowledge broker has membership in multiple

communities and can promote boundary activities to bridge membership and practice into boundary sharing communities (Wenger et al., 2002). My active presence in both of these domains contributed to bridging the experiences of the equine activities with the rest of the innovation workshop. Inversely, the presence and participation of the equine specialists in the boundary activity contributed to a few of the participants continuing their interest in horses with a veteran equine group.

Without the old-timers and a central purpose to get them going, the participants would have likely been in the same space of not really wanting to do the "veteran" stuff or seeing the value of the *design thinking* process. On the equine side, without the specialists acting as old-timers to promote LPP within their community, the participants would have likely gained very little from the equine-assisted activities and not furthered their involvement outside of the workshop.

Thank You for Your Service

This final theme addresses RQ 2, which looks at how student veteran identities are shaped by the workshop experience. Identity is an important component of both VCT, which claims that student veterans inhabit multiple identities simultaneously (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017), and CoP, where it plays a critical role in deciding what matters, who to identify with and trust, and what to share (Wenger, 2000). With a shared student veteran background, the participants entered the workshop with strong identities instilled by military service (Demers, 2011). Participants not only addressed their own student veteran identities but were also always in the process of responding to how others thought

of them as student veterans on campus and veterans in their civilian lives (Bakhtin, 1981). The theme of *thank you for your service* delves into both how the participants felt about their student veteran identities as they entered into the workshop setting and how they felt about being perceived as veterans by others. "Thank you for your service" is something civilians often say to current service members and veterans as a sign of respect, but it was something that made the student veteran participants uncomfortable. In this way, *thank you for your service* references how student veterans are positioning themselves within campus and workshop spaces and how they are positioned by others. It further addresses how the activities and interactions during the workshop helped shape the student veterans' perceptions of themselves and the broader veteran community.

A large portion of this initial section on identity is derived from Richard and Cameron interviewing each other during the first session. I selected this interaction to demonstrate the perceptions of themselves and others as veterans they brought to the workshop environment. Further, this interaction illustrates how sharing their feelings about veteran identities with one another began to inform and shape their respective perceptions of themselves and others as veterans. Nasir and Cooks (2009) address how identity is used and influenced in a CoP as *identity resources.* These resources are broken into three categories of ideational (e.g., how one views themself), relational (e.g., the relationships with others), and material (e.g., the physical artifacts in the setting). These resources all had influences on the participants' student veteran identities in the workshop setting.

Before delving into Richard and Cameron's interview, I will address the interview

question that drove the conversations presented below. The interview questions that the participants were asking each other were decided upon beforehand by the group. The question: "*How do you respond to people saying, "thank you for your service?"* was suggested by William and became the impetus for a large portion of the following excerpts. As the group was deciding on questions to ask, William proposed the following:

> [What is the] best way to respond when someone says thank you for your service? I will walk down campus with my ROTC (Reserve Officer Training Corps) patch, and someone says, "thank you for your service," and I am like, "dude, if only you knew." (laughter)

William, being relatively new to the military, was curious about how the more seasoned student veterans in the workshop responded to the *thank you for your service* comment that he would receive while wearing his uniform in public. William's comment, "dude, if only you knew," is an indicator of the differences in his self-perception as a newer service member training to become a commissioned officer, and how others perceived him as he wore a uniform. The resulting question became a touchstone of introspection and conversation for the student veterans as they participated in the workshop. William further elaborated on the question and how he felt about it while being interviewed by Thomas.

> At drill (military readiness training), my friends joke about this just because, like, someone will say that (thank you for your service) and I honestly don't even know what to say. It's like, I feel like saying "thank you" feels weird. It just feels weird. It's like, I haven't done anything yet. Like, I just completed initial training. I'm in ROTC, like I haven't been deployed, haven't truly, like served. Not necessarily in combat capacity, but like an active service role, right? And so it's like, it's, you know, it's, like, you feel bad because like, in their eyes, like, you are someone, who is doing a lot, but it's yeah, I'm really like, if they do know what you'd actually done, they'd be like, like, "I regret paying for this guy's sandwich." (Thomas chuckling) Yeah, so like, I'll just say, "Thank you," or like, "for sure." Just to like, you know, to be nice, like, give those pleasantries back.

But yeah, I kind of feel guilty for having to, like accept that, but not having done anything to deserve that.

William's response to the question is very telling about how he perceives himself as a service member, and how others perceive him, which places him at odds with two different perceptions. William felt that he hadn't yet substantially served long enough to feel comfortable with being thanked for something that he was just starting into. William addresses the tensions between his perceptions of himself as a service member and the perception of others that he had done something of merit to receive their thanks. He jokingly stated that if they actually knew that he was fresh out of training and in the ROTC that they would "regret paying for this guy's sandwich." The conflicting perspectives of those seeing him as being praiseworthy of his service and feeling that he was too new to have deserved their thanks left him feeling unsure of what to say and "weird." These perceptions with which William entered into the workshop were his initial *ideational resources*, or the way he perceived himself (Nasir & Cooks, 2009) as a student veteran/military service member.

While much of his conflict came from feeling too new into his service to be thanked for it, the other participants also struggled with the same questions, pertaining to the service they had already completed. As Richard and Cameron sat down to interview each other, Cameron started by asking the first question the group had decided upon: "*How do you respond to people saying, "thank you for your service?"*

> *Richard:* I usually say, like, "Oh, I didn't do much." Or sometimes I jokingly say back "Oh, thank you for your service," If they're, like, working at a gas station or something (chuckles). So, it's like, because I don't want to work at a gas station. Are we going back and forth?

> *Cameron*: That works for me. Yeah, I say the same thing. Especially with fast food. I'll say, "Thank YOU for your service." (laughter)
>
> *Richard:* Yeah, like I don't know why I do that. (laughter)

Deflecting the response "thank you for your service," by thanking back whoever had just provided them a service shows the level of discomfort that they felt with how they were perceived. Returning to William's comment, these perceptions stem from the assumption of the person doing the thanking that the veteran or service member had done something worthy of thanks in relation to their service.

In their pairing, William and Thomas shared some of the same sentiments. When William asked Thomas what he said when people thanked him for his service, Thomas responded:

> I'm gonna say, it's always kind of awkward because like, yeah, I was in the Marine Corps, but no, I never like, really did anything. So, I say, "Thank you." You know, "Thanks for your support" is usually my go to, or just trying to not tell people I was in the military.

Like Richard and Cameron, Thomas felt awkward about being thanked for his service, as he felt that he "didn't do" anything. "Doing something" for a veteran typically means that you were deployed to an area of conflict, saw combat, or were wounded, among other things. This stands in contrast to William, who was at the precipice of beginning his military career and felt that just the act of serving out his time would have made the experience of being thanked more palatable. In order to avoid the awkward conversations, Thomas avoided telling people about his military service in the Marine Corps.

The participants entered the workshop space not entirely comfortable with how

they were being perceived as veterans by others, while also feeling like they did not fit

what they thought a veteran should be. As Richard and Cameron continued interviewing

each other during the first session, they discussed what it meant to them to be a veteran.

> *Richard*: So, I think that term is confusing. Because I think, well, especially a lot of people they're like, you know, I think people think about it. It's just someone who went overseas in war. And I think some people are shocked when it's like, "You served in the military, but nothing happened?" You know, overseas, are you in a conflict, and you're still a veteran, you know? So, I think it's a weird position to be in because then I think we do, even as veterans like, we want to distinguish, "Okay, so if you're in the military, you are veterans, but you're a combat veteran," right? There's something like that, right?

> *Cameron*: Yeah.

> *Richard*: So, I never know really what that means, other than I signed up and did my time. Sometimes it makes it sound like you're in prison. What about you?

> *Cameron*: Yeah. I know that veterans are anyone who served, but even me coming to things like this, I feel like I don't really belong because I was Coast Guard. My first two years were definitely not military related, I was changing lightbulbs on buoys. It doesn't seem at all even close to like, people that have deployed and got shot at. I never got shot at. But then…

> *Richard*: I mean, I would posit, though, that, like the risk of drowning and stuff is still significantly higher than if you were… you know?

> *Cameron*: Yeah.

> *Richard*: Like, the odds...

As Richard and Cameron began to delve into what it meant to be a veteran, their

conflicting feelings about their own status as veterans became evident, which fueled their

discomfort with being thanked for their service. Richard felt that he had just "signed up

and did his time," and while he had deployed with the Army, he did not see any armed

conflict. Cameron felt that he had not earned the "veteran" moniker, as he had "only"

served in the Coast Guard and had not deployed overseas or been shot at. As they

conversed, Cameron and Richard discovered that they had both independently identified

that there existed distinctions of what could be considered a "veteran" within the broader

veteran community, such as Richard distinguishing between a "veteran" and a "combat

veteran," where a combat veteran is perceived as possessing "the real" veteran identity. It

is interesting to note that Richard was quick to jump in and disabuse Cameron of the

notion that he had not assumed risks by joining the Coast Guard, to which Cameron

agreed. By disabusing Cameron of the notion that he had not done anything noteworthy,

Richard was beginning to challenge Cameron's assumptions about his own veteran status.

This interaction also demonstrates how *relational resources,* or the relationships with

others (Nasir & Cooks, 2009) influenced each individual participant and how they

thought and felt about their own identities in the workshop.

     The conversation about veteran identities continued between Cameron and

Richard as they further discussed what it meant to be a veteran.

    Cameron: I will take full advantage of it (the veteran status), like a big
                 corporation, offering veteran perks. I know, it's like, I'll go do the GI
                 Bill. I'll take advantage of all of that. But when it's like somebody
                 actually saying, "thanks for being a veteran," I am like "No, I'm not
                 really. That's a technicality."

    Richard: Yeah, I just think yeah, there's kind of like a weird level. I want to say
                 class system.

    Cameron: Like what we were saying about the Wounded Warrior (Project), that's
                 what I think of a veteran. I don't think of myself as a veteran unless it
                 helps me financially.

    Richard: Well, that's the thing too, I think people assume you've had something

traumatic happen, you're broken, whatever it may be, and like that isn't necessarily the case, right? Or you see things to come to this veteran thing, but then you feel like "well, that's more for those guys that are damaged." And then you are kind of like, "I don't want to go to those things, because I feel like I'm not in that group." Right?

Cameron: I don't want to take someone's spot.

Richard: Yeah.

Cameron: A service for somebody who needs it, but I don't need it. I am fine.

As the conversation continued, it became clear that Cameron felt his veteran-ness ended with taking advantage of veteran perks, such as corporate discounts and using the GI Bill to attend school, but beyond that, he felt his status was only a "technicality." Richard called the different levels of being a veteran a "class system," with Cameron stating that the veterans that are serviced by the Wounded Warrior Project and similar organizations, or the "guys that are damaged," as Richard put it, as being the full-fledged veterans.

Returning to Cameron and Richard's conversation, they further communicated their discomfort with what they perceived to be a veteran as they discussed not wanting to attend events put on for veterans. Richard felt like he did not belong with that group of "guys that are damaged," and Cameron did not want to take the opportunity away from someone who would need it. The U.S. Army's *Soldier's Creed* states that, *I will never leave a fallen comrade* (U.S. Department of the Army, 2003). This represents the willingness to sacrifice oneself in ensuring the return of a comrade to safety, even if they had been wounded or killed. Being born from military service, this mentality can be seen in Camron's desire not to take away an opportunity from someone who needed it. In other words, he was willing to sacrifice his want or desire to participate in a veteran

activity so that another veteran who he presumed to stand in need could reap the benefit of participation. Further, Richard's discomfort around the "guys that are damaged," illustrates his feelings of inadequacy in relation to his service record and veteran status.

These perspectives of what a veteran is perceived to be had a notable impact on Thomas. After the first session of the workshop, the participants wanted to go out and see the larger horses, as they had only participated with the ponies during the equine activity. As I was packing up, Thomas began to talk about how frustrating it was that he could not go into any of the Veteran of Foreign Wars (VFW) locations to go and grab a drink and get to know other vets, because he had never deployed or seen combat. In very real ways, Thomas' veteran status was stopped and frisked by the VFW, an organization serving only veterans who served honorably AND could prove "service in a war, campaign, or expedition on foreign soil or in hostile waters" (https://www.vfw.org/join/eligibility). Being ineligible to join the VFW was a missed opportunity for Thomas to connect with other veterans who had deployed (when he had not) and reinforced his perception of himself as not being veteran-enough, despite his service in the Marine Corps.

These feelings of inadequacy or not being a "real veteran" weren't solely the domain of Thomas, Richard, and Cameron. William entered the workshop space worried he wouldn't fit in with a bunch of guys who had already completed their service. Further, because he was forced to wear a military uniform on campus as a part of the ROTC program, it was difficult to avoid the change in how people treated him.

> Like, I don't talk about it a lot (my military service). Like, there's some people that know, it's just like I'm really good friends with them, right? Like, it's not something I try to make a personality trait out of it, but it's kind of hard not to. Like on campus, two or three days a week I have to be in uniform in classes. All

these people see me in uniform and talk to me about it, or they're trying to thank me for my services. Such a dumb thing. It's like, I got an ROTC patch on my arm, no deployment patch on the other. It's like please stop, it's hard to avoid, but you can feel ashamed for it, almost.

Being new in the military, in addition to wearing his uniform frequently in a public setting made William very sensitive, and almost "ashamed" for receiving attention and thanks. He refers to his ROTC patch and the lack of a deployment patch, which is awarded when you deploy in support of combat operations, as an indicator that he was not one of the "people that have deployed and got shot at," as Cameron stated in the previous excerpt. Additionally, being new in the military and actively involved in the ROTC, William noted the challenge of not making his military affiliation a "personality trait," which was proving difficult because of how others positioned him, particularly other students in his classes when he was wearing his military uniform. William's struggle to balance his military identity is reflected in VCT, which points out that veterans simultaneously juggle multiple identities (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017). William needed to juggle his new-found military identity with that of being a student. This struggle was not unique to William. Thomas and Richard noted the difficulty of balancing their identities in regard to how others perceived them, which is addressed in depth at the end of this section.

Every one of the participants entered the workshop space with their own understanding of the hierarchy of veteran-ness, and, for various reasons, they saw themselves lower on the hierarchy than combat veterans or veterans who were wounded in combat. As a further demonstration of the impact of relational resources (Nasir & Cooks, 2009) on the participants, their perspectives began to shift almost as soon as they

began interviewing each other during the first session, perhaps most obviously in Richard pushing back on the idea that Cameron did not assume risks beyond those of civilian life by joining the Coast Guard. While each participant entered the workshop with their own perceptions of themselves and others as veterans, they found that many of their thoughts and feelings were not far removed from the rest of the workshop participants. The participants largely felt they did not fit into the veteran mold, and that a real veteran had "done something," such as been in combat or deployed, or had been "damaged" through their military service. Returning to *thank you for your service,* the act of being thanked by a civilian who was presumed to think that they had done something noteworthy with their service reinforced participants' feelings of discomfort with their veteran or military identities. Further, experiences with other veterans organizations (e.g., VFW) and other veterans reinforced the self-perceptions of the workshop participants and how they viewed other veterans. Illustrating how other veterans can have an influence on the perceptions of being a veteran, Thomas pointed out during the final AAR that while Richard and I had deployed, "you guys didn't hold that over us," which was something that others had done to him in the past.

The workshop bred an environment where the participants identified their commonalities rather than dwelling on their differences. For example, because the participants had more in common than not, it really did not matter that Richard had deployed overseas. Turning to CoP, the role of identity is an important component of community and practice, which defines what is, and is not important within that community (Wenger, 2000). In the workshop community, it became apparent that the

distinction of having, or not having "done something" was not deemed as an important requirement for belonging to the workshop's community. The salient part of identity within the community is that they had served or were currently serving. This provided a baseline and commonality among all of the participants, regardless of the particulars of their military experience. Returning to RQ 2, by finding a common ground with their identities as student veterans, the participants began to identify what was, and was not important to their interactions in the workshop environment (Wenger, 2000). Elements, such as never deploying or having served in the Coast Guard, which caused participants to not feel like they were veteran enough were quickly dismissed as being irrelevant within the workshop's community of student veterans. The workshop created a space and practices that aided in positioning the identities of being student veterans at the center of the fledgling community. This was accomplished by imparting practices through teamwork activities and unstructured time to promote connection between the participants.

To better understand how the workshop environment helped shape the participants' perceptions of themselves and each other, I present their experiences in two different categories: actively working together on the workshop's objective, and downtime. Actively working on the workshop's objective is focused on using the design thinking process to come up with a potential solution for the student veteran population at the participants' institution. Downtime is focused on taking breaks and sharing meals.

Working Together

As the participants worked together to define and ideate during the workshop,

they utilized the design thinking process to better understand student veterans and come up with a solution to the identified problem statement. The design thinking activities also provided *material resources*, or physical artifacts to practice their identities (Nasir & Cooks, 2009) through the use of sticky notes, pens, markers, and a whiteboard. This process presented an opportunity for the participants to think deeply about their own experiences and identities and those of the other participants and negotiate those meanings using the workshops' relational and material resources. Following the interviews during the first session, the remaining two sessions focused the workshop activities on *defining* the issue, *ideating* a solution, and coming up with a solution that could be *prototyped.* All of these activities required the use of sticky notes and a whiteboard to be able to organize, discuss, and identify themes and potential solutions. It also acted as the means to share their own thoughts, feelings, and observations as student veterans. The whiteboard, pens, markers, and sticky notes were the primary material resources used in the workshop. They provided the means for the student veterans to put their identities into action through sharing their perspectives and experiences as they worked toward developing a solution.

The second workshop session began with an equine activity and then reviewed the design thinking process before the participants got to work on developing their problem statement. The participants approached the whiteboard with sticky notes that contained the results of their *empathy* interviews with one another from the first session, and any other thoughts and observations about student veterans they had. After explaining to the participants that the idea of the activity was to start putting ideas up and moving them

around into clusters to start identifying common themes and trends, they began to place their notes. What follows is an example of the interactions of the student veterans as they moved around the notes, creating categories and clusters (see Figure 15).

> *Cameron:* I think that willingness to serve should go over there too (Under *Other's Assumptions)*.
>
> *William:* Okay, so willingness to serve (moving the sticky on the board). Kind of based on the assumptions, like when people kind of like how they treat us, like "thank you for your service?" (Large chorus of agreement).
>
> *Richard:* Yeah, would that be "assumptions" then?
>
> *Thomas:* Yeah, I think that'd be an assumption. Yeah, I had a *preferential treatment* one. I know we talked about that (moving the note to the *Other's Assumptions* cluster).
>
> *Richard:* So, assumptions... Let's see what else we have. "I don't feel like a veteran," would that be an assumption?
>
> *William*: Like, this is us. This is how people see us and like the actions that they say. So, "Thank you for your service," is an action people make based on this assumption. So, we can move those to *what they assume* about us.

As the participants continued to place sticky notes on the board, and discuss how they should be clustered, the ideas, insights, experiences, and perceptions that started as a disjointed mess began to start taking form into distinct themes.

It is important to note that rather than dealing with abstract concepts, the participants were dealing with their own experiences, ideas, and perceptions. As each of the student veterans watched his perspectives and ideas begin to cluster on the board with the perspectives and ideas of the other participants, they began to see that they were not alone in how they thought or felt about their military, veteran, and school experiences.

Figure 15

A Reconstruction of the Clustering Activity
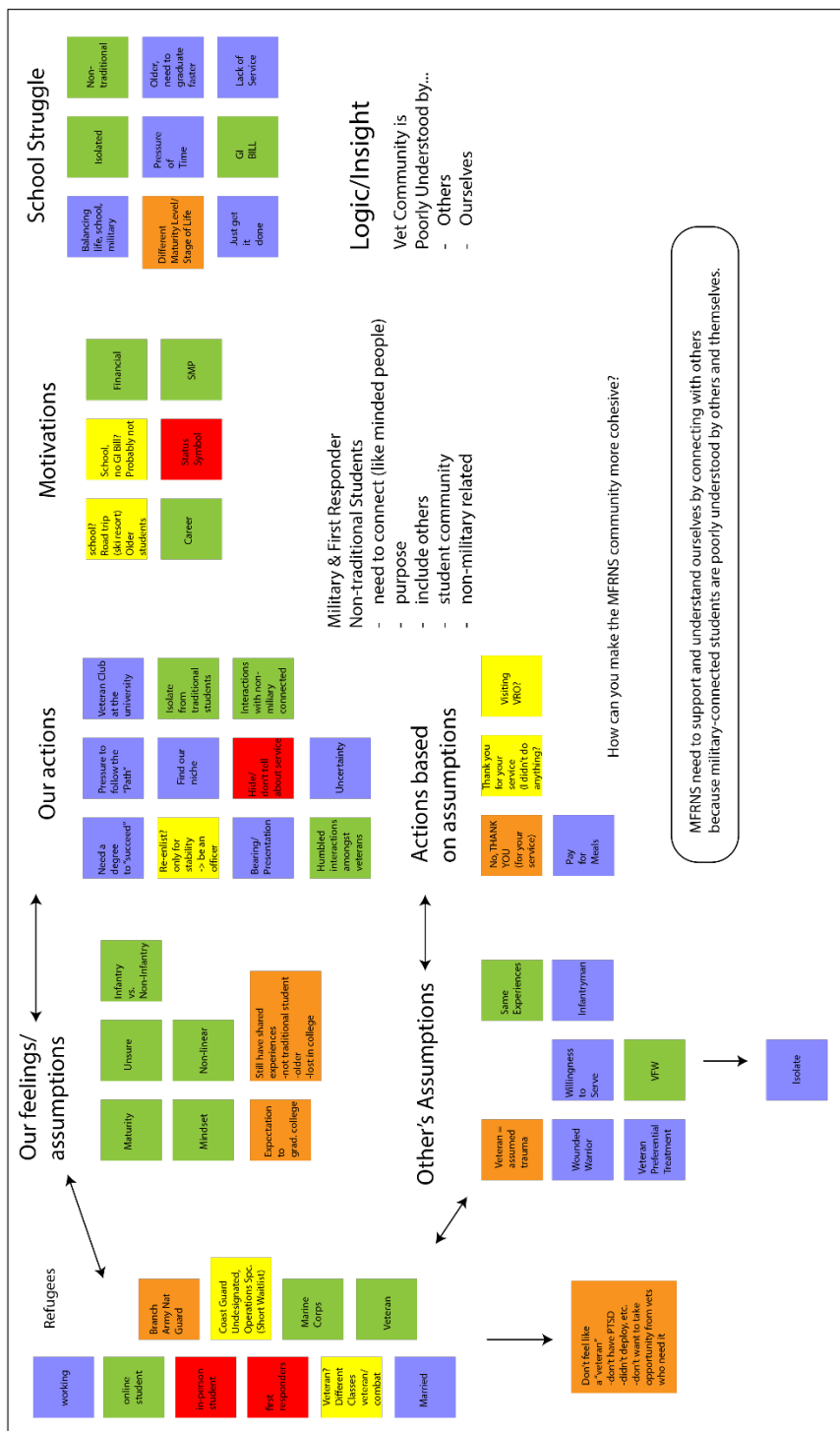
The material resources they were using to synthesize their collective perspectives had an impact on their ideational resources, or how they thought of themselves as they participated in the workshop.

As the discussions turned toward identifying the themes that were emerging, the participants began to see how their own thoughts and viewpoints about their experiences as student veterans coalesced around common themes.

This process continued throughout the remainder of the second session until the participants had defined their problem statement. The third session used the whiteboard and sticky notes to facilitate the *ideation* process, and later the initial steps that were to be taken to prototype their potential solution (see Figure 16). During the third session's AAR, William noted that:

> We came in here with a means to an end. Like we didn't know what the end was. We're all here trying to achieve the same thing. And so, it's kind of cool to like, all boil down like our individual experiences down to just the one thing (speaking of the final result of the design thinking workshop).

William was able to see how his experiences, and those of the other participants, could be boiled down into a single thing, or the themes that led to developing a potential solution. Being able to see their ideas and viewpoints interlock with each other helped confirm and challenge their own assumptions about what it meant to be a student veteran. Discussing and synthesizing their perspectives and experiences as student veterans provided the means to understand and push back against the influences on their perceptions and identities. The effort to push back on the perceptions and practices that influenced them, and other student veterans took the form of their prototype solution.

Figure 16

A Reconstruction of the Ideation Board
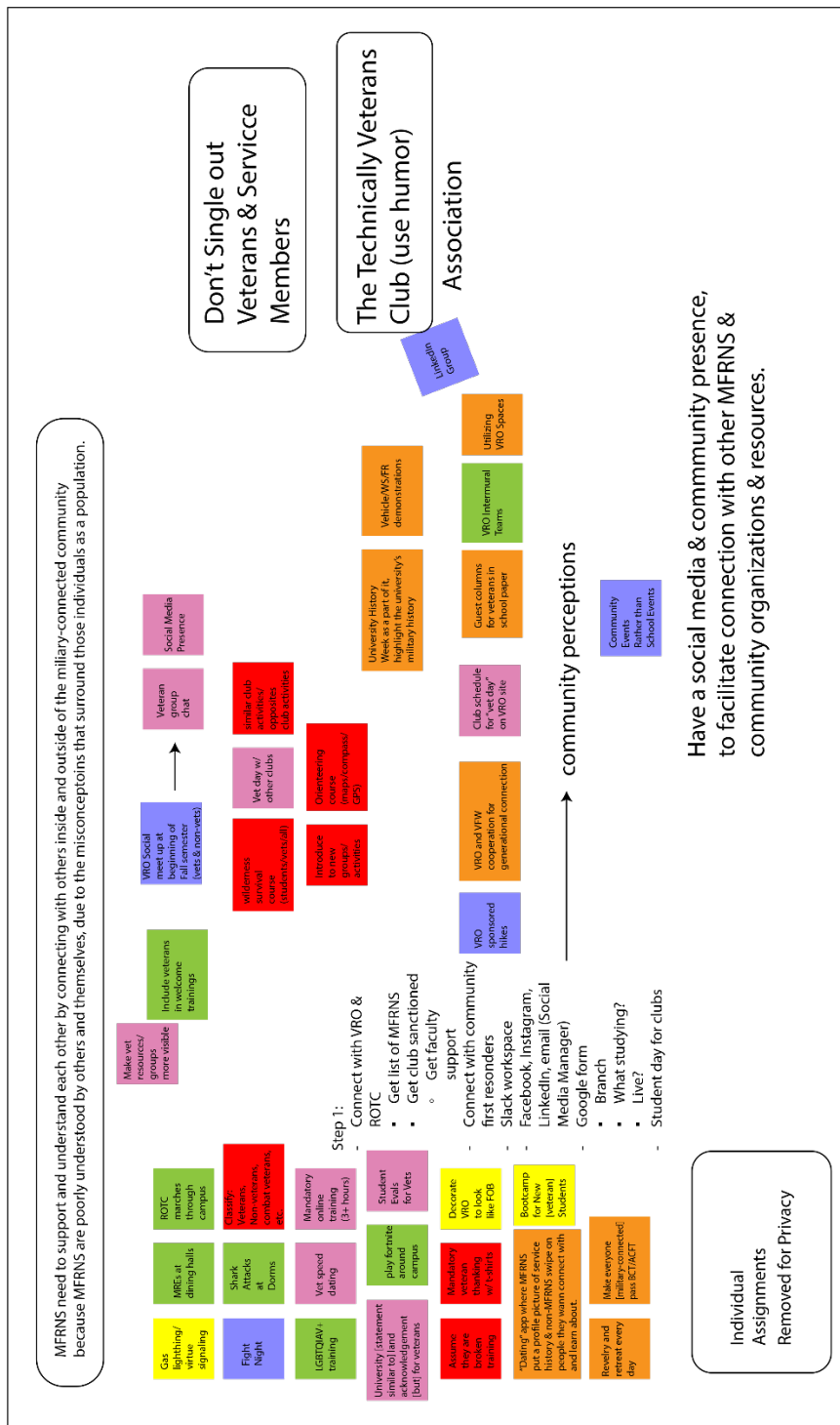
The participants jokingly referred to their prototype solution as *The Technically Veterans Association*, which involved creating and maintaining a social media presence to help connect student veterans to events and opportunities, and to promote connections with clubs and community organizations. The following excerpt reflects the participants' thinking about the naming of their prototype solution as *The Technically Veterans Association.*

Cameron: We should put up the Technically Veterans Club (later changed to *association).*

Thomas: That'd be a funny thing.

Richard: It is something to laugh at. Maybe that's something too, is like we need to like, like even jokingly address this whole thing like, Well, I think veteran! Or... "meh" veteran.

Thomas: Kind of apply just, you know, in the veteran community. You'll get humor as a way to cope or to bond, or you know? Kind of a smart way to go about it.

The name reflects the changed perceptions the student veteran participants had of themselves as a result of participating in the innovation workshop with one another. They recognized that while perceptions of hierarchies of *veteran-ness* existed within the veteran community, they had more in common than not. This shifted their perspectives about themselves and others and resulted in them collectively trying to subvert common assumptions about what veteran means. The participants accomplished this by downplaying the perceptions of veteran status by referring to their solution as the *Technically Veterans Association.*

Their prototype solution, the *Technically Veterans Association,* represents the synthesis and evolution of the student veteran participants' perceptions of themselves and

others as veterans. The design thinking process offered opportunities for the participants to share their identities with each other, while also negotiating what that meant to them and others through the workshop activities. By having their student veteran identities as a central component of the workshop community, participants were able to identify similarities in their experiences of service, discern what was/was not important, and establish trust with each other as they shared their thoughts and opinions (Wenger, 2000). This created an environment equipped with practices that allowed the participants to engage deeply with each other as they negotiated amongst themselves what it meant to be a student veteran on their own terms.

Downtime

RQ 2 focused on how student veteran identities were shaped as they participated in the workshop setting. The participants spent unstructured time together where stories, perspectives, and experiences were shared organically—resulting in shifts in perspectives of the student veterans about themselves and others. While design thinking structured the means to formally share and negotiate what student veteran identities meant to the participants, the workshop provided unstructured time for further sharing and building of camaraderie. With RQ 2's focus on the shaping of student veteran identities in the workshop setting, it was important to provide space where participants had the opportunity to share and shape each other's identities within VCT's student veteran third space (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017).

Every workshop session had scheduled downtime for the participants to take a break or eat a meal together. The first session had a pizza lunch, and the last two sessions

provided breakfast burritos to eat before getting started. During these moments, everyone

would sit and chat about their week, touch on random topics, or share a story from their

military or school experiences. These unstructured times presented an opportunity for the

participants to leverage the relational resources (Nasir & Cooks, 2009) of their workshop-

supported associations with each other. There was no pressure to get back on the task,

and the conversation stayed loose and friendly. Rather than having to be mission-focused

on the goals of the innovation workshop, this time provided opportunities for sharing

other aspects of their lives with one another. For instance, during the final workshop the

group was eating breakfast and the conversation turned to the housing market that had

recently been seeing a large jump in prices. The conversation was between me, Richard,

and Thomas. William and Cameron were running late and had yet to arrive. The topic of

houses started as we spoke about where we lived, with Thomas interjecting how he

managed to purchase his house before the housing market became too pricey.

> *Thomas*: Yeah. We bought it right as it started to go kind of crazy. Right before it hit its peak value and value so far, I guess. We could sell it and make $100,000 on top of what we paid. And then we can live in a van down by the river (a reference to a Saturday Night Live Sketch featuring Chris Farley). (chuckling) Yeah.

> *Richard:* I know. This is like a dark thing than... or whatever. We just had a pandemic. They're constantly every night saying so many people are dying, so many people are dying. I am like, okay, and they say, there's no housing! And I am like, which one is it? Okay?

> *Thomas:* Yeah, are they filling the houses with bodies?

> *Richard:* I thought this was supposed to be clearing up some space here! I joke because there was this one lady in her neighborhood. We live in apartments right now, but she ... Well, she did die actually, now that I think about that. But for a while, she's kind of a she's just old and she just was like, not in touch with reality. So, she complained about

the younger generation. But I joked with my wife, like we should just go through the neighborhood and look for, like, the older people's houses and be like, "yeah, this looks good."

Researcher: It's just how it is like, you know, I've had a few people ask me, hey, do you have any older folks in our neighborhood?

Thomas: Oh, that is just the way to do it right now. Save you the $10,000 on top of whatever.

Richard: Well, that is what is crazy. My wife's sister, she lives in [a city in the Pacific Northwest], and they just sold their house which was like, tiny for 600k or something. And so now I'm, like, watching like, you sell your little dinky house for a ton of money and then just move over here. Yeah. And then it's like "Take whatever you want!"

Thomas: With the issues is with all the people who've moved from California's they're selling their 1000 square foot house for a million dollars and then buy for a million dollars and buy a 3000 square foot house in like a good area, anywhere.

Richard: And my thing too is like (having a job in) natural resources working there in like a smaller community, right? And then you have these like older people, like, decide they are gonna retire: "Let's go live in a smaller community and buy a house!" Yeah. And I'm, like, just like okay, glad I lived in this little slice of time.

The breakfast conversation holds a few notable interactions. First, the conversation turned toward a very real struggle of housing prices that were impacting Richard in particular. Richard, who was still living in a rented apartment, was venting his frustration with the current housing trends. As he expressed his frustration, he found that his viewpoint and frustrations with the housing market were shared with Thomas.

The other interesting aspect of this conversation is how the humor admittedly turned a little darker as Richard expressed his frustration with the current housing situation. Richard's darker joke about the pandemic's death toll and dropping supply of houses would have likely caused some discomfort had it been in a different setting with

non-veterans. Kartchner and Searle (2023) found that the study's student veterans felt more guarded with what they said in the context of higher education and weren't able to use the same dark humor and language in the civilian environments in which they now found themselves. The workshop environment provided a space where the participants felt comfortable with letting aspects of their veteran identities shine through, without needing to worry about judgment or reprisal. Downtime created a purposeful space for un-pressured communication and interaction with each other to exist in the workshop setting.

Another such example of a downtime conversation that built further familiarity among the participants occurred during a break between the equine and interview activities during the first session. The conversation began as William shared how the Air Force ROTC cadets would often practice drill and ceremony during morning workout sessions while the Army ROTC cadets would be doing PT (Physical Training).

William: So, working out [with the ROTC] we do Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday workouts and they do Monday, Wednesday, Friday, so every Wednesday we're in the field house with them all day. Like 90% of what they do is D&C (drill and ceremony). They have first formation outside with the guidons, and like all that crap (referring to traditional military activities).

Researcher: I don't know if it was like this for you guys, but we learned (beyond the basics of) D&C the last few days of boot camp. Just like okay, we better look like we're not a "soggy soup sandwich." (laughter)

Richard: Where did you go? (Asking the researcher)

Researcher: I was in [Fort] Jackson. Were you at [Fort] Jackson? (Asking Richard)

William: (Chiming in) I was at [Fort] Jackson, [unit number]. We had a brand-new building, so it was nice.

Researcher: That was my unit too, the [unit number]. I was in Alpha company.

William: That's what I was, [unit number] Alpha. Alpha and Bravo had brand new buildings, Charlie through Echo were in portables, so it was so nice.

Richard: I was at Fort Benning, so it's like, "home of the infantry," right? So, I wasn't in infantry training, so all the drill sergeants had this chip on their shoulder against you for that.

Researcher: So, they're like, "you're not an infantry soldier."

Richard: Yeah, so it was terrible. And then we come down to Fort Sill for more training, so yeah.

William: Why did they choose the hottest, most humid places to do training? (laughter)

Researcher: Because "if it ain't raining, it ain't training!" (laugher) You know it's gotta suck, if it doesn't suck, it's just not worth it.

Richard: Where did you two go? (Looking at Cameron and Thomas)

Cameron: Cape May.

Thomas: San Diego, baby! (laughter)

As the group sat and chatted before delving into the interview activity, the conversation turned toward where we all had done basic training as we entered our military service. This topic is one that everyone present could identify with due to the requirement to successfully complete a form of initial training before being considered a full-fledged service member. While on the surface it felt as if it was a simple conversation, it communicated aspects of military life that needed to be experienced to be understood. First, William and I had both undergone basic combat training not only at the same installation, but also with the same training unit, albeit with many years between those

experiences. This created an immediate understanding of not only what we had experienced in training, but also where we had experienced it. Having been trained at the same location provided a concrete connection between William and me. Second, this provided an opportunity for all the other participants to share where they had been trained, further communicating a commonality among the participants. Third, other elements of military experience crept in, such as seemingly having all the Army bases located in inhospitable locations, and some of the divisions that exist within the military, such as Richard's comment about being non-infantry at an infantry training installation. These seemingly simple comments communicated experiences that all the participants could identify with. Conversations such as this one helped provide a baseline to develop understanding and trust with each other as they saw that their military experiences weren't as different as they might previously have assumed.

The moment that I feel embodies the shift in participant perspectives the most happened as we were all eating breakfast during the second session. The exchange included everyone, except William, who had yet to arrive at the workshop. The conversation began as Cameron talked about communal housing for his summer employment. Richard made the association with living in communal housing with strangers with his time in the military living in close quarters with other soldiers in a remote location while deployed. Richard commented on having to deal with "those" people (people who are difficult), referring to his military deployment. This prompted me to bring up watching shows while deployed to kill boredom because we ran out of things to talk about while deployed. This led to the following conversation where the workshop

participants began to share similar experiences with each other.

> *Richard:* That's crazy because like BLM (Bureau of Land Management), they got the fire stations up on the west end and stuff. You remind me like a [military] deployment in the middle of nowhere and dealing with "those" people and you're just like, "oh, my life is miserable" (laughter).
>
> *Researcher:* I don't know about you, but we got so bored (on a deployment) and that's when *The Walking Dead* was just into its second season, and that's what we do. Our internet connection was so bad it would take us four or five days to download a single episode. Then we would download it and then we would all get together, about 10 of us in our little unit there, and we would crowd around the computer screen, and we'd watch it, and then we would talk about that one episode for the next week until the next one came out. (laughter)
>
> *Richard:* Is that show still going?
>
> *Thomas:* Yeah, it's just a waste of time I think at this point, I haven't watched it since season three, probably. When we would deploy out to the Navy ships to float around for three months at a time. It's like the worst place to be with a bunch of pissed off Marines every day. There's fights as ways to let out the frustration and then everyone has a terabyte hard drive that was filled with movies.
>
> *Cameron*: We had IT set up, like, a 20-terabyte hard drive. We had this server available throughout the whole boat! (Laughter from group)
>
> *Richard:* That is funny. I was going through my old hard drive and was going, why do I have these?
>
> *Researcher:* I did that about a year ago, I pulled out my hard drive. I'm not gonna watch any of these again!
>
> *Richard:* It is like all of the TV show *Los*t, I have no interest in *Lost* and here it is!
>
> *Researcher:* I watched so many movies that under normal circumstances I would have never watched those. But you get so bored!
>
> *Thomas*: Oh yeah. Anything that is not your daily life is, like, fantastic to watch.

On the surface, this conversation would seem to be about killing boredom, but that moment became a touchstone as everyone realized they had similar experiences during their military service. There were substantial amounts of our military experience where we were all just trying to find something to fill our time. And whether having been cooped up on a base or on a boat, the participants in the conversation all resorted to similar forms of entertainment. While often funny, the stories created common ground that most everyone seemed to experientially understand on some level.

This shared understanding helped continue to demonstrate and establish trust. Tying back into CoP, once trust and understanding were established among the participants, they felt free to share stories, jokes, and thoughts that were related to their salient student veteran identities (Wenger, 2000). The continued sharing of experiences, jokes, stories, and comments became contributing factors in helping shape how the participants perceived their student veteran identities and the identities of others. The moment presented above, and others like it, began to shift the participants' perspectives of themselves and each other as they interacted during unstructured times, such as eating a meal. In his final interview, Cameron stated:

> I think the biggest takeaway was that I felt like that veteran was... I wasn't a veteran, but it turns out, everybody just sat at a desk and didn't do anything! (laughter) So, it changed my view of what a veteran is. So that's the biggest thing.

Referring to the sitting around being bored helped Cameron realize that his experiences weren't far removed from those of the rest of the participants who had served in different branches of service that felt more "legitimate" to Cameron before he participated in the workshop. This new understanding helped him shift his perspective of what a veteran

was, which made Cameron rethink how he felt about his veteran status. As the

participants engaged with each other during downtime, they were able to communicate

experiences, from both the military and life in general. These experiences helped build

mutual understandings of each other, influence perceptions of themselves and others as

veterans, and reinforce the common backgrounds of being student veterans that the

participants all shared.

**Impact of the Workshop on Student
Veteran Identities**

Exploring the shaping of the participants' identities through workshop

participation was the objective of RQ 2. The structured activities based on design

thinking and the unstructured downtimes provided opportunities for the participants to

share their experiences with one another. Throughout the workshop, the participants

shaped and had their identities shaped by one another, leveraging the ideational,

relational, and material resources situated in the workshop setting (Nasir & Cooks, 2009).

During his final interview, Cameron stated that he felt that he "could accept the label" of

being a veteran, which stood in stark contrast to feeling that he was a veteran by

technicality only in the first workshop session. The interactions, activities, and overall

focus of the workshop impacted how Cameron and the others felt about themselves and

others as veterans. Before the workshop started, William worried about participating due

to having only completed Army Basic Combat Training (BCT) a year prior and was

feeling almost "ashamed" by the attention his uniform brought him due to his lack of

experience. As he participated in the workshop and got to know the other participants,

William noted in his interview that:

> Being with other student veterans that have been through before, they have that foundational understanding. They're the same type of individual I was, right? We're like, not the super high speed, like going out there on these like covert ops, right? But like, they did the work, like they put in the time, they know what it's like. So, not only do I not have to set up that groundwork (to explain stories and experiences), I don't have to worry about the different ways in which my story, or thought, or experience will be perceived, because I know that they're like, they're the same kind of person as I am.

William found that through his participation in the workshop, that he was "the same kind of person" as the other participants who had completed their military service. This revelation let him know that while he was still new to the military experience, that he still shared a common bond with other current and former service members—they understood him, and he understood them. Shared earlier in this theme, William spoke of the struggle to not have his military identity become a personality trait—in other words, he was trying to find a balance between his newly instilled military identity and those he already possessed. As William engaged with others in the workshop, he found commonalities with the other student veteran participants. The workshop environment provided a space where he could further explore his military identity that had taken a major role in his life with the understanding and support of others who he felt were fundamentally "the same kind of person" that he was. William was not alone in balancing the identities he carried, the other student veterans also continued to work on striking a balance with their military/veteran identities—even after having left military service up to many years prior.

While William and Cameron became more accepting of the veteran/military labels through their participation, Richard and Thomas, who had the longest periods of time post-military service, spoke about how their military service was now only a small

part of their identities. During the final AAR, Richard stated:

> I think for me, it's like, "oh, you served," and then the veteran (part of you) is the big portion of who you're identified as. Whereas really, it's just like that small component. Like, I'm still me and yeah, I did that thing. But I do my own stuff.

Richard noted that his veteran identity was only a small portion of who he was, and it was something he did not want others to define him by. Using VCT, Richard was communicating that his veteran identity was only one of many identities he inhabited (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017). He noted that when others found out that he served, his veteran identity would displace his other identities in their eyes. This emphasis on his veteran identity placed overt attention on a small part of who he felt he was. This was also echoed by Thomas.

> Yeah, for me, it's like, whenever I talk to people, or close friends, like, they, they still put me in the same group as everyone, a veteran, basically. And we don't often talk about other things that I like to do. And I feel like I'm going to now push more toward, let's get away from this. Like, yeah, sure, it's cool, or whatever you guys like asking questions. But there's other things that we can all do together that don't have to be focused on my experiences or whatever, you know? More of a broad, like Richard was saying, like, I'm not just that. I'm not just a veteran, like, there's a plethora of other things I like to do, and that I'm knowledgeable about that we can go do, or talk about, or whatever, you know? Saying, it (the workshop experience) made me want to, like, push more towards that stuff more outspokenly so.

Thomas also felt that his military experience dominated his relationships once people found out that he had served in the Marine Corps, even with his close friends. Seeing how even his friends treated him differently because of his military service, it is no surprise that he would opt to not disclose his military background in order to avoid his veteran identity becoming his only identity in the eyes of others.

Thomas noted that he had a "plethora of things" that he liked to do, and as a result

of participating in the workshop, he was ready to start pushing toward those interests and disabuse others of the notion that he was wholly defined by his military experience. After Thomas finished his thought, Richard further elaborated on their thread of conversation.

> Yeah, right. And maybe it's Yeah. It's like, okay, yes, I served and did my time, or whatever, but it sounds like prison. (Laughter from the group) It is the same thing (as what Thomas said). But like, I wish I could use that maybe as an entry point into things versus like, that (being a veteran) is the thing.

After sharing that thought, Thomas added, "that is a good way to put it." Richard and Thomas did not want to be defined by their veteran identities, as they felt it was only a small part of their identities. Inversely, they wanted to use those experiences and backgrounds as veterans as an entry point to participate in new activities and communities, without having their veteran identity wholly define who they were in the eyes of others. Returning to VCT, and the simultaneous identities that student veterans carry (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017), Thomas and Richard were keen on having their veteran identities play a role that allowed them to branch out into new interests without it crowding out their other identities due to the overt focus on it.

One of the benefits of structuring the design thinking workshop around coming up with a solution to improve the student veteran experiences at their institution, is that it made the student veterans' experiences and identities the focus and principal means to work toward a solution for the student veteran community. While not completely anticipated, the workshop's central purpose and activities had the effect of intensifying the level of thought, discourse, and introspection surrounding what being a student veteran meant to the participants. This was largely due to the requirement of sharing and negotiating their thoughts and feelings related to their own student veteran identities as a

part of the design thinking process. This resulted in rich conversations and shifts in perspectives of the participants.

Summary

In this chapter, I reported on four themes identified through data analysis to address the study's research questions. As a reminder, RQ1 asked: *how and in what ways did participation in the innovation workshop facilitate the establishment of purpose-driven camaraderie and a sense of community among student veterans?* To answer this question, I shared findings related to three themes that emerged from my data analysis. The first theme, *For us, teamwork is life and death,* outlined the backgrounds of student veteran participants, their collective predisposition toward teamwork, and the familiarity with innovation the students possessed coming into the workshop. These elements helped the student veterans to develop a sense of community in the workshop setting. These findings assisted in answering RQ1 by demonstrating that the shared background of military service and teamwork, coupled with design thinking practices to structure the teamwork promoted a sense of community among the participants.

The second theme, *Sidebar, and the back on task,* outlined how the central domain, practice, and community of the workshop helped boost the sense of camaraderie among the participants. These findings helped to answer RQ1 by demonstrating through the stories, jokes, and other interactions from the student veterans while participating around a central purpose in the workshop environment that they had begun to build friendship and camaraderie. The third theme, *Came for the horses,* addressed the role of

having a central purpose/domain for the workshop, and the role of old-timers in supporting participation. These findings helped to answer RQ1 by demonstrating through the draw of horses as a boundary activity, with the support of old-timers from the student veteran workshop and equine group, the participants were able to continue their participation in each of the communities. Taken together, these three themes addressed RQ1 by showing that domains which provide a purpose to student veteran participants, while being supported by the respective communities' old-timers were able to promote an environment where community and camaraderie could grow among the workshop participants.

Finally, the fourth theme, *Thank you for your service*, addressed RQ 2. As a reminder, RQ 2 asked: *how are student veteran identities shaped within the context of the workshop?* In response to this question, it was found that the workshop provided structured activities and unstructured times in an environment that provided opportunity for the student veteran participants to share, negotiate, and adapt their perceptions of themselves and others as veterans. *Thank you for your service*, shows how participants' identities were shaped at the same time as they shaped other participants' identities through the sharing of ideas, communication, and collaboration toward a final goal. These findings answer RQ 2 by demonstrating that through the environment and interactions provided by the workshop, that the participants were able to broaden their understanding of what it meant to be a student veteran with perceptible changes in how they viewed their identities.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter, my goal is to elucidate the connections across the theoretical and conceptual frameworks guiding this study, the research questions, methods, and findings. As a reminder, I situate this study in relation to CoP (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Nasir & Cooks, 2009; Wenger, 2018; Wenger et al., 2002), VCT (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017), and purpose-driven Camaraderie (Kartchner & Searle, 2023). My goal in designing and testing the student veteran innovation workshop was to determine if such an environment could foster purpose-driven camaraderie within a community of practice for student veterans. This goal is reflected in the two research questions that guided this study.

1. How and in what ways does participation in the innovation workshop facilitate the establishment of purpose-driven camaraderie among student veterans? How does the innovation workshop contribute to building a sense of community among student veterans on a higher education campus?

2. How are student veteran identities shaped within the context of the innovation workshop?

In the remainder of this chapter, I first contextualize the findings presented in Chapter IV in relation to the theoretical and conceptual frameworks guiding this study. This discussion is organized by research question. I then address limitations of this study, areas for future research, and implications of this study.

Research Question 1

Research question 1 inquired into how participation in the innovation workshop facilitated the development of purpose-driven camaraderie among student veterans and

further asked how the innovation workshop contributed to building a sense of community among student veterans on a higher education campus. Chapter IV presented three themes to address RQ 1, which are discussed in more detail below.

Community

The first theme, *For us, Teamwork is Life or Death,* showed how a common background and unique experiences as student veterans, teamwork, and design thinking practices aided in establishing a sense of community among the participants. CoP emphasizes how common backgrounds aid in effectively establishing a community, while differences in the experiences of community members result in rich interactions (Wenger et al., 2002). VCT illustrates that the common culture and background of student veterans is founded on respect, honor, and trust. Connecting to CoP, respect and trust also emerge in well-functioning communities (Wenger et al, 2002).

In Chapter IV, we saw how the participants came to appreciate the common elements of their backgrounds as student veterans that crosscut their distinct branches of military service, time and experience serving, and educational experiences. The sharing of service-related experiences, such as dealing with boredom during their military service, helped create a baseline understanding for an emerging sense of community. The commonality of having a military background was a strong enough influence that Thomas noted the sense of unspoken understanding about each other that existed among the participants. Cameron and William noted that their shared background made it easy to converse and understand each other. Throughout subsequent workshop sessions, participants built on this sense of rapport with one another as they established their

commonalities.

Further, their shared background as student veterans contributed to being able to connect over school-related experiences, such as being older, non-traditional students, compared to the average undergraduate student. The participants also shared institutional knowledge and resources pertaining to their educational and personal interests (e.g., the location of a makerspace on campus and fun elective academic courses). This is in-keeping with Wenger et al.'s (2002) emphasis on the role of both similar backgrounds and breadth of experience in a CoP. Shared experiences can make convening a CoP faster and easier while having unique backgrounds among the participants yields a rich community experience. Participants were able to share their repertoire and institutional knowledge (Wenger, 2018) with each other as a result of being brought together through workshop participation.

Contributing to the sense of community among the participants was the importance of teamwork stemming from their military experience. There is an emphasis of teamwork in the military that is echoed in the Soldier's Creed, that places emphasis on being a member of a team, having a mission, and taking care of each other (U.S. Department of the Army, 2003). Thomas referred to the existential nature of teamwork for service members by calling it a matter of "life and death." Cameron also noted that when he had something to work toward, he would "put more on the table." The teamwork found in the workshop was structured around design thinking practices to aid in working toward the workshop's objective. These practices had elements of familiarity that all the student veterans were able to identify from their previous experiences problem-solving.

William connected his experience to the scientific method, while Cameron and Richard saw similarities from their military service.

While disagreements happened, as with Thomas and Cameron discussing potential connections with other students, they were able to find a middle ground with the input from William to continue moving the design thinking process forward. This example illustrates the mission-first mentality as they put aside their disagreements to find a compromise to continue moving forward, while also demonstrating the respect and trust that they felt for one another.

Taking a deeper look at the trust and respect that was demonstrated during the workshop, VCT tenet 11 states that "veteran culture is built on a culture of respect, honor, and trust" (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017, p. 663). In the workshop, this was evident in how the participants worked together to develop a solution to their problem statement, a predisposition largely rooted in their military experiences (Demers, 2011; Soeters et al., 2006). CoP reinforces the idea that veteran culture is underpinned by trust, respect, and honor by positing that respect and trust are byproducts and features of a well-functioning community of practice (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 28). Using CoPs perspective, it is not surprising that working together as a team while in the military would help build and support trust and respect among service members. To further nuance VCT's tenet 11, I posit that teamwork is an additional element of veteran culture because it reinforces and structures the respect and trust that are among the hallmarks that underpin the culture. To provide further support to this, Erickson (1997) addresses that perceptions of culture have an overt focus on the explicit, or visible elements—which are typically only the "tip of

the iceberg of culture" (p. 39) Honor, trust, and respect would be considered the elements of veteran culture that are explicitly visible, but under the surface, the mission-focused teamwork found in military service yields another compelling and complementary element to enrich the definition of veteran culture found in VCT.

Camaraderie

The second theme, *Sidebar, and the Back on Task,* addressed how camaraderie began to emerge among the workshop participants. The findings in this theme are tied to CoP (Wenger, 2018), purpose-driven camaraderie (Kartchner & Searle, 2023), and VCT (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017). Camaraderie was supported by the workshop's budding environment of respect and trust, which are hallmarks of a veteran culture and well-functioning CoPs (Wenger et al., 2002). The workshop provided a space where a common background, familiarity with one another, trust, and respect provided a foundation for camaraderie to emerge among the participants.

In Chapter IV, I addressed how the participants increasingly became more comfortable with each other as the workshop sessions progressed. Thomas and William both noted how it felt as if they were coming to spend time with friends as they began the third workshop session. The feeling of being comfortable and accepting of each other was noted by all of the participants. A key driver of being able to feel comfortable was their shared military background, or as Thomas put it the "veteran aspect" of their relationships with each other, which resulted in the participants feeling like they did not need to worry about what they said, or how they said it. Cameron, who had recently separated from service, stated that it felt like the ability to converse was "easy" and

comparable to how he communicated with others while serving. William echoed the ease of communication that existed in the workshop by stating that he felt he could say anything, to which Richard agreed.

The camaraderie was noticeable through the jokes and stories the participants shared with each other, and how those jokes and stories evolved as the workshop progressed. The joking started while the participants introduced themselves to each other with Richard asking Cameron about the correct way to pronounce *buoy.* This led to stories and self-deprecating humor, such as communicating experiences of feeling noticeably older than other undergraduate students. This evolved to the point where the participants were poking fun at each other's branches of service, like the conversation among all the participants about MREs and the Coast Guard. The participants even started to directly poke fun at each other by the final workshop, with Thomas jokingly warning William to not turn out like Richard. As the jokes, stories, and familiarity increased, so did the sense of camaraderie. William referred to this as "breaking down barriers," as a sign of a growing rapport and trust amongst the participants as they worked together toward a central goal.

Having a central purpose or objective also helped further support the budding sense of camaraderie among the participants. During his final interview William noted how laid-back the workshop environment was, while still being mission focused. As a result of the workshop environment, William felt that the group was able to achieve "a lot," which was a sentiment that Cameron shared, in that he felt that he would "put more on the table" when there was a meaningful purpose to help others. Returning to VCT and

CoP, having a central purpose and common background to drive their interactions and relationships aided in promoting an environment where mutual trust and respect, being hallmarks of a well-functioning community (Wenger et al., 2002) and veteran culture (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017), resulted in a greater sense of camaraderie to emerge among the student veteran participants. This theme further nuances purpose-driven camaraderie (Kartchner & Searle, 2023), by suggesting that key components to developing camaraderie among student veterans are rooted in mutual respect, trust, open communication, and a common objective.

Old-Timers and Purpose

The third theme, *Came for the Horses, and not the Veterans*, focused on what drew the student veterans to participate in the workshop, and the role of CoP's old-timers, boundary activities (Wenger et al., 2002), and LPP (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in promoting further participation in the workshop and veteran equine group. The theme further addresses that while purpose-driven camaraderie is valued among student veterans, it is not necessarily something that they are seeking out.

Returning to Chapter IV, as the workshop began, it became apparent that the student veteran participants were interested in working with the horses and thought little of the opportunity to come together and learn something with other veterans. During the second session, Cameron commented that he had only come to be with the horses, to which Richard readily agreed. During his final interview Thomas also noted that the horses were the primary motivation to participate in the workshop. To the participants, being with other veterans or working on a solution using design thinking was not a major

draw. In some ways, this challenges the idea of purpose-driven camaraderie articulated

by Kartchner and Searle (2023). In their original conceptualization of purpose-driven

camaraderie, Kartchner and Searle articulated that bringing student veterans together

around a shared purpose would promote camaraderie but, at least for these participants,

coming together with other student veterans was not initially appealing. In addition, the

identified shared purpose, the innovation workshop, was not initially a reason to come

together. Instead, the equine assisted learning activities and the opportunities to work

with horses proved the hook that attracted student veterans to the innovation workshop.

This suggests that future efforts to foster purpose-driven camaraderie need to consider

that student veterans are not necessarily looking for connection with each other as a

primary motivator for participation in an event or opportunity designated for this

population.

Data from the innovation workshop showed that while the student veteran

participants valued the sense of purpose and camaraderie they experienced in the military

(Kartchner & Searle, 2023), they were not actively seeking it out in their lives after

military service. The data offers two compelling reasons for why this might be so. First,

given the deficit framing of veterans in the research literature and in media and the public

eye, the student veteran participants had a conflicted relationship with their veteran

identities. For various reasons, each of the participants felt like they weren't veteran

enough to claim the veteran identity for themselves. This was clearly communicated

through the conversation that Cameron and Richard had during the first session's

interview activity. Thomas also expressed how he felt that he had not earned the veteran

distinction because he did not *do* anything, such as deploy or see combat, while serving. William also felt at odds with his identity because he was so new into his military experience, and like Thomas, felt that he had not "done" anything to consider himself worthy of being thanked for his military service.

Second, for student veterans who had separated from the military (all of the participants but William), they saw their service as only one aspect of richer and fuller lives that included other interests and identities. Toward the end of the final workshop, Thomas and Richard noted how their veteran identities were only a small part of who they were, and avoided sharing it so as not to have it take an outsized role in how they were perceived by non-veterans. Cameron also noted during the second session that he had gotten out of the military "for a reason" and was not keen on feeling like he was back in the military as he sought new associations and opportunities. William also noted the struggle for his new-found military identity to not become a defining personality trait, particularly on days when he had to wear his military uniform on campus. Turning to VCT, the participants were all seeking some sort of balance with their veteran/military identities that coexisted with their other identities (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017). For these reasons, the idea of hanging out with other veterans was not initially compelling to the participants. This suggests that future iterations of the innovation workshop focused on purpose-driven camaraderie should not place an overt focus on its military/veteran elements. An emphasized focus on the military and veteran status may deter potential participation from student veterans who may not feel like they earned their veteran status, or who don't want their veteran identities to crowd out their other interests and identities.

With the participants initially expressing a lack of regard for the student veteran component of the workshop, it presented an unexpected challenge to promote their interest in the workshop content beyond working with horses. CoP offers a solution as to how to engage individuals in moving from the periphery to the center of a domain of interest through Legitimate Peripheral Participation (LPP; Lave & Wenger, 1991) and boundary activities (Wenger et al., 2002). Lave and Wenger coined LPP to denote the process of "newcomers" becoming participants within a CoP. A critical component of a new-comer's ability to participate rests upon the "old-timers" within the community. The old-timers impart their knowledge to the newcomers as they practice alongside each other in the CoP. This was similar to the student veterans entering the workshop. While they did not have the overt desire to interact with the veteran component of the workshop, they were willing to participate alongside an old-timer (me), who helped them see the value and processes of engaging with the workshop's central domain. Over time, the participants also grew to appreciate being with one another as they worked together. Throughout the workshop, I demonstrated the design thinking process, while working alongside the participants as they practiced it. Further, as Thomas identified how design thinking was useful in his professional trajectory, he was able to gain new connections, resources, and insights into the design field as he interacted and built rapport with the old-timer (me).

The implementation of LPP in conjunction with old-timers is similar to mentoring, which is a familiar practice that has been employed with student veterans in higher education. The concept of *peer mentoring* among student veterans has seen

traction in practice (Kirchner et al., 2014), and echoes the preference that veterans have

to work with other veterans, rather than institutions (Blaauw-Hara, 2016; Luchsinger,

2016). Illustrating the preference to work with other veterans, being comfortable with me

as a student veteran peer helped Thomas be able gain new skills and resources yielded

through our rapport that grew throughout the workshop. As the student veterans began to

participate in the workshop, they had old-timers on hand to help mentor and guide their

interests in innovation and with horses.

Coupled with old-timers in the workshop setting, the equine-based boundary

activity became an important element to the workshop experience. CoP identifies these

overlapping events and collaborations between boundary sharing communities as

boundary activities (Wenger et al., 2002). Boundary activities are facilitated by

knowledge brokers, or community members who have multi-membership in boundary-

sharing communities. In the case of the workshop, I had membership as a student

veteran/designer, and I had experience with equine learning activities. This boundary

activity also created a space where the participants could further their participation and

interests with horses and develop a deeper insight and connection to the empathy stage of

design thinking. Returning to the reticence to engage in the veteran portion of the

workshop, the second equine activity took on new importance as a boundary activity, as

the first equine activity did not resonate with the participants, and we did not get as far as

I had intended into the design thinking process and activities. The freeworking activity

was selected to replace the planned equine activity, due to the connections to the empathy

stage of the design thinking process. With the support of the equine specialists, we were

able to weave perspectives of empathy into the process of building rapport and learning to communicate with a horse. This second equine-based boundary activity had a more profound impact on the student veterans, as they each gleaned important insights into themselves and the concept of empathy. Thomas and William both identified the second workshop as the moment where they felt things started to take off with the group of participants and design thinking topics. The boundary activities also resulted in Richard and William both continuing their participation with the equine community outside of the workshop setting.

The theme, *Came for the Horses, and not the Veterans,* addresses how purpose-driven camaraderie (Kartchner & Searle, 2023) is potentially something that student veterans are not actively seeking out in their higher education experiences. Factors, such as not feeling like they fit the perceived veteran mold and not wanting their veteran identities to take an outsized role in their experiences may present obstacles to the desire to interact or participate with other veterans. CoP presents potential solutions to support the development of purpose-driven camaraderie through the use of old-timers and boundary activities (Wenger et al., 2002). A boundary activity can be used as a fun/non-veteran hook to promote student veterans' interest in participating with each other student in a purpose-driven environment—while old-timers can help move them beyond their initial hesitations in participating by facilitating their LPP.

Summary

RQ 1 focused on how purpose-driven camaraderie and community developed among the student veterans as a result of participating in the innovation workshop. In

response to this question, the study found that the military backgrounds of the participants played an important role in quickly establishing a commonality among them. The shared background of military service, coupled with trust and respect, which help form the foundations of veteran culture (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017) provided a starting point for the participants to begin developing a sense of community among themselves. VCT also supports the concepts of trust and respect existing in functional CoPs (Wenger et al., 2002), creating further theoretical connections between the two theories. As community developed among the participants in the workshop, the rapport among the student veterans grew as "barriers were broken down" (William), and trust and respect continued to be cultivated—even when there was disagreement. Their shared identities as student veterans also provided the opportunity for the participants to impart their repertoire and institutional knowledge with each other. Teamwork and mission-focus were identified by the participants as being an important aspect of the workshop. With teamwork being identified as being an important component to both purpose-driven camaraderie and military culture, I have proposed that it be included as a further nuance of what underpins veteran culture, as espoused by VCT.

The workshop further provided an environment where camaraderie could emerge. The workshop progressively established a sense of community, trust, and respect. This environment, coupled with the mission-first mentality instilled by military service helped promote the emergence of stories, comments, and jokes that indicated a level of mutual acceptance. Over the course of the workshop, the stories and jokes became more personal, indicating increased levels of trust and familiarity with each other. The

inclusion of trust and respect, as espoused by VCT (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017) and CoP (Wenger et al., 2002), coupled with open communication and a mission-first focus all contributed to a better understanding of the distinct influences on developing and maintaining purpose-driven camaraderie among student veterans.

This study also demonstrated that while student veterans may value purpose-driven camaraderie, they may not actively seek out interactions with other student veterans. This presented a key challenge to establishing purpose-driven camaraderie among student veterans, especially considering the factors that may influence how their respective student identities are perceived. While not a part of the initial plan for the workshop or study, the equine activities became focal points of interest to promote student veteran participation, while old-timers promoted further LPP in the workshop and with the equine group (Lave & Wenger, 1991). Providing fun, non-veteran related hooks with the support of old-timers to encourage participation of student veterans may help overcome hurdles identified by this study in developing purpose-driven camaraderie among student veterans.

Research Question 2

Pivoting to RQ 2, I again present the question to lead out the discussion. *How are student veteran identities shaped within the context of the innovation workshop?* This second research question focused on the role of identity in the workshop experience. Identity is one of the theoretical constructs that connects VCT (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017) and CoP (Wenger, 2018). To explore the identities of the student veterans in the CoP-

inspired workshop, I used Nasir and Cooks (2009) *Identity Resources*. I identified the key identity resources, and how they interacted, supported, and influenced student veterans' identities within the workshop environment. The final theme of Chapter IV responds to RQ 2, addressing how the student veterans' perceptions of themselves and other veterans were influenced through the activities, interactions, and material resources in the workshop. This theme further identifies the influences on student veteran identities that are both external and internal to the veteran third-space they occupy.

Ideational Resources

The first question that the participants asked each other during the first session was, *what do you say when someone says, "thank you for your service?"* This question not only became an important mechanism to converse about their feelings toward their veteran identities, but it also became a fixture on the whiteboard as the participants worked to define a problem statement. The perceptions of themselves and others that student veteran participants brought into the workshop were the basis of their initial *ideational resources* (Nasir & Cooks, 2009). Overwhelmingly, the participants did not think of themselves as veterans, in the sense that they did not fall into the perception of veterans that they collectively held. That perception was rooted in the idea that a "real" veteran was someone who had "done something" to earn that distinction (e.g., was wounded, saw combat, deployed). Further, Richard floated the idea that there were hierarchies or "classes" of veterans within the veteran community. This was supported by Thomas's inability to join the VFW organization because he had never deployed overseas. The influences of the real or perceived "classes" of veterans on the participants'

perceptions of themselves can be seen in comments and conversations during the workshop. For instance, Cameron referred to himself as "technically veteran" because he was granted veteran benefits, but he felt that his Coast Guard service was not comparable to the other branches of service. Thomas never deployed into an area of conflict and never felt like he "did" anything. Richard felt like he did not belong with the "real" veterans, even though he had a combat deployment, but he did not see any action. William was just getting started with his military experience and felt almost "ashamed" by the attention he would receive as he wore his military uniform on campus several days a week, as is required of all ROTC cadets.

VCT claims that "veterans are constructed (written) by civilians, often as deviant characters" (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017, p. 662). Many of the perceptions the participants had about the status of veterans were derived from the idea that the "real" veterans were the ones that programs like the *Wounded Warrior Project* would support. With overt attention given to the "wounded warrior-type" veterans by the media, politics (Taylor et al., 2016), and deficit-driven institutional supports (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017; Vacchi & Berger, 2014)—it is understandable why the participants compared themselves to the "wounded warrior" perception of being a veteran. With this group of student veterans, deficit thinking-based perspectives and services had influenced them to not see themselves as being full-fledged veterans, because they did not meet the perceived criteria. While VCT addresses the way that student veterans are viewed by civilians, what is not addressed is the way that veterans internalize these perceptions. Further, there exist dynamics within the veteran space that exert influence on how veterans feel amongst

themselves—as there are also powerful institutions that are situated *within* the veteran community exerting influence.

VCT also posits that "veterans occupy a third space on the border of multiple conflicting and interacting power structures, languages, and systems (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017, p. 661). While VCT addresses these power structures as bordering a space where veterans are neither quite civilian nor quite military, there exist institutions and influences within the veteran space that propagate the notion of different levels of veterans (see Figure 17).

Figure 17

Influences Outside and Inside the Student Veteran Third-Space
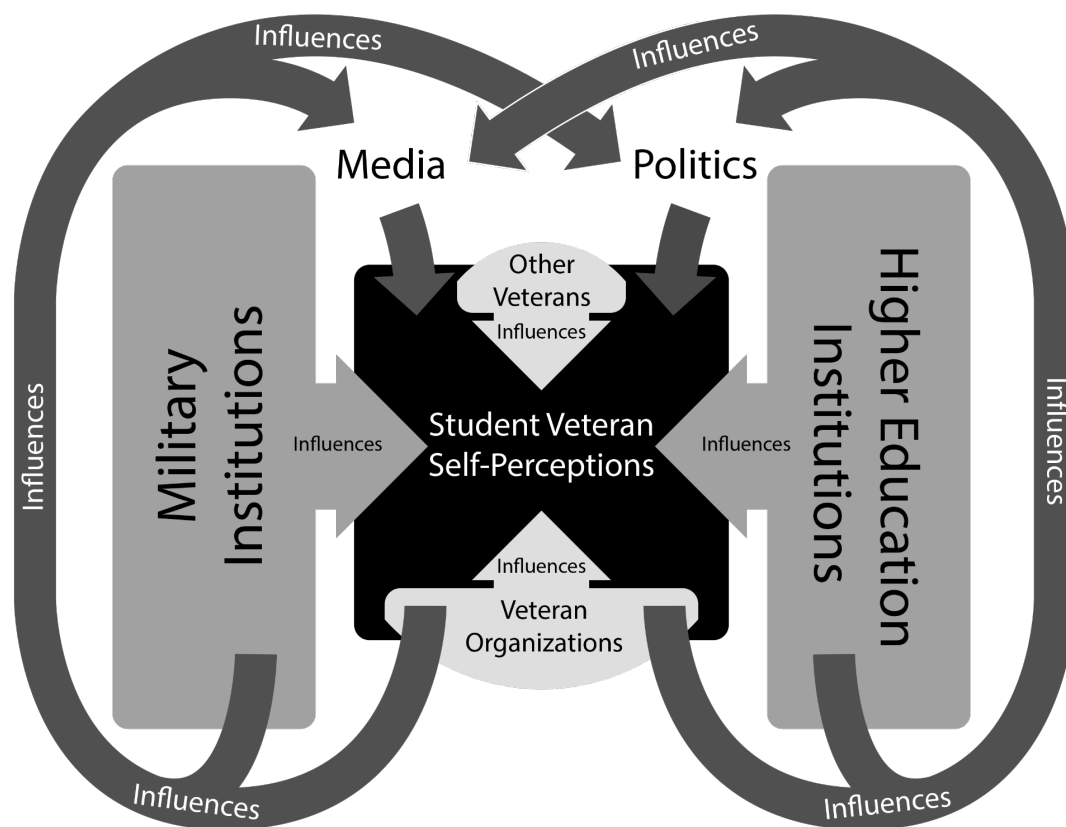
While there are organizations in the veteran space, such as the American Legion, that welcome all former service members, deep divides still exist within, and external to, the veteran community that impact the ways that veterans feel about their military service. For example, the VFW is one of the oldest veterans organizations in the country, with strong political connections, and is an established institution within the veteran space. While they aim to help and support veterans, Thomas was not given the opportunity to associate with other veterans in their respective space because he had not hit the appropriate benchmark of "veteran-ness," by having deployed in a foreign war. Another example is the *Wounded Warrior Project,* which was referenced by the participants. The overt emphasis and attention on services for veterans with service-related disabilities, or the institutional reinforcement of differences in service (e.g., VFW), had contributed to the workshop participants feeling like they weren't quite up to that standard as the veterans "that did something." This can be seen in the way that Cameron and Richard discussed the meaning of being a veteran. Richard alluded to not feeling comfortable being around the "guys that are damaged," due to not having sustained service-related disabilities during his time that would have made him feel like he belonged. Cameron alluded to not wanting to potentially be taking "a spot" in a program from a veteran with service-related disabilities, because he felt that he did not need it and wanted to make sure that they had access to it. Further, not only do institutions within the veteran space perpetuate distinctions between veterans, but veterans can also contribute to the self-perceptions of veterans. At the end of the workshop Thomas noted that while Richard and I had deployed, "you guys didn't hold

that over us," which was something that he had previously experienced.

To bring this full circle and look at the perceptions that exist inside, and outside of the veteran community, it is not surprising that the participants felt uncomfortable with being thanked for their service, as they did not feel like they met a certain standard of being veteran-enough. Having discussed the divisions about identity that exist within the veteran community, the workshop participants also struggled with the perceptions of non-veteran individuals, and the resulting treatment. Both Richard and Cameron explicitly stated a few times during the workshop that they were not interested in doing military- or veteran-related things. As Cameron put it, "I got out of the Coast Guard for a reason." The idea of being back in an environment similar to the military was not appealing to Richard, Cameron, or Thomas—the three participants who had completed their military careers. Richard made the observations that he felt that when someone (non-military) would find out about his service, that in their eyes, it would become the *only* defining characteristic of who he was. In the past, to avoid this and similar encounters, Richard, Cameron, and Thomas all opted to not share their military background with others.

While the external influences were felt by the participants, it seemed as if the influences from *within* the student veteran community had more sway on how the participants felt about their student veteran identities and how they used them. On a practical note, the student veterans in this study identified different hierarchies of veteran-ness within the veteran space that they perceived to exist and had strong associations with what is deemed to be a veteran. This can also have the effect of deterring student veterans from interacting with one another, or not pursuing

opportunities available to student veterans, because they don't feel that they "did" something to earn that status or opportunity.

Relational and Material Resources

Continuing with Nasir and Cooks (2009), *relational resources* stem from the interactions and relationships with the community members. While the old-timers, such as myself and the equine specialists played a role in the workshop, the focus of this theme is on the student veteran participants, who acted as the primary relational resources within the setting. As the workshop progressed, and the participants worked together and interacted together, they began to influence each other's initial perspectives on what it meant to be a veteran. One such conversation centered around fighting boredom, which had an impact on Cameron. He later stated that "it turns out, everybody just sat at a desk and didn't do anything!" His perception was shifted as he and the other participant freely spoke to one another about their experiences and perspectives. In essence, the relational resources began to influence the initial ideational resources that the participants entered with. The workshop provided opportunity for the student veterans to be key mutual relational resources through structured *design thinking* activities and unstructured times. The workshop environment acted as a space where they could build relationships, share, and broker what it meant to be a student veteran.

Again, returning to Nasir and Cooks (2009) identity resources, *material resources* are the physical artifacts and resources used to practice within a CoP. The primary material resources of the workshop were the *whiteboard, sticky notes, pens*, and *markers*. A major component of practice within the workshop was the *design thinking* process

(Brown & Katz, 2019). As described in Chapter III and Chapter IV, the participants made use of the material resources to *define* the problem they wished to address, and later to *ideate* solutions during the final session.

These activities and material resources had the effect of allowing all the participants to post their thoughts and ideas on the board and begin to discuss, rearrange, and cluster their thoughts into coherent themes and concepts. An example of this was seen in both how the participants began to cluster concepts relating to their assumptions and the assumptions of others concerning their veteran status. Through the design thinking activities and materials, the participants were constantly brokering with each other what they were seeing emerge on the board—contributing to an evolving sense of what it meant to be a student veteran. This evolving perspective was encapsulated in the potential solution resulting from the workshop, which they titled *The Technically Veterans Association.* The title distilled down the participants' feelings and thoughts about the differences between veterans, and how they felt about themselves. William noted how impactful to him it was to distill down all of their collective thoughts and experiences into a single, actionable concept. By the end of the workshop, their perspective had shifted to looking for the commonalities and looking past the differences in the student veteran community and between themselves. The material resources in the workshop provided the means to structure, communicate, and negotiate what it meant to be a student veteran for all of the participants.

Summary

As the student veterans entered the workshop, they all overwhelmingly felt that

they did not quite fit their perceptions of what a veteran should be. The participants

further identified that there existed different hierarchies of being veteran that were

influenced by internal and external influences related to the veteran third-space (Phillips

& Lincoln, 2017) they occupied. These influences impacted self-perceptions of student

veterans, contributing to the feeling that they had not "done anything" to earn their

veteran identities or status. The study identified these external and internal influences to

have potential impacts on student veterans' self-perceptions regarding their veteran

status, resulting in a possible detrimental effect in seeking opportunities available to

veterans or interactions with each other.

Further, the workshop offered opportunities for the participants to share their

thoughts and feelings concerning their perceptions of themselves and others as veterans.

Through sharing and negotiating their thoughts and ideas concerning student veterans

amongst themselves, the student veterans were able to leverage each other as influential

relational resources (Nasir & Cooks, 2009) during the workshop. Coupled with the

material resources provided through the design thinking activities, the participants shared

and negotiated their thoughts and ideas concerning student veterans. As the workshop

progressed, the participants experienced shifts in how they perceived themselves and

others as veterans.

Limitations

This study presents a number of limitations that will need to be addressed in

future work. The first limitation is the limited sample size and demographics of the

participants. There were only four participants, all of whom were Caucasian males, who represented three of the six military branches of service. This small size and narrow sampling of participants leaves many experiences, stories, practices, and perspectives unexplored. This could be remedied by offering multiple workshops at a variety of educational institutions to be able to capture a more diverse demographic of student veterans, including range and variation in their student veteran identities and experiences.

The second limitation of the study is my positionality. I was an integral part of the workshop as I played the roles of *old-timer* (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and *knowledge broker* (Wenger et al., 2002) while facilitating the workshop sessions. My identity as a student veteran and a researcher allowed me to be able to become a meshed part of the experience, permitting me to understand the experiences and backgrounds of the participants in a way that a non-military veteran facilitator or researcher would not be able to do. Without a student veteran to act as *an old-timer* or *knowledge broker*, replicating the workshop environment might not be possible. A potential solution to this would be to run the workshop longitudinally as a series with different cohorts of participants. After the first few cohorts, a few of the student veterans from the previous sessions could become the facilitators, old-timers, and knowledge brokers for future workshop participants. This solution also addresses *time* as another limitation of the study. The workshop only spanned around 10 hours of participant involvement. By running multiple cohorts and supporting the continued participation of former cohorts as they participate within the broader CoP, there arises the opportunity to collect longitudinal data on student veteran participation in CoPs.

The third limitation of this study is recruitment. This study identified the hesitancy of the participants to attend veteran-related activities for the fear of not taking the place of a veteran who needed it, or not fitting in by not being veteran-enough. As it turned out, a couple of the participants almost did not sign up to come to the workshop due to those factors. It has made me rethink how I would recruit student veterans for future studies. I would remove any verbiage or labels that would unintentionally communicate that the study, activity, or service was for a veteran "who did something." What this would look like is something that would need to be identified through further research with the student veteran community to better understand the perceptions they hold about themselves and the veteran community. This approach would be in line with VCT's eighth tenet, "Veterans are more appropriately positioned to inform policy and practice regarding veterans" (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017, p. 662).

Future Work

This study, and its allied conceptual framework, presents an opportunity to further develop the workshop format as an entry point for student veterans and to expand it into sustained CoPs. One of the gaps in research and practice is the lack of longitudinal data on student veterans (Massa & Gogia, 2017; Molina & Morse, 2015). The conceptual framework and innovation workshop established by this study can act as the means of being able to follow student veterans throughout their education in an asset-driven environment. This would provide a rich opportunity to delve into their experiences and form a better understanding of student veteran identities and how they are used in

academic, interpersonal, and professional pursuits. There would likely need to be a few minor shifts in the overall structure and focus of the workshop to be able to use it as an entry point into sustained student veteran CoPs.

One of these changes would be to shift away from coming up with a solution to improve the student veteran experience, to something that can be utilized repeatedly with different cohorts of student veterans—while still maintaining student veteran identities as key components of all three CoP pillars. To this end, for an expanded, future version of this study, I would shift the focus to having the participants use design thinking to help design each other's academic and professional trajectories. This process would turn the design thinking process onto each of the participants as an individual, with the entire group helping them design their experiences. Design thinking process is a series of continual approximations, meaning that after their initial introduction into designing their own experiences, they can continue supporting each other as they work toward their desired outcomes. This process also has the potential of continuing beyond the confines of a workshop space, especially if other student veteran "old-timers" from previous cohorts promote new participant LPP in an inward trajectory. This idea also embraces the idea of veterans helping veterans (Blaauw-Hara, 2016; Luchsinger, 2016), while potentially boosting LPP (Lave & Wenger, 1991) in other communities.

Conclusion

While this study was not designed to generalize to the broader population (Yin, 1994), it has several implications for further practice and research within the student

veteran space. The main aim of the workshop was to further investigate purpose-driven camaraderie in a setting designed to foster the sense of community and camaraderie that student veterans experienced while serving in the military. A secondary objective was to investigate how the workshop setting helped shape the identities of the student veteran participants. To this end, I implemented CoP (Wenger, 2018) as the structure and analytical lens, which was used along with VCT (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017) to interpret the findings.

The study identified teamwork as an important element to the workshop and military experience, contributing to a more nuanced understanding of VCT's definition of veteran culture (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017). Further, this study contributes to a purpose-driven camaraderie (Kartchner & Searle, 2023) in two notable ways. First, suggesting that mutual respect, trust, open communication, and a common objective contribute to establishing purpose-driven camaraderie. Second, while student veterans may value purpose-driven camaraderie, the workshop participants were not actively seeking it out with each other as they navigated higher education. In response to the challenge of promoting purpose-driven camaraderie, CoP's old-timers and boundary activities (Wenger et al., 2002) acted as the means to promote purpose-driven camaraderie in the workshop. The study contributes a CoP-based solution as a potential means of encouraging engagement among student veterans. Finally, the study nuances VCT's veteran third-space to expand its scope to consider the influences and pressures that exist *within* the veteran third-space, which is impactful on how student veterans perceive themselves and other veterans.

Theoretically, this study contributes to the small body of work that focuses on the generative aspects of the student veteran population. With the prevalence of deficit thinking in research and practice surrounding student veterans, it is critical to introduce more generative perspectives on student veterans. This study provides a starting point for additional research focusing on the use of workshop experiences, and other social learning environments that have compelling domains for student veterans to practice around, in order to promote purpose-driven camaraderie. From a policy and practice standpoint, this study provides additional generative-based perspectives, which institutions can implement as asset-based approaches with student veterans. The use of a CoP-based workshop situated at the boundaries of other CoPs provided opportunities for the student veteran participants to bridge their participation to other communities that are found inside, and outside of the university setting. A further practical consideration would be weighing the power of labels. The student veterans in this study identified different hierarchies of veteran-ness within the veteran space that they perceived to exist and have powerful connections to the term "veteran." Those pressures and perceptions from within that space, and external to it, can have a profound influence on how a student veteran feels about their veteran status. This has the potential impact of the student veterans opting not to take advantage of opportunities available to them, and to connect with others—because they do not feel veteran-enough.

Final Thought

It is customary to share one final experience with the case that illustrates how this

is my perspective and experience, amongst many (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 102).

Frequently as I would sit down to transcribe, analyze, write, or revise this dissertation, I would often find myself laughing as I reviewed the conversations and stories shared by the workshop participants. It was fun. Like with the other participants, it felt comfortable and familiar to me—like wearing an old, broken-in pair of boots. And echoing what all the other participants said, I was able to speak freely, without worrying about how I was saying something or what I was sharing. Despite feeling that I could freely share, it was often the most rewarding to sit back and enjoy the interactions of who I was with. This experience reminds me that while I was given the opportunity to study the student veteran participants in the workshop environment as a researcher, at my core I was one of them. A student veteran.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Student Veteran Design Thinking Workshop

Student Veteran Design Thinking Workshop

Overview of Workshop

The workshop will be broken into three face-to-face sessions over 3 weeks. The workshop is centered around an ill-defined problem within the student veteran community that will be defined by the workshop participants as a part of the design thinking process. The student veteran participants will innovate, using design thinking practices, to come up with a solution to address an ill-defined problem.

The workshop is situated within the student veteran community, using locations earmarked for student veterans. As a means to boost team building and problem-solving, the University's Equine Assisted Activities program, which has a strong tie to veterans, will provide equine-assisted activities during the first two sessions of the workshop. The workshop will culminate with the participants developing a fully prototyped concept that can be tested as a part of the design thinking process (see Table A-1).

Table A-1

Workshop-Level Desired Results

WORKSHOP-LEVEL DESIRED RESULTS
Established Goals: ● Operationalize innovation by implementing the *design thinking* process in a real-world setting/scenario. ● Create an environment of teamwork that can be applied to other work/school environments. ● Bridge the "adapt and overcome" (innovation) military mentality and skills to academic and professional pursuits.

Understandings:	Essential Questions:
As a result of this workshop, the participants will be able to understand… ● The 5 stages of the *design thinking* process and practices, and apply them: 　○ **Empathize:** gain an understanding of the problem that is attempting to be solved using empathy. 　○ **Define the Problem:** take what was learned from developing empathy to create a definition of what is trying to be solved. 　○ **Ideate:** generate ideas using the defined problem as the basis. 　○ **Prototype:** create a simplified version of what it is trying to accomplish, this can take many forms. 　○ **Test:** get feedback on the prototype.	● What is the innovation process? 　○ How do we apply it? ● How can you apply *design thinking* to your professional and academic pursuits? ● How does your military experience tie into your experience in the innovation workshop? 　○ How does it contribute? 　○ How is it different? 　○ How can you marry these two skill sets together? ● In what ways did connecting with other individuals help shape your innovative solution to the problem?

Refine. Test. Repeat. ● Innovation often doesn't happen in a vacuum. ● Innovation is iterative and "messy." ● How participants' military experiences have impacted their ability to innovate.	
Students will know… ● The *design thinking* process. ● How to approach a problem that needs to be solved or addressed. ● The value of working as a team to innovate a solution to a real-world problem. ● The value of incorporating different viewpoints and ideas into the participants' ideation processes.	**Students will be able to…** ● Structure their problem-solving activities using the *design thinking* process. ● Deliver actionable solutions to a real-world problem using the *design thinking process.*

WORKSHOP-LEVEL ASSESSMENT EVIDENCE

Performance Tasks: ● Participate in two equine-assisted learning activities to build teamwork and problem-solving skills and perspectives. ● Innovate, by using the *design thinking* process and workshop tools to present a solution for a real-world problem.	**Other Evidence:** ● Design artifacts, such as written notes, and sticky notes arranged on the board ● Observations ● Interviews (Group and Individual)

WORKSHOP-LEVEL LEARNING PLAN

Setting: ● First two sessions: equine arena with an adjacent classroom. ● Third workshop session: Design Lab, located on the main university campus.	**Resources Needed:** ● Equine-assisted learning staff to facilitate horse-related activities. ● Horses and their necessary equipment. ● Materials for ideation activities. ● Computers (provided by venue). ● Screens for presentation (provided by venue).

Workshop-Level Learning Activities:
- Icebreaker/team-building exercise supported by equine learning.
- Introduction to the problem that needs to be addressed.
- Introduction to collaboration/communication tools.
- Develop an empathetic view of the target audience.
- Group discussion/reflection (AAR) following each session.
- Pony Soccer, a problem-solving activity using equine support with a focus on divergent thinking to determine a solution.
- Freeworking, an equine supported activity to develop a deeper understanding of the concept of *empathy* in the design thinking process.
- Defining the issues at hand by using the *5 whys* in interviews and employing empathy.
- Ideation using sticky notes and using the worst *possible idea* and *brainstorming*.
- Prototype an idea that is chosen as a potential solution to text.
- Test ideas (if time is available).
- Reflect on their experiences.

Workshop Session 1

This first workshop session will be focused on developing the concept of *empathy* while helping the participants build rapport with one another. The equine activity has been specifically selected to help the participants to reflect on the concept of empathy while having an initial icebreaker and team building experience (see Table A-2).

Table A-2

Workshop Session One Lesson Plan

DESIRED RESULTS	
Established Goals: ● Broadly understand the *design thinking process.* ● Build teamwork and purpose to address a real-world problem. ● Understand and apply the concept of empathy.	
Understandings: ● The design thinking process and its 5 stages. ○ A special emphasis on developing empathy. ● Collaborative tools. ● Working as a team to accomplish an objective.	**Essential Questions:** ● What is empathy? ● What role does empathy play in the design process? ● How can I apply empathy to the process of developing a solution?
Students will know… ● The importance of empathy ● The different stages of *design thinking.* ● Their main objective.	**Students will be able to…** ● Identify the needs and characteristics of those who they would be designing for, by engaging in developing empathy for their target audience.
ASSESSMENT EVIDENCE	
Performance Tasks: ● Employ the *5 Whys* to develop empathy. (Or the *What, Why, and How)* ● Reflect on their experiences as military-connected students, along with known characteristics of the population. This will take the form of the participants interviewing each other to develop a better empathetic understanding of everyone.	**Other Evidence:** ● Debrief of Equine Activity on team-building and empathy. ● The resulting information from the participant-led interviews. ● Any information finding or next steps that the participants decide upon.
LEARNING PLAN	
Setting: ● Livestock pavilion:	**Resources Needed:** ● 2 Horses

○ Arena for the equine activity. ○ Classroom for design thinking-related activities.	● 2 Equine specialists ● 6, 8' wooden poles to create "goals" ● Computer ● Projector screen ● 5 Stages of Design Thinking Handout ● Sticky notes ● Pens/markers ● Whiteboard Markers ● Scratch paper ● Workshop 1 AAR instructor sheet with questions.

Learning Activities:

9:00 AM	● Collect forms ● In the classroom, participants will have the opportunity to introduce themselves and share some of their backgrounds and educational/professional aspirations. ● The instructor will then introduce themself and tell them about the research objective of the study and the workshop objective. ● Participants will be briefly presented with an overview/schedule of the workshop, what skills they will learn, and a brief introduction to design thinking. Here are the major points: 　○ Why design thinking? *Norman Doors* YouTube Video. 　○ Introduce the 5 stages. Provide the handout. 　○ Design thinking is iterative and non-linear. 　○ Focus on solutions and not problems. 　○ Utilizes divergent thinking to identify possible solutions 　○ Focused on *humans*. 　○ Spend the bulk of the time *understanding* the problem. 　○ This workshop is organized so that we are working as a design team. 　○ Acquiring actionable data, project management, collaboration, visual design, and presentation skills. 　○ This session's activities will help delve into the concept of empathy, with an emphasis on observation and interaction.
9:30 AM	● Participants will be taken to the arena, where they will be introduced to the equine specialist, who will then break down the group into teams. These teams will participate in an activity with two horses, named *pony soccer*. This activity is two-fold, it is intended to boost teamwork and act as an ice-breaker while providing a common experience to begin structuring the discussion and activities surrounding *empathy*. As described by Merriam-Webster Dictionary: *empathy is the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another of either the past or present without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner.* 　○ Pony soccer requires participants to have no verbal or tactile communication with each other or the horse (i.e., they can't touch each other). They must use non-verbal communication with each other and the horse. 　○ Each team will be assigned a horse, who will act as the means to score points. The participants will need to get their horse to stand in their assigned "goal" (a box with one end open, made with the 8' poles), while trying to prohibit the other team from getting their horse into their respective goal.

<table>
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○ Other rules may be established by the equine specialist in order to add more challenge to the scenario. Some of these rules may be that the team cannot make a plan before starting the activity or permitting the use of other objects that may be on-hand to assist with maneuvering the horses.

○ Following the activity, the participants will be brought together for a debrief, where they will discuss their perceptions of the activity. This discussion will be led by the instructor and the equine specialist.

■ The debrief will focus on the concept of empathy, and the challenges that the participants faced with not being able to communicate by talking or touching. This will be related to solving challenges and problems in real-life; without being able to understand each other's needs, it is difficult to succeed.

■ Empathy is driven by our ability to observe.
- What did they observe during the activity?
- What did they notice about the horses' behaviors? The other participants?
- How did they start to understand each other and the horse?
- How did you adapt your behavior? How did your teammates adapt their behavior?
- What cues did you start picking up on from the other participants and the horses? (Physical, emotional, etc…)
- How did those cues influence the way that you behaved during the activity?
- What did you notice about your environment? What was helpful/detrimental about the environment as you were trying to maneuver your horse?
- Why did it work? Why didn't it work?
- Thinking about your own experiences, how can you relate what you did with the horses with your own experience? (Possibly talk about situational awareness or the OODA Loop: Observe-Orient-Decide-Act, which are both military doctrines and how this takes the same concepts and applies them differently.)
- If they were to do it again, what would they do differently?

■ Have the participants state how they could see empathy working in the real world, by applying this to their experience. Explain to them that when we dehumanize that we lose focus on real needs that need to be addressed and it becomes easier to act in only our best interest and not theirs. The military employs these methods to make it easier to disassociate humanity from those who you may potentially be killing. That is why we call them anything but the terms that denote their humanity (like a "Tango" or "Target").

○ The discussion will lead to how they were/weren't able to break through with communication challenges while bridging the activity over to design thinking by indicating that design thinking is all about understanding the *needs* of those you are trying to address.

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<tr><td>**10:30 AM**</td><td>

- Show the participants https://youtu.be/q7LRxKHdao8 and talk about how our time is best spent trying to best understand the problem, and only a small chunk of that time is used to try to create solutions. Use the example of Crumble vs. Google Glass (maybe get some crumble cookies to eat while we chat…)

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	● Start developing empathy for the target audience of military-connected students. This will focus on 3 categories: 　■ What we know. 　　● What are the broad strokes? (expert, I could possibly have them ask me questions…) 　　● Get personal and interview each other and create empathy maps. 　　● Go global again, using the empathy maps to fill in more gaps of understanding. (sticky notes and clustering). 　■ What we don't know. 　　● Who else is not represented by the group and empathy maps? 　　● What special situations may they find themselves in? 　　● Are there other actors who influence the military-connected students that we need to be aware of? 　　● Other situations, power structures, practices, etc... that we haven't considered? 　■ What we would like to know. 　　● Let's figure out what we would like to know, and how we are going to get that information (if at all). ● First, have the participants start thinking up things that they may want to know about military-connected students. What would they ask them? ● Second, have the participants interview each other and ask those questions. Have them use the *5 whys*. ● Third, have the participants record their insights on sticky notes in preparation for a *clustering* activity to help them define what the problem is that they are solving.
11:15 AM	**Lunch ~ 20 minutes. Opportunity for everyone to relax and chat.**
11:35 AM	● Perform a rapid recap, outline what will happen during the next session. ● AAR and dismiss.

AAR Workshop 1. This post-activity debrief will likely last no more than 15 minutes at the conclusion of the workshop session. The following questions will be asked to ascertain more about their experience:

● Tell me what went well today.

● Tell me what could have gone better.

● What would you like to see more of during the next session? Less of?

● Tell me about something you learned today.

● Tell me about what you learned about empathy. How can you see yourself using this at school/work/etc…?

● What questions do you have about the design thinking process?

- Tell me about something you learned/did today and how you could use it professionally or in your schooling.

Workshop Session 2

The second session will focus on defining what they are trying to accomplish, ideating potential solutions, and be introduced to the prototype/test process. Like the first session, an equine activity will provide the opportunity to further build teamwork and cohesion, while providing the platform to experience and discuss the problem-solving process. The session will conclude with the task for the participants to share their initial prototypes with applicable individuals to receive further feedback (see Table A-3).

Table A-3

Workshop Session Two Lesson Plan

DESIRED RESULTS	
Established Goals: ● Further explore *empathy* using equine assisted learning. ● Understand and apply the *define* process to identify a problem statement.	
Understandings: ● How to define the problem that is being addressed using available data and empathy. ● The role of *empathy* in being able to develop an effective problem-statement	**Essential Questions:** ● How do you know that you are solving the core issue/problem?
Students will know… ● How to approach defining a problem. ● The role of *empathy* and how to develop an empathetic understanding of an issue.	**Students will be able to…** ● Develop empathy for an issue. ● Use clustering to identify themes, commonalities, and differences in collected empathetic data. ● Define a problem-statement.
ASSESSMENT EVIDENCE	
Performance Tasks: ● Utilize clustering to identify themes in the collected data. ● Develop a problem statement	**Other Evidence:** ● Design documentation, which may include sticky notes, whiteboard drawings/sketches, notes on paper, and other digital formats used to capture ideas, feedback, and prototypes.
LEARNING PLAN	
Setting: ● Livestock pavilion:	**Resources Needed:** ● 2 Horses

○ Arena for the equine activity. ○ Classroom for design thinking-related activities.	● Equine specialist ● Whips ● Computer ● Projector screen ● Sticky notes ● Pens/markers ● Whiteboard Markers ● Scratch paper ● Workshop 2 AAR sheet with questions

Learning Activities:

9:00 AM	● Breakfast. ● Introduction to the session's activities.

9:30 AM	● Participants will be taken to the arena, where they will be reintroduced to the equine specialist(s), who will then be taken individually into the pen to freework with one of two horses under the guidance of a specialist. Two horses, or more, are required to give the horse a break to cooldown between participants.
	    ○ The pen will be bereft of any obstacles and the participant will be provided a whip, which will act as an extension of their arms to signal intent to the horse within the arena. Raising the whip with the arm extended provides "pressure" to communicate to the horse the desired direction. Lowering the whip reduces the "pressure" and gives the opportunity for the horse to relax. Turning the back to the horse will also release "pressure." While there are other techniques, these compose the core of the communication tools for the participant to communicate to the horse.
	    ○ The horse also communicates with the participant. Body language and signs of comfort/agitation are key to being able to communicate efficiently with the horse using the provided techniques and tools. This provides the basis for learning to develop empathy between the horse and participant. It requires the participant to closely pay attention to not only what they are doing, but what the horse is telling them. These elements provide the key talking points about the development of empathy.
	    ○ Following their experiences, the participants will then regroup with the instructor and the equine specialist to debrief the activity. The focus will be on how the participants developed a report with the horse. This will lead to discussion how paying attention to what the horse was communicating and how they were communicating back echoes the process of developing empathy for people and situations.
	    ○ Design thinking uses divergent thinking and a focus on developing solutions for the population and not focusing on remedying the perceived problem. (I can use the example of architects vs. scientists). Engineers are excellent problem solvers; the problem is that they often are not solving the right problem! How do we get there? Ask the 5 whys. We iterate and keep on plugging back into the cycle what we learned from the previous

		attempt.
10:30 AM		● Following the equine activity, the participants will regroup in the classroom where, as a whole, we would readdress *empathy* to see if they had any new insights or if they would like to make any adjustments to the personas.
		● Participants will then be instructed to take their sticky notes and ideas that were developed during the previous session's interviews and begin the clustering activity to help define the problem-statement for the issue they wish to address.
		○ The activity involves placing all of the sticky notes, with their associated ideas, up on the board. This doesn't need to be organized. The concept is to get all of the insights and ideas into one space.
		○ Following the initial wave of sticky notes being placed on the board. The group will begin to move sticky notes around to begin clustering insights and ideas into groups that are deemed to have associations. This is very fluid, and sticky notes can be moved from one group to another or have new groups and sticky notes added as information and discussion leads to new insights.
		○ As the groupings of ideas begin to coalesce into distinct clusters, the group can shift toward identifying the themes of each grouping, and potential relationships between other clusterings and groups. Write these themes and connections on the board with the sticky notes.
		○ After core themes have been identified, the participants can take the insights and themes gained from the clustering activity to develop a problem statement. This problem statement is the basis for the subsequent ideation, prototype, and testing phases of design thinking.
		○ Use a pre-canned format for developing the problem-statement: The *place the target audience here* needs to *place the identified need here* because *list the insight here* . The underlined sections are replaced with the specifics derived from defining the issue at hand.
		● After creating the problem-statement, outline the ideation and prototype phases that will be addressed in the final workshop session.
11:40 AM		● Perform a rapid recap, outline what will happen during the next session.
		● AAR and dismiss.

AAR Workshop 2. This post-activity debrief will likely last no more than 15 minutes at the conclusion of the workshop session. The following questions will be asked to ascertain more about their experience:

- Tell me what went well today.

- Tell me what could have gone better.

- What would you like to see more of during the next session? Less of?

- Tell me about something you learned today.

- What questions do you have about what we are doing?

- Tell me about something you learned/did today and how you could use it professionally or in your schooling.

Workshop Session 3

The final session will focus on ideation, prototype/testing of actionable solutions. The participants will be introduced to different tools, techniques, and concepts to support the design thinking process. The workshop will culminate with a final AAR to discuss the entire workshop experience as a group (see Table A-4).

Table A-4

Workshop Session Three Lesson Plan

DESIRED RESULTS	
Established Goals: ● Take a problem-statement and develop ideas that can be easily prototyped to determine their efficacy in addressing the core problem-statement. ● Understand how all the phases of design thinking work in concert and are a fluid process. ● Identify how this process can be used in a variety of contexts.	
Understandings: ● How the design process is fluid and can lead to developing a well-formed potential solution to a problem. ● How they can apply the design process to virtually any area of their life.	**Essential Questions:** ● How have your design and perceptions evolved as you have navigated the design process? ● How can you use design thinking to tackle other tasks or challenges that you face?
Students will know… ● How the design process can be applied to the various aspects of their lives. ● How to fluidly move between the different stages of design thinking.	**Students will be able to…** ● Develop new ideas to address the identified problem. ● Fluidly move between the different stages of the design process in order to refine their solution.
ASSESSMENT EVIDENCE	
Performance Tasks: ● Develop an actionable idea. ● Outline how to prototype/execute the idea and determine if it is effective (test).	**Other Evidence:** ● Design documentation, which may include sticky notes, whiteboard drawings/sketches, notes on paper, and other digital formats

● Reflect on the participant experience.	used to capture ideas, feedback, and prototypes.

| **LEARNING PLAN** ||

Setting: ● Design/Collaboration space located on the main campus.	**Resources Needed:** ● Computers (provided at the location). ● Presentation screen (provided at the location). ● Sticky notes ● Pens/markers ● Whiteboard Markers ● Scratch paper ● Workshop 3 AAR sheet with questions

Learning Activities:

9:00 A.M.	● Breakfast. ● Introduction to the session's activities.

9:30 A.M.	● On the board, rewrite the problem-statement that was defined during the previous session. In order to help the participants recall the previous session, this may need to be expanded to help provide continuity to the previous session's outcomes.
	 ● Open up the ideation phase with the worst *idea,* which is a brainstorming activity to break the ice and get creativity and collaboration flowing.
	    ○ This activity encourages participants to post the worst possible ideas that they can think of to address the problem-statement. There are no restrictions, and this is meant to help get people thinking divergently. This also has the added benefit of creating a starting point to talk about good ideas, with the worst ideas as a foil.
	 ● Following this activity, pivot to brainstorming and clustering. This follows similar patterns to the define phase. Have the participants write ideas on sticky notes and place them on the board. Once enough ideas have been placed and explained, begin to move ideas around into groups and identify relationships. This will ideally lead to new ideas and combinations of ideas that will lead to the prototype stage.
	 ● Once an idea has been identified, the participants will be encouraged to determine how they would go about testing out the idea in the simplest terms possible. The idea is to invest as little time, effort, and money into determining if the prototyped idea is viable, before amplifying the investment of resources.
	    ○ The workshop format is not long enough to actually test the idea. The best that the workshop can do is help them lay out a plan of action and illustrate how they can revisit the design thinking process as they gain new insights and information.
	 ● Share with the participants various design resources, and project management techniques that they can apply to help shepherd their ideas through the design process and a final product.

11:40 A.M.	● Conclude with an AAR that recaps the whole experience and helps the

	participants to recognize how they can apply the design thinking process to all aspects of their lives. ● Schedule interviews.

AAR Workshop 3. This post-activity debrief will likely last no more than 30 minutes at the conclusion of the final workshop session. The following questions will be asked to ascertain more about their experience:

- Tell me what went well today.

- Tell me what could have gone better.

- Tell me about something you learned today.

- What questions do you have about what we are doing?

- Tell me about something you learned/did today and how you could use it professionally or in your schooling.

- What are your thoughts on the location(s) used for the workshop?

    ○ What worked well?

    ○ What didn't work well?

- If there were a future iteration of this experience, describe to me the sort of tasks/problems/objectives you think would be compelling for the participants?

- If there was a piece of advice you would provide to a hypothetical future participant, what would it be?

- Tell me about the time/duration of the workshop. (Was it enough or too little?)

    ○ How do you feel the time was used for teambuilding?

    ○ How do you feel the time was used for working with your team?

    ○ How do you feel the time was used for learning activities?

    ○ What would you suggest about the time/duration if the workshop were offered again in the future?

- Describe to me who/what were the most influential resources during the workshop?

○ Tell me about the tools that were the most useful? Least useful? Where did you get them?

○ Tell me about the skills that were the most useful? Least useful? Where did you get them?

○ How would you use these with your schooling and profession in the future?

○ Tell me about resources that you feel would have been useful.

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol

Primarily, the interview and questions will be guided by the experiences of student veterans as they participated in the innovation workshop. Interviews will take a semi-structured form so that there is some consistency across participants, but also space for participants to shape the interviews and emphasize aspects of the experience that were most meaningful to them. The interview protocol is rooted in the research questions, which have been mapped to elements of CoP, and the shared emphasis with VCTs identity and veteran culture.

- How and in what ways does participation in the innovation workshop facilitate the establishment of purpose-driven camaraderie among student veterans? How does the innovation workshop contribute to building a sense of community among student veterans on a higher education campus?

- How are student veteran identities shaped within the context of the innovation workshop?

The protocol questions are focused on building up a better understanding of the main components of CoP: domain, community, and practice, coupled with identity, which is a welding link between CoP and VCT. The protocol questions are aimed at eliciting the following:

- The experiences of military-connected students as they learn to practice within the Domain of *design*.

- How the military-connected students' military identities are operable within the context of the community (i.e., the workshop setting) to be able to effectively practice the design process.

- How the community of workshop participants identifies the connections to each other as they participated, and the exploration of that military link that is an operable part of the community and participant identities. Their military identities can be viewed their military identities through the lens of participation, and how they perceive their identities following participation in the workshop.

Interview Questions

All of the interview questions might not be asked, and additional follow-up questions may be added, based on the observations that took place during the execution of the innovation workshop. In addition, questions in the protocol may be asked out of order to maintain the feeling of a conversation between the researcher and participant.

- Why did you decide to participate in the design thinking workshop?

- What did you expect this workshop would be like when you signed up?

- What did you hope to get out of it?

- In hindsight, after participating, what was the most compelling part of the workshop?

- Walk me through your experiences in the design thinking workshop from day 1 to completion.

  - What was that like?

  - Are there particular moments that stand out to you?

  - What are your thoughts on the central problem that was the focus of the design thinking process?

  - What are the biggest takeaways for you from the workshop?

- Tell me about your familiarity with design thinking prior to the workshop.

- Describe to me how comfortable you feel with the overall design thinking process after participating in the workshop.

  - How do you see yourself using the design thinking process in the future?

    - Academically?

    - Professionally?

    - Personally?

  - Having learned the design thinking process, how does it fit in with your current experience? Military experience?

- Tell me about the moment the design thinking process "clicked" in your mind.

  - What did you find familiar about the design thinking process?

  - What seemed foreign?

  - Where do you think that the familiarity, or the lack of it, stemmed from?

- What was the general vibe of the workshop?

  - What made it feel that way?

- ○ How comfortable did you feel with engaging with the other participants?

- ○ How comfortable did you feel with engaging in the workshop activities?

- In what ways did the shared military backgrounds of the participants influence the workshop experience?

    - ○ Describe to me how your military background influenced your experience in the workshop.

        - ■ How did it influence the way you connected with others?

        - ■ How did it influence the way you worked together?

        - ■ How did it influence the way that you spoke or acted?

        - ■ How was the workshop similar or different from team-driven military experiences?

        - ■ If this workshop had been a mix of individuals, including non-military, how do you think that it would have been different? Why?

        - ■ How has the workshop experience influenced your self-perception as a military-connected student?

            - ● What were your self-perceptions as a military-connected student before participating?

            - ● What were your perceptions of other military-connected students before and after participating?

- What was your overall experience working with other military-connected students on developing a solution using design thinking?

    - ○ How has your experience with other military-connected students in the workshop varied from working with other students? How has it been the same?

- Describe to me how you feel the workshop did with providing a teamwork environment.

    - ○ What worked well?

    - ○ What didn't work well?

    - ○ Tell me about what would have been useful in team building.

- Tell me about a moment where you felt like you "clicked" as participants.

  - When you didn't "click."

  - What do you think the difference was?

  - In the future, what could be done to help build stronger teams in the workshop setting?

- If you could use one word to describe your experience interacting with the other participants, what would it be?

  - Tell me why you chose that word.

- Tell me about any individuals or groups that you encountered in the workshop that you would like to continue to associate with.

  - Why?

  - Why not?

  - Tell me about your experiences with the equine-assisted learning group in the workshop.

- Tell me about the most important (to you) information, resources, people, and groups that you have been introduced to through the workshop, if any.

- If given the opportunity, what sort of groups or activities would you like to associate yourself with outside of your regular responsibilities?

  - What sort of groups or activities do you feel contribute to your personal/academic/professional success?

Appendix C

Workshop Aids and Materials

Figure C-1

Infographic of the Design Thinking Process

THE DESIGN THINKING PROCESS

A human-centered focus on developing solutions using an iterative approach.

Empathy
Identify the needs of the target audience. This involves interviews, discussions with experts, observations, and immersion in their evironment. Design for them, and not yourself.

Define
State the needs and problems of the target audience. Always define the problem from the viewpoint of the target audience and not your own.

Ideate
Create new ideas while challenging assumptions. Engage in divergent thinking to create as many ideas as possible before starting to converge on solutions.

Prototype
Create the solution. Experiment. Converge on the best ideas and turn them into a solution. The prototypes should start simple and be relatively easy to implement.

Test
Try your prototype out. Use what you learn to develop deeper empathy, redefine the problem, generate new ideas, and improve the prototypes.

Empathy · Define · Ideate · Prototype · Test

Learn new things about people as you test
Generate new ideas from tests
New ideas
New perspectives that redefine the objective

Based on diagrams and information from the d.school and Interaction Design Foundation.

Figure C-2

Project Management Handout

SIMPLE PROJECT MANAGEMENT

The Kanban Method
(Japanese: Visual Signal)

Kanban is a project management method that helps you:

- Visualize your tasks.
- Set limits on what you are focusing on.
- Maximize your efficiency.

Kanban is a simple method that can be used to boost performance and manage everything from large, multi-member projects, to your own personal tasks.

How does it work? Kanban is implemented by creating at least 3 "lists" with detailed task "cards" to constrain your efforts.

You will place all of your task cards in the **TO-DO**, which is used to funnel your task cards to **IN-PROGRESS**, where the cards receive your focus. As cards are finished they are moved to **COMPLETED**, and new cards are moved from **TO-DO** to **IN-PROGRESS**. This process works great with digital management tools, such as Trello.

TO-DO:

Task

Task

Task

Task

This is the "bull pen". Take everything that you need to do and place it here, add any necessary details, and then forget about it... Well, don't forget about it, but don't let it worry or distract you from your focus on **IN-PROGRESS** task cards.

IN-PROGRESS:

Task

Task

Task

This is the category you focus on. Try to keep your tasks limited. 3 – 5 tasks at a time. It is recommended to keep this closer to 3. Keep moving items over from the **TO-DO** list as you complete **IN-PROGRESS** tasks.

Getting too many tasks that need to be worked on? Double down on getting your existing top priority task(s) done to be able to move the next one in.

COMPLETED :

Task

Task

Good job, you did it! As things get completed, move them here. This will give you a record of what has been done and will allow you to revist items, as needed.

INNOVATION
WORKSHOP
For Military-Connected Students

Figure C-3

Visual Design Basics

VISUAL DESIGN BASICS

7 Principles to Make Your Designs "Pop"

INNOVATION

Emphasis

Define what is the most important, and the next, and the next... Use this level of importance to determine how much emphasis is placed on each element. Ask yourself, what is the first piece of information that my target audience needs to know?

Repetition

Say you have 3 core colors and a couple of fonts for a design you are workign on. This will require you to repeat them throughout your design. This is called repetition, and it helps create a unified experience and will strengthen the visual appeal of your design.

Whitespace

White space is the empty page around the elements in your design. Often, by giving a design more room to breathe can upgrade it from mediocre to successful. White space creates hierarchy and organization. Our brains naturally associate ample white space around an element with importance.

Balance and Alignment

Each element you place has visual "weight". This can come from color, size, texture. You can use two types of balance: **symmetrical** (evenly distributed along a center line) or **asymmetrical** (uses opposite weights, such as a large element on one side and several smaller elements on the other).

Contrast

Contrast creates space and difference between elements in your design. Your background needs to be significantly different from the color of your other design elements so they are harmonious and are readable. Also, you can create contrast by using two different type (fonts).

Movement

Movement is controlling the elements in a design so that the eye is led to move from one to the next and the information is properly communicated. If you look at your design and feel your eye get "stuck" anywhere on it due to an element beeing too big, too bold, slightly off-center, etc... go back and adjust until everything works in harmony.

Proportion

Proportion is the visual size and weight of elements in a composition and how they relate to each other. It often helps to approach your design in sections. instead of as a whole. Once you master alignment, balance, and contrast, proportion should emerge organically.

Appendix D

Recruitment Materials

RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Email Subject Line: Bridling Innovation: A 3-Part Design Thinking Workshop for Military-Connected Students

Have you wanted to learn the process of harnessing your creativity? Design Thinking provides the tools to become an innovator in virtually any career or academic pathway. The Workshop will take place over 3 consecutive Saturdays for 3 hours each and will have the objective of learning innovation skills while addressing a real-world problem. Extra bonus: this workshop uses horses to build teamwork and problem-solving skills.

What you can get out of it:
-   Innovation skills and tools for productivity and collaboration.
-   Work with horses.
-   Build new connections with other military-connected students and groups.
-   A **$100 Amazon** gift card.

What we (the researchers) get out of it:
-   Learn more about military-connected students as they participate in the workshop.
-   Understand how the workshop design helps build a sense of purpose and camaraderie among the participants.

If you would be willing to participate, please follow the link below to fill out a *very* brief form in order to determine eligibility.

-   [Form URL]

The total time commitment to participate in this project is about 10 hours, broken up over 3, 3-hour workshop sessions held on Saturdays (lunch provided), and a follow-up interview conducted in-person or via Zoom.

The study is being conducted by a fellow student-veteran, Brian Kartchner: [Contact Info].

If you have any other questions or concerns, please contact the principal investigator, Dr. Kristin Searle, at [Email], or [Phone].

We look forward to hearing your response.

IRB Protocol: 12177

***QUALTRICS SURVEY FOR RECRUITMENT AND DETERMINING
ELIGIBILITY:***

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Dr. Kristin Searle, an
Assistant Professor in the Department of Instructional Technology and Learning
Sciences—and Brian Kartchner, a Ph.D. candidate in Instructional Technology and
Learning Sciences, and a fellow student-veteran. The purpose of this research is to
investigate how a workshop, structured around a common purpose, can yield new insights
into the experiences of military-connected students as they collaborate with each other
during the workshop. Through the workshop, you will learn the *design thinking* process,
which promotes innovation. Your participation is entirely voluntary.

We are looking for the following:

- You must be enrolled as undergraduate or graduate degree-seeking students at
  [your university].
- You must have served in the armed forces in active duty, reserve, or National
  Guard capacity.
- You can be currently serving in the Reserves or National Guard.
- You must be within 10 years of leaving military service.
- You can be currently enrolled in the ROTC as a cadet if you had prior service as
  an enlisted service member before becoming a cadet.
- You cannot be currently serving on active duty.

Your participation will involve attending a 3 session workshop with each session being
held on consecutive Saturdays. The dates of each session are…(fill in once those dates have
been secured with the facilities). Each session will last roughly 3 hours—for a total of 9
hours. Following the workshop, there will be a concluding interview lasting 45 - 60 minutes
which will be conducted either in-person or via Zoom. Once we have analyzed data, we
would also like to perform what is called a member check. We would share a summary of
our findings with you and ask for your feedback in a 30-minute Zoom meeting. The total
time of participation will be roughly 10 hours. You will be compensated with a $100
Amazon gift card at the completion of the post-workshop interview.

The workshop will be focused on teams of participants addressing a real-world need by
using the *design thinking* process. Design thinking provides the tools to engage in the

innovation process. You will be introduced to activities, processes, collaborative tools, and productivity tools. As a part of the study, you will be engaging with other participants while working with horses in an effort to build teamwork and nurture problem-solving. We anticipate that 10 people will participate in this research study.

Did you serve in the Army, Navy, Marines, Air Force, or Coast Guard?
- Yes
- No

Are you currently serving in a reserve or National Guard status?
- Yes
- No

Are you currently serving in a full-time or active-duty status?
- Yes
- No

Have you been separated from military service within the last 10 years?
- Yes
- No

Are you enrolled as a degree-seeking student at [your university]?
- Yes
- No
-

Are you currently participating in the ROTC program as a cadet?
- Yes
- No

Your Name: (Text Field)

Email: (Text Field)

Thank you for your interest in participating. Brian Kartchner [email], will be contacting you shortly with additional information and to coordinate a meeting time. If you have any questions please contact [email of PI].

IRB Protocol: 12177

RESPONSE EMAIL (Follows survey if all criteria is met):

Email Subject Line: Bridling Innovation: A 3-Part Design Thinking Workshop for Military-Connected Students.

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this research study. We look forward to your participation in the workshop. We will be having our first meeting on March 26 and 9:00 AM at [address]. Please respond to this email to confirm your participation.

Prior to the first workshop session, please email a signed copy of the consent form (attached) to [Email].
If you should have any additional questions, please contact Dr. Kristin Searle at [Email], or [Phone].

We look forward to meeting you.

IRB Protocol: 12177

RESPONSE EMAIL (Follows survey if criteria are NOT met):

Email Subject Line: Bridling Innovation: A 3-Part Design Thinking Workshop for Military-Connected Students

We appreciate your interest in participating in our study. Unfortunately, based on your answers, you do not fit the criteria that we are looking for in participants in this particular study. If you know of any other military-connected students at [your university] who may be eligible for participation, please have them contact [Email].

Thanks.

IRB Protocol: 12177

CURRICULUM VITAE

DAVID BRIAN KARTCHNER

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Student Veterans, Post 9/11 Veterans, Veteran Critical Theory, Higher Education, Entrepreneurship Education, Innovation, Communities of Practice, Mentoring

EDUCATION:

2023	Ph.D. - Instructional Technology and Learning Science, Utah State University
2019	M.A. - Instructional Technology and Learning Science, Utah State University
2016	B.A. - Art, Utah State University

EXPERIENCE:

2022 - 2022	Instructor - ITLS 4230/6230
2015 - 2022	Graphic/Web Designer, S.J. & Jessie E. Quinney College of Natural Resources
2013 - 2019	Owner, Mega Mountain LLC
2008 - 2014	Paralegal Specialist, 65th Fires Brigade, U.S. Army, UTNG

HONORS / AWARDS

Army Commendation Medal (3) - 2009, 2010, 2011
Army Achievement Medal (2) - 2012, 2014
Iraq Campaign Medal with Star Device - 2011
Honor Graduate, U.S. Army Paralegal Specialist School – 2009

PRESENTATIONS

Kartchner, D. B., & Searle, K. A. (2021). The Journey Through Higher Education: The Role of Mentors in Student Veteran Educational Experiences *2021 UASAL Annual Conference.*

Kartchner, D. B., & Searle, K. A. (2021). Understanding Student-Veterans: The Role of Buddies Along the Road of Higher Education. *2021 AERA Annual Conference.*

PUBLICATIONS

Kartchner, D. B., & Searle, K. A. (2023). Using Veteran Critical Theory to Understand the Experiences of Student Veterans: The Role of Buddies and Camaraderie Along the Road of Higher Education. *Journal of College Student Development 64*(3)*.* 292-308.

MEMBERSHIPS / AFFILIATIONS

Veteran Studies Association
Utah Academy of Science, Arts, and Letters
American Educational Research Association
Veterans of Foreign Wars
American Legion
Instructional Technology Student Association (President, 2019-2020)