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Female student veterans' resiliency in their role transitions

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Female Student Veterans' Resiliency in their Role Transitions

by

Michael D. Parise

Dissertation
Submitted to College of Education
Department of Leadership and Counseling
Eastern Michigan University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
Educational Leadership Program

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February 2, 2016
Ypsilanti, Michigan
Dedication

There are many people during the course of this dissertation who have made this project possible, but my wife, Carmen, has endured the most and has the patience of a saint with the many years of my research. I also want to thank my daughter, Rebecca, and son, Michael, for hanging in there with me, and I truly hope that I have been an example to them by showing that age is not a barrier and goals in life are what you make of them. I hope you understand that the time away was needed in order for me to add to the knowledge of those who support women veterans now and in the future.

I also want to send a special thank you to my extended family for being there when I had ideas to bounce off them and for understanding why I may not have been able to attend all of the family events. I especially thank my father, Sam, my Uncle John, and my wife’s Uncle Angelo, all of whom told their stories of their military service during wartime and what they gave up in order to serve our country.

Another thank you goes out to my other uncles who proudly served in the Army, Air Force, and the U.S. Navy. You have inspired me not only to serve, but to make the military a career. Thank you to all for teaching me the importance of continuing my work with those women and men who are currently in service.
Acknowledgements

In order for this project to be successful, it truly did take a village. There are those who have given me support one way or another, and I want to thank everyone who has lent a hand in this project. If I have failed to acknowledge you here, just remember that you are appreciated.

I want to give a special thanks to Elaine Meinzer and Wendy Banka, who have helped me in many ways from research ideas, computer and software challenges, and editing. I want to also give a thank you to Pat Gold for her editing of my final submission.

For those colleagues at work, many of whom have gone through this same process and have given me guidance in what to expect and that “you can do it” push when I needed it, thank you. I also want to thank Dr. James R. Baker, Jr., my current boss, Kim Ficaro, and a special shout-out to Claire Verweij (retired) and all who provided support for my efforts.

Thank you to the members on my committee who guided me through this entire process, from Dr. Jaclynn Tracy, who supported my efforts at the beginning, to Dr. David Anderson who steered me towards the finish line. I especially am thankful to Dr. Eboni Zamani-Gallaher, who was a key to my study of female student veterans. I also want to thank my other committee members that included Dr. Robert Carpenter, who so graciously accepted my invitation, to Dr. Marcia Valenstein from the University of Michigan, who is dedicated to this population in her research as well.

I want to acknowledge the women who have taken that step to join the Armed Forces, especially Tanya Brunner. I know that it is a tough job to take on and I hope during my military career I gave the women I worked with my utmost support. I especially would like to thank those women who participated in this research project, who freely gave up their time and opened up about their experiences. Last, but not least, I want to thank those men who supported them.
Abstract

This qualitative study focused on female student veterans, their role conflicts, and coping strategies used during their collegiate transition and persistence. After World War II (WWII), the United States (U.S.) began to realize a national policy of veteran benefits was needed, and that policy became known as The G.I. Bill of Rights. The G.I. Bill had the aim of increasing the educational attainment of all veterans including those who did not previously have the opportunity to become first-generation college students (Greenberg, 1997).

The United States Department of Veterans Affairs (2013) revealed that by 2011 more than $25 billion in educational benefits alone has been paid to veterans. This figure is expected to swell as the number of veterans returning home is expected to increase. Academia will need to have resources in place to accommodate a growing population that will include female student veterans. According to the 2012 Demographics Profile of the Military Community, the total military force is 2,228,348; 16.0% are female and 84% are male (United States Department of Defense, 2012). The Center for Public Integrity (2013) states there has not been enough data obtained to date that illustrate attainment of educational goals of those veterans who are using the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill.

This study examined female student veterans as they pertain to Schlossberg's Theory of Transition (1981), which asserts that many life events influence one’s ability to adapt when transitioning from one role to another in a linear fashion. The results of this study reveal that the participants viewed change not as a transition, but that they faced conflict from competing roles and stressors. Their attainment of their goals resulted from their ability to be resilient.
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Chapter 1: Background

Introduction

“The G.I. Bill of Rights has been heralded as one of the most significant pieces of legislation ever produced by the federal government—one that impacted the United States socially, economically and politically” (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013). The history of this G.I. Bill started when negative repercussions came from veterans of World War I (WWI), who approached the government for the early payment of a bonus (pension) for the number of days they served in the military. The early payment was turned down, as this pension was not to be paid until 1945, as was written in the World War Adjusted Act of 1924, which was commonly known as the Bonus Act (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013).

In 1932, there was a 33% unemployment rate among these disgruntled veterans who demanded early payment of their pensions because of the economic hardships brought on by the Depression that followed WWI. The government stood firm that these pensions were not to be paid earlier; however, the veterans and their families had reached a state of desperation. An encampment that included 20,000 veterans and their families was established and a protest began that was called the “Bonus March” in Washington, D.C. (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013). This march ended in multiple casualties to the protestors and to their families when Federal troops were brought in as riots began, and the encampment went up in flames. The pensions were not paid early as demanded by the protestors.

This infamous event was fresh in the memory of then-President Franklin D. Roosevelt who, after WWII, was determined not to have history repeat itself with another Bonus March and Depression. President Roosevelt signed new legislation named The Servicemen's Readjustment
Act of 1944. This Act, which is commonly known as the G.I. Bill, is managed by the governmental agency called the Veterans Administration (V.A.) (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013).

The G.I. Bill has had various reiterations since its inception and has seen more than 21 million veterans take advantage of the educational portions offered as part of the benefits (McGrevey & Keher, 2009). In addition, these G.I. Bill(s) have assisted in financing the educations of men and women student veterans, some of whom have become lawyers, bankers, teachers, engineers and physicians who may not have otherwise had this chance without this legislation (McGrevey & Keher, 2009). However, student veterans do not fit the traditional college-age student mold.

These student veterans are typically older than traditional students, bringing their maturity and leadership skills obtained in the military to campus (McGrevey & Keher, 2009). However, this non-traditional student population does bring to campus their own unique types of stressors that can interfere with persistence. A study by AHEAD.org (2009), known as the Association on Higher Education and Disabilities, concluded that institutions of higher education need to be aware of these potential roadblocks to degree completion.

There are also cultural differences that student veterans experience between the military and academic cultures that may interfere with their expressing these stressors. In a study by Love, Boschini, Jacobs, Hardy, and Kuh (1993), they found several challenges to the student veteran in their adaptation to the campus culture. Research by Grossman (2009) supports these cultural differences affecting the student veteran’s transition away from a military culture.

Women in the military are immersed in a culture that is male-dominated and encourages the members to be “macho.” The expressing of emotions is viewed as a sign of weakness,
discouraging such behavior in the military setting and in personal life, affecting how they assimilate into academic culture. In a paper by Street, Vogt and Dutra (2009) they found that because of this male dominance in the military, males have typically been the focus of studies. This lack of knowledge about the female veteran inhibits the understanding of this sub-population, their stressors, and their use of the various benefits available to them. The female veteran who becomes a student veteran represents a smaller portion of the total veteran population on campus.

This study focuses on Schlossberg's Transition Theory and Role Theory and includes additional theories that are thought to be complimentary and valuable in uncovering the experiences of female student veterans in passing from one role to another. Schlossberg’s model includes role conflict, role ambiguity, role strain, and role stress (1981). The use of this model is intended to bring awareness to what extent (if any) role conflict is experienced by this sub-population in attempting to persist in higher education as its members navigate between military service and college attendance.

**Problem Statements**

There are several problem statements that relate to female student veterans in their transition to college. In some cases, colleges and universities have a limited understanding of the female veteran and what types of coping and involvement strategies are employed as they attempt to change roles from being in the military to being a student, due to a lack of research of this sub-population. In addition to this role change, there might be a transition issue going back to the military, if the student is an active member of the National Guard (NG) or Reserves. The understanding of role conflict, stressors, and the transition process has the potential in aiding the female student veteran in their retention and persistence in higher educational goals.
Another problem is the level of transition difficulty for veterans measured in a study conducted by the Pew Research Center (Morin, 2011). The participants totaled 1,853 veterans, of whom 19% were women. The survey measured their levels of coping and stress during their transition from military to civilian life. Of those surveyed, 710 of them were Post 9/11 veterans.

Of the overall study sample population, 82% said their reentry was easy; however, those who suffered a psychological trauma during service saw their percentage lowered to 56%. When the Post 9/11 veterans were measured separately, their level of an easy reentry was at 56%. Also, those veterans who found the reentry most difficult were those who were married, at 61%, while those who were single had less difficulty, at 37%. However, veterans who had a college education had an easier transition, at 78%, compared to those who only had a high school education, at 73%. In addition, from an analysis of the Pew study by Morin (2011), 84% of civilians said they have no understanding of military roles. This role perception misunderstanding also dims civilian employment prospects of the returning veterans.

A Military Times staff writer, Andrew Tilghman, wrote a four-part series in 2012 regarding the problem of returning veterans' joblessness. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, of a total of 220,000 veterans who were in the age 24 or less group, the unemployment rate stood at 25%, which was above the national average of 16.1%. Of those veterans in the age group of 25–34, the unemployment rate was 12%, compared to the civilian rate of 9.3%. As a potential result of these high unemployment rates, nearly 1/3 of jobless veterans are in college.

There are other employment factors that can contribute to the employment problem according to Tilghman (2012). First is the negative stereotype that all veterans are suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Another is the greater emphasis placed on activating those who have the role of a Reserve or NG member, than at previous times in our nation’s history.
The translation of military job occupations to those of a civilian is difficult in regard to applicable job skills, which can dampen employment prospects. For the veteran, the military is becoming less an option of employment due to downsizing from troop withdrawals as the war winds down. This lack of a military career opportunity makes attending college and obtaining benefits an alternative means of temporary employment. The last problem affects society as a whole, and that is national security. If the nation perceives the military as a dead-end occupation, then the reduction of all-volunteer force levels is a threat to the nation’s readiness.

A new challenge is the changing roles of female soldiers because of the latest policy implemented by Defense Secretary Leon Panetta in 2013, where additional combat-related roles include female soldiers (Roulo, 2013). In a paper by Murdoch, Bradley, Mather, Klein, Turner, and Yano (2006), they discovered that while women are attempting to gain equality with their male counterparts in the military, they are enduring additional stressors that many may not have had before.

**Justification**

Higher education institutions need to prepare for this student veteran population, as it is expected to increase due to the drawdown of troops from the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts, with 300,000 troops per year returning to civilian life. According to a report by Murphy (2011), since August 2009, approximately 500,000 veterans have taken advantage of the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill education benefits. The V.A. has allocated a total of $3.6 billion for this purpose. However, with the economy still struggling to provide employment, these returning veterans may find their job prospects dim. With this swelling veteran population and a stagnant economy, both of these circumstances cause veterans to look towards academics for their education and support.
Significance of the Study

This study attempts to bring forth the conflicting roles and unique stressors of these female veterans, the mental and physical challenges they bring to campus, and how the interactions of these stressors are a hindrance. An outcome of this study might also be the answer to the question: How do female student veterans successfully navigate college (e.g., develop coping skills, reduce anxiety levels, etc.)?

The academic and social engagement of female student veterans is critical in their transitioning back to civilian life and creating opportunities to evolve from post-military service. Without adequate academic and social support for veterans, particularly the unique experiences of female veterans on campus, students may disengage from their studies and potentially cause their disenrollment. When higher-education faculty, staff, and fellow students understand the unique characteristics of student veterans and especially those of female student veterans, a dialog can be opened. This dialog can be used to identify the barriers to motivation in order to assist in the persistence towards their educational goals.

There is a responsibility as taxpayers to support this veteran population because a significant amount of government funding via taxpayers dollars is being spent on providing education and support services. The soldiers have done their part by fulfilling their obligation to military service in order to reap the benefits of the G.I. Bill. Once they have enrolled in college, the veterans and the citizens of this country have a great deal of time and effort invested in the pursuit of the student veterans’ educational goals (Fuller, 2011).

In order to assist in furthering this investment by both veteran and taxpayers, this dissertation focuses on the understudied population—the female student veterans and gives them a voice of their experiences regarding their transition to college and sharing their sentiments about
persistence. This sub-population is seeing their numbers grow in the military, which is reflected on American college campuses.

**Purpose of the Study**

The proposed study might help in shaping specific academic services that are considered valuable to female student veterans that increase involvement and keep them engaged toward their goal completion (e.g., student support services and their contribution to the female veteran students' engagement).

In addition, the value of membership in a student support club (and specifically veteran-oriented support clubs) influences persistence (Capps, 2011, p. 96). The usefulness to institutions is in encouraging membership to increase the camaraderie among female student veterans. Lastly, there is a lack of information regarding the effect of family support on the student veterans and their attainment of their educational goals (Morreale, 2011). Moreover, Morreale (2011) noted the need for additional research that illuminates student veterans’ characteristics, the various roles of veteran students, and how they identify themselves.

**Research Question**

The guiding research question explored in the study is, “What are the transition experiences of female veterans to college and how do they navigate shifting roles to cope and persist in higher education?”

Female student veterans are being studied to understand what types of coping skills female student veterans employ in the persistence toward their educational goals. These coping skills are influenced by what female veterans experience in their transitions between alternating roles. These transitions are also affected by the level of family and community support and campus awareness available for this population. These female student veterans reveal how they
engage with other students or student veterans and their involvement with the overall student population and the effect, if any, that student organizational membership has on goal completion. Additional studies focus on whether student involvement affects the awareness, stress levels, and ultimately how the female veterans view their roles as students and ultimately their academic retention.

**Conceptual Definitions**

The conceptual definitions are described here in order to understand certain terms related to this study. For the purposes of this research, they are listed below:

- *G.I. Bill* refers to the educational component of legislation passed during WWII, and any reiterations after that time.

- *Role or role theory* relates to Schlossberg's Theory of Transition, the basis for this study, which attempts to identify each role an individual chooses and how that process is affected by life event changes (Schlossberg, 2011).

- *Conflict*, according to Schlossberg (2011), is when a person transitions into a role, then through it, and finally out of a role; conflict occurs from the time involved making a decision in this transition and from competing goals and perceptions.

- *Stress* can be caused by changing roles and using the decision process when a veteran debates the benefits of enrolling in college or continuing her military career.

- *Coping mechanism* refers to what experience the female student veteran relies on in order to resolve a stressful situation. These can be mechanisms that were learned as a civilian, a member of the military, or through other means of learning how to cope with the daily stresses.
• **Persistence** describes when a student is enrolled from one semester to the next and persists in college until she graduates.

• **Retention** is an institutional definition of when a college retains a student until he or she graduates, meaning that retention is interchangeable with persistence (Hagedorn, 2006).

• **Matriculation** can be interchanged with retention, as both terms refer to a student who has registered for classes, intends to earn credits towards a degree, and usually is in an approved program for the intention of obtaining financial aid, for example (Nolan, 2009).

• **Success** can be measured when credits attempted during a semester are actually earned and usually lead towards attaining a degree (American Federation of Teachers, 2011).

• **Stopping out or stopped out** is when a student does not want to leave college but has to put his or her education on hold for some reason, such as work commitments (Fain, 2013).

• **Swirling** is when students transfer from one college to another. An example would be transferring from a 4-year college to a 2-year college. The reasons given by students include not fitting in with the campus, academic difficulties, and affordability (Selingo, 2012).

• **Veteran friendly campus** infers that an institution has support specifically designed for the student veteran, such as a Veteran Support Office (VSO) or a student veteran organization.

• **Awareness** is the level of acknowledgement the student veteran feels other students have about the military experience they endured either as an individual, or as a group.
Operational Definitions

The operational definitions for key terms are described below as they relate to this study. For the purposes of this research, they are listed below:

- **Military** includes all branches of the service such as: the Army, Marines, Navy, Air Force, United States Coast Guard, and the National Guard (NG), and any of their Reserve or Reserve Officer Training Corp (ROTC) components.

- **Wartime** and **conflicts** are interchangeable and refer to what a veteran participates in, whether an officially declared war or one that is not officially declared.

- **Veteran** is any individual who served in the military from a prior enlistment, whether the enlistment has exposed them to a war or conflict or was during peacetime, but also refers to a person who is currently on active duty or in a NG or Reserve component. A veteran also includes both male and female service members but becomes gender-specific when they are referred to as a **female veteran**.

- **Soldier** refers to both the male and female genders and does not refer to any specific service branch.

- **Troop** refers to a group of those service members in the military of any branch and is not gender-specific.

- **Student veteran** is a veteran who is attending any type of institution of higher education, a 2-year or 4-year (private or public) college, and includes both male and female service members; but female veterans are the focus of this study.

- **Non-traditional students**, when compared to traditional students, are older, have families and/or have a partner, are working full- or part-time, and did not follow a typical path into academics.
Conclusion

The role of females in the military is changing because more women than ever before are being exposed to combat trauma. Higher education needs to recognize that these role conflicts create stressors and therefore should have policies in place to assist this sub-population. This sub-population is heading towards an increase in unprecedented numbers and the level of assistance needed must grow in an exponential manner.

Student veteran experiences in the military bring to campus knowledge of teamwork, leadership, diversity, and cultural experiences, sometimes learned under adverse conditions. Even though these experiences can create disabilities that are both visible and invisible, the traits obtained while in the service can become a positive influence on campus and can assist all students in their persistence toward achieving their education goals.
Chapter 2: Review of Literature

Introduction

After World War II, the U.S. began to realize a national policy of veteran benefits was needed. That policy had the support of key political players, military leaders, veterans' support groups, and the general public, all of which were enlisted to pass The G.I. Bill of Rights. The G.I. Bill became a pipeline to higher education that had the aim of increasing the educational attainment of all veterans, including those who did not have the past opportunity to become first-generation college students (Greenberg, 1997).

There have been multiple versions of the G.I. Bill since WWII. Under the current Post-9/11 G.I. Bill, as of 2011, the United States Department of Veterans Affairs has paid out $25 billion in educational benefits. According to the 2012 Demographics Profile of the Military Community, the total military force is 2,228,348; 16.0% are female and 84% are male (U.S. Department of Defense, 2012). The investment by American taxpayers is requiring higher education to accommodate this growing population, one that is reflective of the U.S. population demographics. However, there has been a disconnection between those eligible for benefits and those not taking advantage of them. This disconnect also is skewed by the availability of study data. For example, the Center for Public Integrity (2013) states there has not been enough data obtained to illustrate attainment of educational goals of those veterans who are using the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill.

Veterans Educational Bill Beginnings

Following WWI, legislation was enacted called the World War Adjusted Act of 1924, which was also known as the “Bonus Act.” Under this act, the veterans of WWI were promised “bonuses” by the U.S. government, which were based upon the number of days served in the
military. These bonuses were thought of as a type of pension (or Social Security) payment, in that the government stated it would not redeem the bonuses until 1945 (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013).

Before the redemption of the bonuses occurred, historical circumstances intervened in the form of the Great Depression that followed WWI. By 1932, there was a 33% unemployment rate among veterans, who, facing significant economic hardships, began to demand early payment of their “bonuses.” The U.S. government stood firm that these payments were not to be made earlier, and soon thereafter, the disgruntled veterans and their families began to protest by starting a march towards the nation’s capital. This march became known as the “Bonus March.” These marchers established an encampment in Washington, D.C. that included 20,000 veterans and their families (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013).

On July 28, 1932, the police attempted to arrest protestors; tempers flared and a riot ensued. This event forced the government to call in federal troops to dismantle the camp and rid Washington of the protesters. The historical irony saw a veteran himself, then Major George S. Patton, command these troops against the veterans. Patton and his cavalry arrived on horseback, and tanks were brought in to disperse the crowds. The shantytown was set on fire in the chaos; two babies were killed, along with multiple injuries being inflicted on the veterans and their families. This riot was labeled in history as the worst unrest ever seen in Washington, D.C. (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013).

**Key Political, Military, Educational Leaders**

Towards the later years of WWII with the wartime economy ending and a need to transform to a peacetime economy, President Roosevelt and Congress were concerned with the societal and economic impact and the need for policy formation to address the needs of the
returning veterans. Francis Fowler said regarding policy formulation, “…policy agenda is usually set by powerful politicians, such as presidents, governors and legislators” (Fowler, 2012, p. 17). Remembering the results of the Bonus March after WWI, President Roosevelt determined that history would not repeat itself for WWII veterans during his leadership.

Multiple legislative bills were being introduced by senators and were supported by veterans groups, along with other organizations who were attempting to ensure a smooth transition to employment for veterans. Discussion in Washington, D.C., at this time was about whether there were enough incentives for veterans to enroll in educational programs, and whether this would result in less pressure on the economy by a rush of job seekers (Altschuler & Blumin, 2009).

The country too began to realize that a national policy of veteran benefits was needed and one of those bills was The G.I. Bill of Rights, as put forth by the American Legion. Fowler again describes that during the policy formation phase, “bills may be developed by…advocacy groups who support the legislation” (Fowler, 2012, p. 17).

However, there were conflicts among educational organizations, veterans groups, as well as politicians that needed to be resolved before full legislation support was won. There was disagreement between educational organizations, such as the National Education Association (NEA) and the American Council of Education (ACE). The NEA, represented by Ralph McDonald, felt the educational portion of the American Legion bill should be under the control of the Bureau of Education. However, the ACE, through Representative Francis Brown, opposed the American Legion bill because of what they felt was federal control of the bill through the V.A. (Frydl, 2009).
The two largest national veterans groups, the American Legion and the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW), also had conflict over who was to control the program. The American Legion obtained advice from the Land Grant schools, which had representatives in Washington, D.C. Under the guidance of Indiana Republican John Steele, the American Legion felt that the control of the educational portion should reside in the V.A., under the control of the various State Departments of Education. The issue among these various groups was whether control should be under the Federal government or under more local control (Frydl, 2009).

The VFW disagreed with the American Legion on the educational component in the bill but for another reason besides agency control. The VFW foresaw a heavy financial burden on the American taxpayers who were already beginning to feel the economic impact of WWII. Eventually, the VFW through intense negotiation with the American Legion determined that the Legion bill, which promoted V.A. control, was the best possible legislation for the veterans that both groups represented (Frydl, 2009).

Now that the sentiment in Washington, D.C., at that time seemed to favor support of the American Legion bill, the building of popular support was necessary. The American Legion saw they needed to put pressure on Capitol Hill through local leaders in order to encourage passage. The American Legion with the aid of a staunch supporter, William Randolph Hearst, the newspaper magnate, placed newspaper ads. Hearst, through his use of giving financial support through his numerous modes of media, amplified the weight of public opinion. As a result, the American Legion had multiple means of communicating their message through radio advertisements, mail, and newsreels in theatres, in order to influence public opinion (Greenberg, 1997).
However, passage of the American Legion bill still was uncertain, as differences in opinion existed amongst those in the same political party. The passage of the bill that was gaining popularity was placed in jeopardy when Representative John Rankin of Mississippi, a Democrat, opposed what was called the 52-20 Club portion of the bill. The openly racist Representative Rankin objected to this portion of the bill that provided unemployment benefits because it supported whites and blacks equally. In addition, Representative Rankin held the proxy vote of Georgia Representative John S. Gibson, also a Democrat, who was a supporter of the bill and was home severely ill.

Representative Rankin was determined to cast only his vote and not vote the proxy of Representative Gibson, since withholding of this proxy would ensure the failure of the American Legion bill. Just a day before the final vote, phone calls were made, telegrams were sent, and local police were asked to do whatever was possible to locate Representative Gibson. The police were sent to assist him in personally attending the session in Washington, D.C., to cast his vote (Greenberg, 1997).

As Representative Gibson was on his way to Washington, David Camelon, a newspaperman, interviewed Gibson as they took this historic journey together. Camelon wrote down the words of Representative Gibson, harkening back to the issue (mistreatment of veterans) that had prompted the creation of the bill in the first place and reflected those attitudes of most Americans. Gibson said in the book by Bennett (1999):

Americans are dying in Normandy in the greatest invasion in all history–and anyone who dares to cast a vote against this bill should be publicized to all the world. I’m going to hold a press conference after this meeting. And I’m going to expose anyone who doesn’t vote for the G.I. Bill of Rights. (p. 191)
After an intense search, severe weather, police escort, and hurried plane ride, the ill Representative Gibson arrived on time to cast his vote (Greenberg, 1997). With enough yes votes cast to pass Congress, President Roosevelt signed into law a new piece of legislation named The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944. This Act, commonly known as the G.I. Bill, became law and, among other entitlements, provided support for veterans who chose to participate in higher education during a set benefit period, which would end in 1956 (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013).

**Pipeline to Postsecondary Education**

**Initial Fears and Concerns.** There was initial opposition by those in higher education to the arrival of the multitudes of GIs who took advantage of the G.I. Bill. According to Greenberg (1997), President James B. Conant of Harvard, “…feared that unqualified people would flood the campuses” (p. 39). President Conant also proposed that Congress should restrict enrollment to the type of training and length of study that would best alleviate the needs of the economy (Altschuler & Blumin, 2009).

In addition, Greenberg (1997) quoted from the Robert M. Hutchins article (then President of the University of Chicago) regarding the G.I. Bill that Hutchins, “…labeled the bill unworkable, a threat to education, and warned that the lure of money would turn the colleges into educational hobo jungles” (p. 39). President Hutchins warned that veterans would be taken advantage of from unscrupulous institutions that would not avoid the lure of money. He called for a national qualifying exam in order to ensure only those veterans that had a good chance to matriculate enrolled. Other provisions that he endorsed were for only Federal support of 50% of the educational benefits to the veterans, and the colleges controlling the remaining amount, in order to ensure proper management of taxpayers’ funds (Altschuler & Blumin, 2009).
Willard Waller, a professor at Columbia University, had some well-publicized comments regarding his opinion of veterans going to college. He felt that only those who attained a certain class level in high school prior to joining the service should be allowed to use the bill. Also, he felt that those students who were married, as well as those who had children, would not be able to withstand the rigors of college. Waller said, “For a great many veterans the scales are heavily weighted against college attendance. They will do better to give up the idea” (Altschuler & Blumin, 2009, p.78).

In spite of some colleges being opposed to the G.I. Bill, several leading educational associations eventually gave their support while proposing amendments that became part of the new law. Francis Brown of ACE supported the lifting of the age restrictions in order to encourage benefit participation. Ralph McDonald of the NEA advocated an increase in the allowance given for support of dependents (Altschuler & Blumin, 2009).

Eventually the G.I. Bill of 1944 was passed with bipartisan support after several revisions satisfied those of opposing forces. Encouragement first came from the positive results of reports that were commissioned by the President. This sweeping legislation appealed to conservatives who required institutions to comply with the law and to ensure that funding was expended properly on veterans. Those demanding equality and justice for service members came into play when laws were put into place to ensure proper assistance was obtainable by all veterans in the completion of their educational goals. Those who had the social New Deal type of values had no doubt that when veterans matriculated, they would add value to not only themselves, but also society as a whole.

However, the driving force that brought all opposing groups together was the fear of repeating the Bonus March as the result of another Depression. In any case, despite the initial
fears and concerns, the G.I. Bill drew widespread support from all sides of the political spectrum, but few anticipated the eventual level of participation by the returning veterans (Altschuler & Blumin, 2009).

The V.A. originally forecasted that the number of enrollees would be 150,000 per year, with an approximate 700,000 enrollees by the end of the benefits period in 1956. The actual number of veterans coming to campus was staggering; by 1947, over one million veterans had registered for college (Greenberg, 1997).

**Impact on Higher Education.** WWII was not the first time that soldiers came to campus and changed the culture and structure of higher education. During WWI, college campuses filled the need of the federal government for training and space for troops that were being deployed. After WWII, campuses re-tooled once again for the influx of these new veterans, and their impact on higher education was even greater than that of previous veterans (Thelin, 2004).

This new generation of veterans brought about a multitude of changes to all higher educational institutions. There was a movement to a more diverse student body that had an exposure to a worldwide view of life. This student body required changes in the curriculum that included training that is more advanced and more selective programs. The G.I. Bill gave rise to growth in research universities, as the result of the need for medical research and a greater interest in science programs for defense-related research (Thelin, 2004).

Faculty members became recognized for their expertise in the fields of humanities and foreign languages. They saw an enrollment increase in their fields from interactions with foreign cultures between allied forces and the warring factions. Along with the interest in language, there was an increase in the desire for the knowledge base related to geography, history, and world politics. Academia would need to fill this void, as future world leaders would need to be
familiarized with the effects on cultural values as they relate to expanding post-war markets (Thelin, 2004).

Educators, after the passage of the G.I. Bill, had to ensure that their admission process allowed enrollment on campus of those students who were previously excluded. Admissions policies had to be more flexible. The students were non-traditional in the sense they did not have traditional transcripts or records. Because of this flood of students, admission decisions had to be made quickly and from a larger, more diverse application pool. Also, structurally these students had to graduate on a timely basis in order to free up space for the next batch of students. This resulted in allowing educational credit for military training to be used toward graduation and also revealed the need for standardized testing. All of these changes were the result of WWII student veterans and the impact they had on campus (Thelin, 2004).

The second paradigm of the Multiple Ethical Paradigms, the *ethic of critique* as inferred by Caldwell, Shapiro & Gross (2007), asks the question of whether institutions had policies in place that would allow those who were previously excluded to have access (p. 17). These returning veterans represented different races, ethnic groups, religions, and even included previously excluded married couples and families. Also, many of these students, before they were veterans, were excluded because of their socio-economic class. Now, as a result of the financial benefits of the G.I. Bill, they became first-generation college students (Greenberg, 1997).

**G.I. Bill Iterations and Educational Reform**

**G.I. Bill of 1944.** The educational component of the G.I. Bill was a policy instrument that focused on education as a veteran benefit, with the aim of an increase in the overall level of educational attainment in the American landscape. One evaluative study of the 1944 G.I. Bill
was published in 2002 by Bound and Turner, in the *Journal of Labor Economics*. The authors said, “Yet little research has looked at the question of whether military service, combined with the availability of post-war educational benefits, led World War II veterans to increase their investments in education—particularly at the college and university level” (p. 785).

However, using complicated analytical processes and census data, Bound and Turner (2002) were able to indicate the net effects of military service and the widely available funding for college through the G.I. Bill. Their analysis revealed the G.I. Bill did lead to a moderate gain in the postsecondary educational attainment of World War II veterans (p. 784).

**Veterans’ Readjustment Assistance Act of 1952.** After the Korean War, the nation saw 5.5 million veterans return home between 1950 and 1953, and the need for additional veteran support was perceived and ensured under the Veterans’ Readjustment Assistance Act of 1952. However, the many veterans still taking advantage of the WWII G.I. Bill viewed these new wartime veterans as competing for benefits and were not as politically supportive of this new group of veterans. This changing policy advocacy resulted in educational benefits that were less generous than the previous bill as well as a longer enlistment to qualify for those benefits. This resulted in higher costs for student veterans along with the need for additional financial support (Altschuler & Blumin, 2009).

**Veterans’ Readjustment Benefits Act of 1966.** During the Vietnam War, the Veterans’ Readjustment Benefits Act of 1966 (known as the Vietnam Era G.I. Bill) was passed on March 3, 1966. This bill required 180 days of continuous active duty service to qualify for benefits versus 90 days during the Korean War. There was also an additional reduction in educational benefits, commensurate with the Korean War reduction, which increased the financial gap in affording an education through a private institution (Altschuler & Blumin, 2009).
However, another politically significant part of this bill was the act of extending the legislation in such a manner that the G.I. Bill(s) was becoming less attached to a specific war. During this time the G.I. Bill(s) was starting to become a benefit program that saw less political struggles with trying to pass legislation during peacetime (Altschuler & Blumin, 2009).

The combination of population and cultural changes resulted in staggering numbers of veterans taking advantage of the Vietnam Era G.I. Bill, even above those of the 1944 version. A comparison has been done to show the difference in usage of benefits between war eras and those veterans utilizing the G.I. Bill educational benefits (See Table 1).

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Veterans Era</th>
<th># Veterans eligible</th>
<th># Veterans attending college</th>
<th># Veterans attending other schools</th>
<th># Veterans receiving on-the-job training</th>
<th># Veterans receiving farm training</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vietnam Era</td>
<td>8.2 million</td>
<td>5.1 million</td>
<td>2.5 million</td>
<td>591,000</td>
<td>56,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korean War</td>
<td>5 million</td>
<td>1.2 million</td>
<td>860,000</td>
<td>223,000</td>
<td>95,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GI Bill (Post WWII, 1944-1956)</td>
<td>15 million</td>
<td>2.2 million</td>
<td>3.5 million</td>
<td>1.4 million</td>
<td>690,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source – Bound & Turner, 2002, p. 813

Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act. According to an article written by DiRamio & Jarvis in 2011, U.S. veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars were again encountering difficulties in attaining adequate veteran benefits. In recognizing this need for support, a national student organization, the Student Veterans of America (SVA), was started by a veteran who attended classes on the Ann Arbor campus of The University of Michigan. This group became instrumental in policy reformulation of the G.I. Bill for post-9/11 veterans to address the problems stated by DiRamio and Jarvis (p. 31).
The concern of the SVA at that time was the usage of the educational benefits for those in the NG and Reserves. In the case of the Post 9/11 veterans, those making the laws attempted to understand what possible impact the legislation would have on the future student veteran. Even though the active duty time was sufficient to earn educational benefits, there were war casualties amongst these service members who passed away before they used them. A provision in the Post 9/11 G.I. Bill sought by the SVA would allow survivors of those veterans the usage of these earned educational benefits, thus giving back to the deceased veteran in an indirect way by caring for the future educational needs of their family.

Through the actions of veterans groups, another provision of the proposed revised Post-9/11 G.I. Bill was to reduce the eligibility requirement for active duty to only 90 days, similar to the G.I. Bill of 1944. In addition, understanding that student veterans may face multiple deployments as members of the NG or Reserves, a provision was requested that would allow the benefit eligibility period to be increased to 15 years. These policy recommendations were implemented with the passage of the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act on June 30, 2008. Recent amendments include payments of tuition and a housing allowance for online education and the ability under certain conditions to transfer educational benefits to a family member (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013). All of these revisions should have a positive impact on postsecondary education providers.

According to an article in USA Today, the Post 9/11 G.I. Bill is near the point where 1 million veterans have taken advantage of the current legislation. The article continues to mention that the V.A. has paid out $25 billion in educational benefits under the provisions of this bill. "It shows that veterans are not only thriving, but they have a desire to succeed and lead in this
country in uniform and out of uniform," said Michael Dakduk, the executive director of SVA (Zoroya, 2013, p.1).

Much like the educators involved in the campus transformations from the first G.I. Bill, educators today are faced with finding ways to comply with the demands of this expanding population. During the early history of the G.I. Bill, this massive influx of students resulted in the need to provide additional infrastructure such as classroom buildings, dorms, and faculty. Today the current influx of students requires that higher education professionals ensure that they provide an academic environment that encourages access, by providing awareness training to campus staff, and other support, to aid in understanding what benefits are available to the veteran and how best to assist them in their role as a student.

There has been an attempt to measure the academic services environment in a recent empirical study conducted by ACE. This report was conducted in collaboration with the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and pertains to the level of on-campus support provided to student veterans (McBain, L., Kim, Y.M., Cook, B., & Snead, K., 2012). This report is a follow-up with 690 institutions from an initial report published in 2009. The purpose of the report was to measure the percentages of support services, programs, and policies that are available to student veterans from participating higher educational institutions across the nation.

Some of the key findings stated in this report are that public four-year institutions have a higher rate of providing programs that are designed for student veterans at 74%, when compared to public two-year institutions, at 59%. However, at 51% private not-for-profit colleges and universities are even less prepared to offer services. Across all institutions that provide student support services, such as financial aid and tuition assistance counseling, the number was at 67%.
Also, another large percentage of the campuses said they hold special events that were veteran-specific at 66% (McBain et al., 2012, p. 8).

There were several areas of concern revealed in this study. The first concern was the level of social acculturation of the student veterans. In 2009, the level of concern amongst the institutions was 33%; by 2012, that level had risen to 55%. The next area of concern was healthcare awareness and available resources for the student veterans. By 2012, this level was at 48%, which was a slight rise from the level in 2009 at 43%. Of all the institutions that participated in this study in 2009, those concerned with degree retention and completion stood at 73%; by 2012, the concern had risen to 77% (McBain et al., 2012, p. 25).

The conclusion of the study, besides the high level of concern with retention and college completion by student veterans, was that peer support groups were lacking across the campuses. Another concern was the absence of offices specifically assigned to provide veterans services. Some of the challenges reported among the institutions were the difficulties with the veterans obtaining proper timeliness of their benefits. The veterans and the colleges encountered the need to process paperwork several times in order to obtain benefits, along with delays in payments and even veterans being overpaid (McBain et al., 2012, p. 10). All of these factors then contributed to stress in the academic environment, which affected the matriculation of the student veteran.

College practitioners need to understand these stressors, which hamper the level of involvement by student veterans. First, they need to become aware of them, gain understanding, and finally alleviate or lessen those stressors whenever possible. This dissertation should shed light on the different roles female students encounter, what are these role stressors, and how the coping mechanisms affect involvement and persistence. Those institutions that are aware of the
conditions needed to encourage student veteran learning and development to create a positive environment (Love et al., 1993).

Equality and the G.I. Bill

A paper written by Katznelson and Mettler (2008) compared two contradictory analyses on the effects of the educational and training benefits from the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944 towards achieving racial equality. This analysis examined the methods, interpretations of the data, and implications of the G.I. Bill. The results of both researchers contradicted each other.

Katznelson found that the G.I. Bill policy further widened the gap between whites and African Americans, especially in the southern states (p. 524). Mettler on the other hand, stated that she found the policy was a means of achieving racial equality and a way to close the racial gap. She said, “The G.I Bill’s education and training provisions constitute such an example, one that demonstrates how public policy can enable citizens themselves to claim political power and to reinvigorate democracy (p. 533).

Recruiting Tactics. As shown in the Katznelson and Mettler (2008) paper, there are different opinions as to whether the military, through the G.I. Bill of 1944, contributed to racial equality. That same question arises today--whether military recruiting tactics target certain demographic groups, which contributes to this racial divide. Throughout the years, there have been articles stating that the military takes advantage of the undereducated, the poor, urban youth, and racial groups.

The U.S. Department of Defense (2005) published a fact sheet regarding the composition of the volunteer military to dispel these myths regarding the demographics of enlistees. The fact sheet states that over 90 % of the recruits had a high school education or equivalent. This statistic dispels the myth that the military recruits undereducated young people when only 70 % of the
youths in the general population completed high school. Another myth dispelled in this report is that the military heavily recruits in the poor and urban areas. This report states that recruiting actually reflects the general U.S. population, which is mainly from the middle class. Also, youths who are recruited from suburban and rural areas are overrepresented in the military with relation to the general population (United States Department of Defense, 2005).

**Recruiting Myths.** Another study was done of the socioeconomic characteristics of the enlistees in the military by a non-profit research organization that operates the Center for Naval Analyses and the Institute for Public Policy (CNA) that was contracted by the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. This study, published in 2012, analyzed data that was available for those recruits in Fiscal Year (FY) 10 and FY11 of non-prior-service enlistees compared to the general population of 18- to 24-year-olds. This study also dispelled the myths that the military draws heavily from youth who are poor. This study did show that the military represents the general population regarding income levels. Also noted was the fact that the lower income levels were actually underrepresented (Lien, Lawler, & Shuford, 2012).

Furthermore, when black heads of households were studied against the general population, the highest income group was overrepresented by these enlistees. Regarding female recruits, they were underrepresented in regard to the general population but were disproportionately represented in the lowest and next-to-lowest income group (Lien et al., 2012).

**Eligibility Disconnection.** Not all veterans who are eligible to receive benefits were taking advantage of them. This disconnect became evident from the membership survey of the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA). This survey was conducted in 2012 from a total of 4,278 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans, of which 2,223 gave proof of their service through
the government form DD214 (which verifies service for benefit eligibility). The remainder participating were not confirmed through any documentation but did select themselves as either Iraq or Afghanistan Veterans. Regarding the Post 9/11 G.I. Bill, 65% of those surveyed were not taking advantage of the benefits offered. Some of the responses were positive in the survey, including that 37% plan to use benefits at some point, 18% have already completed their degree, those that plan to transfer benefits to a dependent are 16%, while 15% of those surveyed are on Active Duty and do not need to use benefits yet. However, several responses were negative, which included having a focus on their current job and being unclear about eligibility -- both responses at 14%. Also, several of those surveyed, at 11%, felt that they could not afford it (going to college), and 7% have decided to focus on gaining employment. Of the last two responses given of those taking the survey, 7% were ineligible (or felt that they were), while 3% could not attend school at this time due to health reasons (IAVA, 2012).

**Employment Disconnection.** A Military Times series, written by Andrew Tilghman in 2012, examined why veterans typically have a higher unemployment rate than their civilian counterparts. One of the causes is that veterans have to battle stereotypes about PTSD. Also, potential employers are reluctant to hire veterans who are in the NG or have Reserve status because of absence due to training and possible deployments. Another factor that inhibits employment is the translation of a military job into that of a civilian occupation.

One program developed to encourage veteran employment is the use of education as an outlet for adding to a veteran's skills. This is a novel program at Bellevue University in Bellevue, Nebraska, developed in 2013 in partnership with nationwide companies in order to encourage the usage of the G.I. Bill. This program, called the Veterans Initiative for Advancement (VIA) was designed to encourage employers in allowing veterans to use their benefits. The purpose of VIA
was to show employers that by encouraging the student veterans to utilize their educational benefits, the veterans would then enhance their value to the company without costing the business educational expenses (Bellevue University, 2013).

An article was published by the Omaha World-Herald about the VIA program that was developed in response to the low 36% usage of the current Post 9/11 G.I. Bill amongst employed veterans. In that article, several student veterans from Bellevue University were interviewed regarding obstacles to usage of the current education bill. There was a perception that completion of a degree would not lead to a promotion. Another theme that seemed to become evident was that veteran students did not want the inconvenience of attempting to battle bureaucratic hurdles. Also, the student veterans worried that if they asked their current employers for time off for their studies, it would be viewed in a negative manner (Hansen, 2012).

These are only some of the disconnections between those eligible for using the G.I. Bill and those not using the benefits. Additional disconnections are the physical and mental obstacles, along with the stress of navigating through the V.A. for benefits, and the university itself (Church, 2009). Also, there are issues with obtaining proper credit for military training towards a degree, along with cultural and age differences from those of the traditional college-age student (Lang et al., 2013).
Veterans Characteristics and Demographic Profiles

Gender. According to the 2012 Demographics Profile of the Military Community, the total military force, which includes Active Duty and Selected Reserve members, is 2,228,348 (U.S. Department of Defense, 2012). Of this military population 16.0% are female and 84% are male (See Figure 1).

![2012 Military Profile: Gender](image)


Marital Status. The marital status of military members shows that 52.6% are married and those never married were at 41.7%. In the military, members who were divorced totaled 5.5% while those in the "Other" category (annulled, widowed and unknown) were at 0.2% (See Figure 2).

![2012 Military Profile: Marital Status](image)

Age. The age ranges of the Armed Forces today are 39.4% being age 25 or younger, while 21.5% are age 26 to 30, with the next largest group, age 41 or older, at 14.4%. The remainder of the troops total 14.2% from the 31 to 35 age group, and the last age group of 36 to 40 totals 10.6%. (See Figure 3).

![2012 Military Profile: Age](image)


Race. The racial composition shows 71.9% are white, while Black or African American represents 16.2% of the armed forces, "Other" or "Unknown" are 4.1%, and Asians are 3.5%. The remainder of the troops comprises other races as shown (See Figure 4).

![2012 Military Profile: Race](image)

Veterans as Students

**Recent Student Veteran Research.** According to the American Council on Education (2008), student involvement is lacking when the information, outreach, and a veteran friendly campus are not readily available. This organization commissioned a nationwide report in 1950, which interviewed 2,119 WWII veterans with disabilities and college presidents that represented 453 institutions of higher education, and found that they did not meet the needs of WWII veterans. This 1950 report had four recommendations: (a) having a dedicated staff member for veteran issues; (b) the need for faculty and staff awareness; (c) follow-up of services rendered; and (d) student self-identification (Madaus, Miller & Vance, 2009). Incidentally, even though the findings of this report had historical significance, the four recommendations from the 1950 report are still issues facing academia today. In addition, student veteran concerns today are insufficient completion rates, goal persistence, and role transition.

The V.A. published a study prepared by the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics (2011), which was a statistical analysis of veterans' usage and completion rates of the G.I. Bill from 2000 through 2009. In this analysis, the V.A. found that male veterans had a lower completion rate of obtaining a Bachelor’s degree at 16.3% than the non-veterans at 18.1% (p. 6). Female veterans on the other hand had a 21% completion rate while female non-veterans had an 18.2% rate (p. 6). When compared to male veterans, female veterans had an 11% completion rate towards their Bachelor’s degree, while male veterans had a rate of 10.4% (p. 7). When race is considered, Hispanic veterans had a 13.8% completion rate of a Bachelor’s degree when compared to the non-veteran Hispanics at 8.5% (p. 10). White non-Hispanic veterans who completed a Bachelor’s degree were 17.4%, versus the non-veteran White non-Hispanics that had a higher rate at 20.5% (p. 10). However, “Other” non-Hispanic veterans obtaining a
Bachelor’s degree were 26.1%, while the “Other” non-Hispanic non-veterans stood at 16% (p. 10). There was no statistical difference between Black non-Hispanic veterans and non-veterans completing a Bachelor’s degree, at 12.3% and 12.1% respectively (p. 10).

**Veteran Goal Persistence.** There have been previous studies of student veterans that have built the basis of research on persistence. One dissertation published in January 2011 by Capps titled: “Veteran Students: What Motivates Persistence from Matriculation to Goal Completion?” was a study of a group of veteran students at one community college. This study attempted to add research data with a survey completed of student veterans at a community college to determine what factors motivated this particular group of students, their obstacles, and their persistence to goal completion.

In addition to goal completion, the study also examined the effects of student services, academic support services, and advising on veteran student persistence. The student veterans in this study attended a rural community college in the Midwest which had a veteran population that totaled 60 students. Of these, 15 student veterans, both male and female, participated in both the survey and a follow-up focus group. Even though this was a rather small sample group, the results still brought to the forefront several issues.

There were various significant results: first, there were several common stresses from the transition from the military to college. Secondly, the motivations to complete educational goals might vary widely but were a key to staying in school. Additional results concluded that student support services were vital to persistence and that college academic services were essential to goal completion. Some other results of this study showed the experience of the transition to college was considered normal by 67% of the respondents. Yet 13% of those reported the transition was harder than they expected. Some of the difficulties they encountered ranged from
goal conflicts, paying of tuition, school life adjustments, and bureaucratic paperwork. Other difficulties were the lack of proper G.I. Bill information and the inability of some veterans to stay focused due to combat-related injuries. Also shown was the motivation to persist and complete educational goals for these students, which came from their positive personal drive and family support. They were motivated by the opportunity to earn a living and a desire to become a contributing member of their community.

**Dedicated Staff Member.** In addition, veterans in the study by Capps suggested that Student Support Services should include an advisor. This advisor would be specifically assigned to veterans, as well as trained in the effects of injuries such as PTSD, and would be the same advisor throughout college. Finally, this advisor would be especially valuable if he or she were capable of assisting veterans with obtaining educational benefits. According to this study, the veterans indicated that they not only wanted a dedicated advisor, but one who was also a veteran and therefore understood their obstacles. In addition, Capps mentions that veteran students would benefit from a type of early warning system regarding their academic and personal issues. She also referred to similar results from a previous study conducted by Coll et al. (2009), which showed that advisors need to play an active role in the persistence of first-year student veterans. Advisors also needed to be able to make necessary referrals when other types of support are needed both on and off campus.

A majority of veterans (93%) in the Capps study felt it would be important to share their experiences with other veterans. This type of response was indicative of other research conducted by DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell (2008) that showed, “A visible, campus-based student-veterans organization could provide opportunities for veterans to meet with students who have had similar experiences while also serving as a point of connection to the campus” (p. 95).
Faculty and Staff Awareness. The results of the Capps 2011 study suggested there should be staff professional development and workshops available on the various disorders and other stressors that veterans faced, in order to raise campus awareness. This training can include recognizing signs of distress and knowledge of local resources. Faculty members are on the front lines with student veterans and have the ability to identify those students who are in need of a referral to professional counseling. This awareness begins to create an environment of support for the student veterans in order to keep them engaged (p. 94).

Follow-Up Services. A recent report shows that when student veterans receive support from their college and university, they have higher retention and graduation rates than their peers do. This report, “Completing the Mission: A Pilot Study of Veteran Students’ Progress toward Degree Attainment in the Post 9/11 Era,” was released in November of 2011 and was supported by Operation College Promise (OCP) and the Pat Tillman Foundation. OCP helps institutions retrofit existing services already in place to support student veterans. The Pat Tillman Foundation is regarded as a "national leader in providing resources and educational scholarship support to veterans, active service members, and their dependents. The Tillman Military Scholars program aids all veterans, specifically the ever-growing population of veterans and dependents of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts” (Pat Tillman Foundation, 2014).

This report surveyed a sampling of 200 out of 6,400 veterans that attended seven public universities nationwide during the 2010-11 academic years. Approximately 90% of the 200 students were enrolled full-time. The results of the study were summarized by Murphy (2011):

Student veterans were earning an average grade point of 3.04. The retention rate from fall 2010 to spring 2011 was 94 percent, above the national average of 75 percent for first-
second-year retention. About 71 percent earned all credits pursued, with an average of 24 credits for the academic year. (p. 1)

A majority of the veteran students in this study were first-generation, male, married, and had at least one dependent. The researchers of this study intended to continue following this group of students and suggested a comparative study of institutions that do not have a support network for veterans (Murphy, 2011).

Student Self-Identification. A dissertation presented by Morreale in 2011 scrutinized student veterans' variables to see their effect on academic motivation and self-concept. These variables included combat, military status, grade, rank, and deployment status. She also examined demographic variables such as age, gender, socioeconomic class, marital status, and education. The survey instrument was a web-based survey sent out to 222 veterans enrolled in undergraduate programs throughout the U.S., of which 176 participated. Morreale wrote in her paper:

Combat exposure was found only weakly correlated with academic motivation and academic self-concept with the finding not statistically significant… Academic motivation, demographic (e.g., socio-economic class), and educational (e.g., first-generation status) variables significantly contribute to explanation of almost half of the variance in academic self-concept. (p. 151)

The current environment of conflict wartime veterans were exposed to, such as the First Gulf War, Iraq, and Afghanistan, is not much different from historical environments in that all wartime veterans witnessed violence and death, which caused an increase in angry and aggressive behavior. However, some major differences from the current war were the advances in protective combat gear. These improvements, along with medical advances and rapid
evacuations, resulted in a high survival rate of those who have lost limbs or were exposed to an improvised explosive device (IED). In these current conflicts, the number of amputees already exceeded the 6% rate from the Vietnam War (Church, 2009). The reality of having a disability added stress to the role of the student veteran, in addition to attempted assimilation into civilian culture.

**Role Transition.** A recent study was published in 2012 which was a qualitative study conducted at a community college by Wheeler. This study interviewed nine veterans (eight males and one female) in regard to their transition process of leaving the military and attending a local community college. The analysis was conducted using Schlossberg’s (1981) Theory of Adult Transitions, which resulted in several themes that demonstrate the coping mechanisms utilized in this transition.

The first theme was the academic experience and how the student veteran adjusted to the role of a college student who encountered loneliness on campus. This isolation came from the inability to share the same military-related experiences with other students. The next theme was personal relationships and connections. The only female veteran in the study summed up her feelings towards on-campus relationships: “I’m here to get an education, not make friends” (p. 781). The last theme was the benefit or detriment of bureaucracy and how the type of services provided by the college campus contributed to either a positive transition or a negative one by entangling the veteran in paperwork and his or her not having knowledge of the process of obtaining the G.I. Bill benefits (Wheeler, 2012).

**Lack of Tracking Mechanisms**

The Center for Public Integrity (2013) published a report which stated the federal government has not tracked the number of students who persisted or matriculated since the Post-
9/11 G.I. Bill was passed. Michael Dakduk of the SVA worries that without this tracking mechanism, the future of this bill is in jeopardy. An audit of the V.A. by the General Accounting Office (GAO) was conducted in May 2013. Regarding measuring the performance of the student veterans, the V.A. said disbursing of the benefits was their responsibility; however, outcome measurements were not. The GAO felt the V.A. was responsible to collect outcome data in order to ensure policymakers justify the expense of the bill to taxpayers (The Center for Public Integrity, 2013).

**Beginnings of Data Collection**

The Pat Tillman Foundation published a study in November 2013 that collected data towards college degree outcomes on student veterans. The founding of the Pat Tillman Foundation, in 2004, had the purpose of providing educational support to veterans and their families through scholarships, with the goal to nurture a diverse group of community leaders. For this study, the Pat Tillman Foundation partnered with OCP which is “…a national policy, research and education program based in Trenton, New Jersey, which supports the transition and postsecondary advancement of our nation's veterans” (Operation College Promise, 2013).

This research project, *Completing the Mission II* (2013), represented 23 schools across the nation that volunteered to be a part of the project. These schools were located in 20 different states and were all four-year colleges or universities, and 741 student veterans eventually participated in the project. These student veterans were considered freshman- or sophomore-level students who were enrolled full-time, with 12 credit hours or more, and were using the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill (Lang et al., 2013, p. 3).

This study in 2013 was a follow-up to the pilot project by Lang, Powers, Cason, Sigue, & Riley in 2011. In this pilot project, *Completing the Mission*, student veterans were surveyed to
establish baseline measurements for the future study (Lang et al., 2011). These baseline measurements from 2011 where carried over to the 2013 study, which included the students' grade point average (GPA) and credits earned compared to those attempted, which they considered the “Success Rate.” The students' “Persistence Rate” was measured by retaining enrollment from the fall semester to the spring (Lang et al., 2013, p. 3).

In the 2013 study, *Completing the Mission II*, the student veterans' GPA averaged 2.98, which is slightly lower than the 2011 pilot study participants who had an average of 3.04. The Pat Tillman Foundation cited a DePaul University study published in 2011 regarding student retention or persistence, where the general population of students who had a GPA between 2.5 and 2.99 traditionally had a retention rate of 85.2% (DePaul, 2011).

However, the student veterans exceed the general population persistence level. According to the test developer, ACT Incorporated, in their published work in 2008, titled *National Collegiate Retention and Persistence to Degree Rates*, the average retention rate for all students in all institutions surveyed was 65.7% (p. 3). The measurement of the “Persistence Rate” between the fall and the spring semesters for the student veterans in the 2013 study *Completing the Mission II* was 97% (p. 7). This was an increase from 94% in the student veterans' rate in the earlier 2011 study conducted by Lang et al.

The “Success Rate” of the student veterans in the 2011 pilot study showed that, of the credits pursued, the attainment rate was 71% for the period of fall 2010 to spring 2011. This cohort in the 2013 study attained a 90.5% “Success Rate” for the fall 2011 to spring 2012. If this trend continues, those student veterans become eligible for a degree within 5 years or even sooner, depending on acceptance of transfer credits (Lang et al., 2013, p. 7).
Female Veterans

The effects of PTSD and other war-related injuries can negatively label veterans and become an embarrassment for them, creating a sense of isolation and depression. A *New York Times* magazine article reported in 2007 that 1 in 10 soldiers serving in Iraq and Afghanistan were female, comprising more than 160,000 female soldiers. For comparisons, Vietnam saw only 7,500 female soldiers and even the first Gulf War saw only 41,000. Even though women in Iraq were serving in combat support roles, the war in Iraq has eliminated the distinction between combat and support roles, especially with support vehicles often being the target of insurgents (Corbett, 2007).

In October 2005, Natasha McKinnon, now a student at North Carolina State, was a soldier riding in a Humvee in Iraq. An IED exploded underneath the vehicle, imbedded shrapnel in her right leg, and caused the loss of her left foot (Branker, 2009). Because students do not understand this type of trauma that soldiers like Natasha faced, soldiers are not willing to share some sentiments with students that help alleviate stress (Shackelford, 2009).

After two years, Natasha left Walter Reed Hospital with a new prosthetic limb. She walks with the assistance of a cane; however, as a disabled student she faces many obstacles. She must drive around campus several times to find a handicapped parking space that is close to her building. After she finds a space, she has to walk up ramps and find elevators to get to class. By the time she is in her classroom, her attention has dwindled because of exhaustion (Branker, 2009). The campus implications of these physical and mental barriers such as those to Natasha, is the reason for low attendance. She also shares other common issues that disabled veterans face, such as intense pain, reactions to medication, and multiple appointments with the V.A. hospital (Church, 2009).
The first Gulf War in 1991 presented the first time there was a deployment of mothers being mobilized, some of whom were single mothers. It was also the first major war in which a significant number of men and women lived together and worked alongside each other. These close quarters, along with the minority of women in a male-dominated profession, increased the stress due to sexual harassment. Stress also increased with the “maternal guilt association” of being deployed, while leaving the children back home (Vogt, Pless, King, & King, 2005, p.116).

In findings of a study conducted in 1998 by Vogt et al. (published in 2005), of 495 Gulf War I veterans (25% of whom were females), they found that women were more likely to report sexual harassment than men were. Women also reported stress from lacking social support from supervisors and peers when attempting to report harassment. Men only reported combat exposure at a greater stressor level than women.

During Gulf War I, women accounted for almost 11% of the active duty personnel, which amounted to approximately 33,000 women who were assigned non-combat positions. Some of these positions included supply convoys, air support, flying missions, security at prisoner of war (POW) facilities and Navy ports, artillery support, and construction projects. Even though these missions were not technically combatant roles, women still experienced the trauma of war. This type of war that included insurgents made it difficult to determine who one's enemy was, as no definite battle lines were drawn as in previous conflicts.

One female soldier who exemplified this blurring of roles and brought this to the attention of the national and international audience, was Private First Class (PFC) Jessica Lynch. PFC Lynch was one of several female soldiers who were part of a supply convoy that got lost and encountered enemy fire. They were wounded, became POWs, and were eventually rescued;
the dramatic and eventual successful rescue attempt was captured on camera and gained worldwide media attention (Murdoch et al., 2006).

In the 2006 paper by Murdoch, et al., the authors emphasize that not only should those who interact with today’s women veterans understand the ever-increasing combat roles, but that female veterans also experience other types of trauma while in the military. These additional stressors include sexual assault, which has an effect on the rate of PTSD, depression, suicide risk, relationship issues, and difficulties in maintaining employment.

On January 24, 2013, Defense Secretary Leon E. Panetta announced a new policy for the Defense Department that changes the role of women in combat. This new change opens up about 237,000 combat positions to women that were previously limited to men. Panetta said, “I fundamentally believe that our military is more effective when success is based solely on ability, qualifications and on performance” (Roulo, 2013).

The perceived difficulties of opening new combat roles to women might be garnered from a survey done by the Marine Corps in 2012 about the expanded role of women in combat. There are some similarities of concerns between the male and female Marines but also some differences. How intimate relationships would be handled is a concern for both men and women and also how the obligation to protect the females would influence the mission. Men were concerned that the women in these new roles would affect unit readiness, there would be false reporting of assault and harassment charges, fraternization would increase, and the presence of women would lead to special privileges. The concerns of women included being targeted, captured and tortured by the enemy, sexual harassment and assault, and proper living accommodations (Strauss et al., 2012).
This new role opportunity for women brings changes in stressors that may affect female veterans, as they become college-bound students. These future students have experienced a unique culture coming from all branches of military service and soon the experiences of additional combat roles.

According to the 2012 Demographics of the Military, published by the United States Department of Defense (DOD), women make up 202,876 of the Active Duty component and 153,028 of the Selected Reserves component. The total number of women serving in all branches of service (except Coast Guard) was 355,904. (See Table 2).

Table 2  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Women in the Military by Branch of Service: Active Duty &amp; Selected Reserves</th>
<th>Active Duty</th>
<th>Selected Reserves</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Army</td>
<td>73,495</td>
<td>Army Reserves</td>
<td>46,043 Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Army National Guard</td>
<td>53,605 Army NG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navy</td>
<td>53,151</td>
<td>Navy Reserves</td>
<td>13,389 Navy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marine Corps</td>
<td>13,991</td>
<td>Marine Corps Reserves</td>
<td>1,782 M.C. Reserves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Air Force</td>
<td>62,239</td>
<td>Air Force Reserves</td>
<td>18,430 Air Force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Air National Guard</td>
<td>19,779 Air NG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Active Duty</td>
<td>202,876</td>
<td>Total Selected Reserves</td>
<td>153,028</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Forces</td>
<td>355,904</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Female Student Veterans

The ACE report of July 2009 stated that in 2006 women represented 7% of all U.S. veterans. Yet, in the school year of 2007 – 2008, female veterans represented 27% of the military population using their educational benefits (p. V). This follows a trend in the shift of the gender make-up in the military that affects the college campus. As stated in the 2009 ACE report, in 1980 just 4% of the veteran populations were women; by 2006, that number grew to 7%; for a total of 1.64 million female veterans. By 2020, the female veteran population reaches 1.9 million or 10% of the total military population, meaning at that time more than one million women have served after September 11, 2001 (p. 5).

In the Association for the Study of Higher Education (ASHE) Higher Education Report by DiRamio and Jarvis (2011), women serve in the military for similar reasons as men do. They have a sense of duty to their country, seek adventure, want to start a career, obtain financial security, and want to take advantage of educational benefits (p. 69).

According to statements in the article, in reference to Foster and Vince (2009), they found several traits of females in the military in comparison to males. One trait was that military women are more educated, at 70%, than their male counterparts at 57%. A second trait was that these women were single parents at 11%, compared to 4% of the men. Another trait was those women who identified themselves as a racial/ethnic minority were 40% compared to 32% of the men. However, where the differences are greatest is that 1 in 5 female soldiers had suffered from military sexual trauma (MST). In addition, women were twice as likely as men to suffer from PTSD. This study even revealed that a number of women enlisted to escape an abusive and violent home front (p. 71).
Veterans experienced stress while on active duty, then in adjustment to civilian life, which included transitioning as a new college student on campus. Male student veterans are typically the topic of study, as the military is known as a male-centric profession, thus giving researchers a large male population to study. However, as the number of female veterans increases, the gap is widening, necessitating studies on the changing roles and the effects of stress in relationship to involvement, engagement, and persistence in college. There continues to be a need for studies that assist those in academic circles to understand this growing population.

The veterans coming to campus are considered a non-traditional student group, and the disparity between the traditional student and the non-traditional military student becomes evident. The military student is 33% less likely to be a full-time student and 24% more likely to be enrolled part-time or part of the year. The military student is more likely financially independent, has a 48% chance of being married, and 47% had at least one child. All of these civilian issues, combined with war-related stressors, affect the mental and physical well-being of the veteran student. Compounding this environment is the reluctance to seek help that can be traced to the military culture (American Council on Education, 2008).

Once student veterans choose to attend college, if that college is unfamiliar with the particular needs of student veterans and has insufficient support services, then it can contribute to a stressful experience for the student. The results from a survey conducted during the fall semester of 2009 by AHEAD disclose policies of higher educational institutions that need to be developed in order to increase awareness of the student veteran population. Also, according to the study, an evaluation should be conducted of whether student services are knowledgeable of this population. Some of the reasons given for lack of preparedness by the institutions to provide these services are inadequate funding, lack of training faculty and staff, and few resources that
are specifically in place for veterans. Another issue is in the reporting of disabilities by the students themselves (Madaus et al., 2009).

An additional contributor to the current problem of understanding the student veteran was the very nature of the wars being fought by the U.S. and how these conflicts have blurred the roles in female student veterans. The types of war conducted in Afghanistan and Iraq were fought in urban areas, where the enemy mingled with the civilian population and therefore had no defined “frontline.” How this environment changed female veterans is that, in these wars, a higher percentage of women were exposed to combat situations, even though they are not in “combat” roles. Because of this previously unheard-of situation, it is still unknown how female veterans are ultimately affected by these conflicts. The increased combat role adds to the stress faced by the woman soldier. In addition, female veterans, whether they were involved in combat or not, encountered stressors different from their male counterparts, specifically those of sexual trauma (Vance & Miller, 2009).

**Veteran Support Mechanisms**

**Military Support.** The Survey of Officers and Enlisted Personnel from 1992, where \( n=59,930 \), included information that was collected from soldiers who served during the Gulf War in 1991 and continued with their military careers after that conflict. This report revealed the need of the military to provide more support to female veterans as their roles increase. Of those female veterans in this study, female soldiers indicated 49% were married, 17% were divorced, 8% were separated, and 41% had children. The survey also revealed that of all soldiers deployed, the majority of them were in ground units of the various services, including the Navy. The report also revealed the soldiers' need for economic stability and family and community support to
assist in alleviating the stress of being a single parent during a deployment (Angrist & Johnson, 2000).

DiRamio and Jarvis discussed in their 2011 report the results of a survey done by Herbert in 1998. Herbert surveyed 285 women from all branches of the military and detailed the cultural differences in the military and what needs to be addressed. Participants were asked if they felt pressured to act either masculine or feminine while in the military, and if they did, what they thought would be the potential penalties. When asked if a woman was deemed too feminine, 66% said yes, there would be penalties. The penalties were the appearance of being an unfit leader, or they were considered sexually available. If a woman reflected masculine traits, her chances of a leadership role would be greater. However, the penalty for this was that older commanders see females as being too aggressive as they gain promotions. The women soldiers eventually hit a glass ceiling as the older commanders felt their status quo threatened. Other penalties would be with having the same gender relationships, such as where males have male friends. Women, on the other hand, when they have friends of the same sex, would be looked upon as being lesbian (p. 72).

The seriousness of changing the military culture and providing proper support was analyzed by a joint collaboration between Rand Health and the Rand National Security Research Division. In 2008, they projected the cost of PTSD and major depression between $4.0 billion to $6.2 billion for the 1.6 million deployed service-members. This cost is only for the first two years of post-deployment treatment and can vary, depending on how lives that were lost due to suicide are accounted for (Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008).

Some student veterans are still active members of the United States Army National Guard, often referred to as the NG, or are attending college while still on active duty. Therefore,
they must transition back and forth between being a member of the military and the academic community. These veterans have dual career decisions to make, both in the military and as a civilian. As a result of these role conflicts, they must adapt to different environments and cultures and maneuver successfully through the government and academic bureaucracy. One of the differences for the student veteran is the adaptation process that can be difficult due to their wartime experiences. These stressors can develop into mental health issues which the veteran student is less apt to self-identify with or may not recognize that he or she is affected by (Grossman, 2009).

Therefore, it is understandable that non-reporting comes from the military culture. In this culture, admitting you have a problem can create a negative response from your superiors and peers, threatening your career. Men and women in combat have to keep up this perceived image of being “macho” in order to survive that environment. When a soldier enters academia, this false shield creates a barrier to admitting the need for help and prevents them from getting assistance. However, veterans who have assistance in the transition to college from someone who is familiar with these disabilities, has knowledge of resources available, and who listens increase overall engagement (Grossman, 2009).

The U.S. Army developed the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness program for soldiers on active duty. This program teaches soldiers how to adapt to stressful situations using positive psychology by not waiting until negative situations require a reaction. Instead, they learn to be proactive in order to prevent negative responses. This program shows how building positive traits can build relationships and can increase resiliency (Cornum, Matthews, & Seligman, 2011).

The U.S. Army has been working on conducting studies that evaluate the mental well-being of soldiers in order to refine these types of educational programs. One such study,
published by Greden et al. (2010), was a survey instrument that measured the problems and mental health issues of a Michigan Army National Guard (MI ARNG) unit returning from Afghanistan.

At the time of this study, there were approximately 9,000 members of the MI ARNG activated to fight the war in Afghanistan. This survey was given to 926 soldiers and their spouses. Approximately 40% of the soldiers had a positive result in having a potential mental health issue. Of those assessed with a mental health issue, 8% reported they had suicidal thoughts. The survey results, regarding the reporting of a mental health issue, revealed there were several reasons for not seeking help. The top four were these: they did not want it in their records that they sought help (27%); they were afraid to report because the unit leadership might treat them differently (20%); if the illness was reported, they would be too embarrassed (17%); and the final 17% expressed concern that reporting would harm their careers (Greden et al., 2010).

The benefit of sharing problems and relating to those people who have similar traits was revealed in a recent study conducted by Coan of the University of Virginia in 2011. His results show that stress is significantly reduced when you share your problems with someone. The Social Baseline Theory (SBT) shows the importance of relationships with the burden of coping with stressors. Coan’s study reveals that having a circle of friends to share stress with means that an individual copes better and leads a healthier and longer life (Beckes & Coan, 2011). The concepts of SBT can be best applied by the campus in encouraging and supporting the establishment of organizations that create an atmosphere where the student veterans can interact with each other.
Civilian Community Support. What makes the current wars especially difficult for the troops is that between 40% and 50% of those fighting the war are made up of the NG. The NG troops typically do not return to waiting employment; therefore, many take advantage of the G.I. Bill for financial support. Most of them do not live near or on a military base that would typically provide mental health and other veteran-related support. When they come home, it usually is to a civilian community where they are expected to acclimate and depend on the limited services available. As a result, this creates additional responsibility for the care of the returning veteran on both the civilian and campus community (Dalack, et al., 2010). These additional stressors are another reason the adjustment to campus life can be difficult.

Women soldiers encounter the same stressors as men, but react in different ways. The literature on women's development shows females tend to care for others and have a sense of responsibility towards relationships. This is evident in the article written by DiRamio & Jarvis in 2011, where they said:

For many female veterans who become college students and juggle multiple roles, the deeply rooted sense of responsibility for others that they adapted to in a combat situation will follow them into an academic environment. This sense of teamwork and connectedness when balanced with the justice and fairness orientation adopted from the discipline of the military, become important components of success in the college environment. (p. 75)

Women veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars have been shown to have several threats to their mental health. According to a study conducted by the National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in Boston Massachusetts, one result was that electronic communication has kept veterans in almost constant communication with their families back
home. This has shown to have benefits, but has also shown to increase the stress of those deployed, as they experience their daily military stressors and then are reminded almost daily of family problems back home (Street et al., 2009).

In addition, with a higher number of deployed troops being from the NG and other Reserve forces, there is less of a chance of an infrastructure being in place that assists in providing childcare, which is exacerbated when the soldier is a single parent. This study also stated there is a cultural stigma, with female veteran wartime experiences not being considered equally the same as a male veteran's, due to their perceived lower level of combat exposure. This false perception leads to less social recognition and support (Street et al., 2009).

**Academic Support.** When veterans have experience in both the military and academic communities, there is a cultural clash between the two, which makes developing programs for student veterans difficult. The military has a mandatory reliance on the chain of command and an emphasis on quick decisive planning and action. Academia has a more unhurried yet careful pace and a more relaxed leadership style (Mortimer, 2011). The student veteran faces these differences head on with more difficulty adjusting than other non-traditional students when they return to campus. They have to decide what courses of study to take, learn to adapt to the academic environment, and are exposed to a diverse student body while they learn how to maneuver through the system (Love et al., 1993).

According to the article written by Patrick Love, there are several groups of students who are culturally marginalized, and female student veterans appear to have many of these traits. These traits include students who are physically challenged, those who are older, commuter students, and students of color, and they “…feel disconnected from the institution, express less
satisfaction with their experience and, therefore, are less likely to stay in school” (Love et al., 1993, p.67).

When one begins to study the culture of the military, it is understandable that some veteran students feel disconnected. In a study by Bauman completed in 2009, the researcher interviewed 24 student veterans, some of whom experienced deployments during their attendance in college. Also, several of these students had been mobilized at least once to a combat zone, which meant they had role adjustments between the military and college, creating goal conflicts. This is similar to “stopping out” in the civilian world, where students stopped their studies and then returned. One female Marine reservist in the study commented on the difficulty in adjusting from one role to another:

It was not easy, going from a student to an NCO (non-commissioned officer) and from an NCO back to a student. As a student, you’re supposed to question everything you’re told...You’re supposed to always think outside the box, challenge rhetoric and plans made by authority. As a Marine, you are supposed to accept orders without question…no matter how little they make sense. The roles and rules of a student are very different from those of a Marine...There’s very little overlap. (p. 18)

These students, who were deployed for up to 18 months, would return to find their civilian classmates have continued on or graduated while they stagnated, making the transition back to a student even more stressful (Bauman, 2009).

**Theoretical Perspectives and Construct**

This study focuses on female student veterans and how they transition from one role to another using Schlossberg's Theory of Transition. The Schlossberg 1981 model can be applied to the female student veteran population because they can face multiple transitional issues when
contemplating adjusting from the role of a soldier to that of a student. The basis of the model details that individuals can have conflicting roles, and possible transitions into new roles that result in stressors, both negative and positive, as they attempt to adapt. The adaptation can be determined by how the role change came about, how a person understands self, the support mechanisms in place, and, when obstacles appeared, what types of strategies were used. In addition, some veterans faced multiple role transitions repeatedly as a member of the NG or Reserves when they vacillated between multiple roles.

There is a myriad of additional theories and concepts regarding coping, resilience, and involvement. Some of these are included to explain the effects on awareness, stress levels, and how they ultimately relate to academic retention of the female student veteran. The United States Army Research Institute has developed a program that incorporates the concepts of Meichenbaum and Deffenbacher's (1988) Stress Inoculation Theory (SIT) in programs to build resilience in a military and clinical setting.

In 2003, Kuh discussed student engagement and the lack of engagement that needs to be identified, in his paper, *What we are learning about student engagement from NSSE*. Bean and Metzner, in 1985, developed the Conceptual Model of Non-Traditional Student Attrition that demonstrates how a student lacking persistence is affected by the academic environment. In addition, Dirkx discussed in his 2008 paper, *But sometimes you’re not part of the story: Oral histories and ways of remembering and telling*, the effects of emotions on the adult learner. The final theory is Social Baseline Theory by Beckes & Coan (2011), that finds success with relationship building and that sharing of stressors with a close friend helps with coping.

These proposed theories and concepts are introduced in order to understand how to assist student veterans in their retention, persistence and achieving of their educational goals. However,
there is need for additional studies in order to illustrate the effectiveness of these theories in relationship to assisting student veterans in taking advantage of the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill. Astin, in his commentary published in the DiRamio & Jarvis article in 2011, suggested that even though there have been studies on the non-traditional student, there needs to be intensive research on this non-traditional population (p. 32).

**Role Theory.** There are multiple theories and studies regarding how roles or changing them can affect the levels of stress. A few of these studies are detailed in this section. According to *The Stress Process*, by Pearlin, Menaghan, Lieberman, & Mullan (1981), we gain an understanding of social stress and the effects on depression. The researchers, throughout this paper, studied how the changing job roles that appeared from job disruptions caused role strain. The strains, combined with coping mechanisms and the time taken to change due to role ambiguity in assuming the role, determine the severity of depression (Pearlin et al., 1981). However, this research can be applied to any role change and transition.

According to the 1981 research by Pearlin et al., the stress process begins with the origins of this stress, which occurred by events in life. Next, the severity of the stress is determined by whether the events are planned or unplanned and whether these circumstances are desirable, which determines the level of control a person exerts towards a solution. However, these events are also dependent upon the meaning given to that occurrence, which determines the stress level. If persons have a sense of mastery over their lives, they have a certain level of control or degree of high self-esteem. If there is little or no control, then individuals have low self-esteem and higher stress levels.

The next impact on stress in this study is the role of mediating resources, including social support and coping, both of which can alter the control mechanism. This social support can
become stronger as the quality and length of relationships grow between people. A person can gain understanding and knowledge of coping mechanisms, as he or she learns and shares experiences. From this knowledge, an individual learns how to recognize a stress, draws upon experiences of self or others and understands how to diminish the effects of this stress (Pearlin et al., 1981).

Time is another factor found by this research of the stress process. The length of time a person delves into the event or can commit to it by coping, as well as the strength of the coping mechanisms and the duration of the event, can determine the outcome. At the end of the 1981 study discussion by Pearlin et al., they describe some of their findings: “Perhaps the most important lesson that could be conveyed by this analysis is that social stress is not a happening; instead it is a complex, varied, and intellectually challenging process” (p. 352).

In regards to the model described in the 1981 paper by Schlossberg, she states that, “a transition can be said to occur if an event or non-event results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one’s behavior and relationships” (p. 5). How a person adapts to this transition is determined by multiple factors, such as the type of transition and whether there is perceived positive gain or negative loss from this new role. Also factored in the negative or positive effect from this new role is the amount of time it takes to deal with this transition and the coping mechanisms of the individual (Schlossberg, 1981).

In 1989 Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering revisited the original Schlossberg model of transition and added three components that include moving in, moving through and moving out. In this first phase, moving in refers to living up to a certain role identity and the expectation of that certain role. Moving through is after a person learns what is expected of him and adjusts to
this new role. The last phase is moving out, when one has satisfied the needs of the desired role and begins to look for another new role to satisfy current desires.

For the veteran, the transition to being a student is just one of the roles the returning service member encounters in the transition to a community college setting, according to Wheeler in her 2012 qualitative study of veterans. The author of this study discusses the current and past roles of the participants and the conflicts these veterans encounter. For example, the military is very structured, while academia is more relaxed and unstructured. Regarding military structure, promotions use a step-by-step written process that details which goals need to be reached in order to achieve the next highest rank. In the service, one's commanding officer represents a higher authority and respect is given accordingly. Service members recognize the many years of experience the person with this rank has obtained and what the rank represents.

Each day the soldier has certain non-negotiable requirements: be in uniform, be at a certain place, and be there at a specified time. He/she has traveled to places in the world that others can only dream of, encountering diverse populations and people, sometimes under unfavorable conditions. Teamwork is essential and each service member must ensure that those around them are supportive of the mission and understand the components of that goal. Training must be taken seriously and repeated until the concepts are ingrained. All of this has a purpose, as the role of being a soldier and the decisions made can mean life or death for you or those around you (Wheeler, 2012).

As these soldiers return, they encounter conflict as they face many roles at home, work, and at school. There is conflict with the transition to becoming a student because of age differences and the distinct life experiences of service members, compared to those of the younger and less experienced students. Veterans have learned to respect leadership roles and
view challenges made by fellow classmates in the classroom to the professors as a way of showing disrespect.

Student veterans note that each class is different; therefore, each type of curriculum presents challenges with multiple ways to accomplish goals. Sometimes there is the perception that professors show favoritism to some students that may not seem deserved. Grading and the turning in of assignments can be flexible in academia, whereas military assignments are done in one structured way. The college guidelines can be blurred, as one student can be seen as slacking off by not meeting the basic requirements with what appears to have little or no consequences (Wheeler, 2012).

The ambiguity of roles is explained in a paper written by Thoits, wherein she discusses whether lower status groups, such as women, minorities, and the unmarried, have higher stress because they have fewer resources (1991). She also states that role identities are relevant to the experience and not all experiences are negative. According to Thoits, identity strains come from traditional gender roles that can create social isolation, conflict, and pressure to conform to an expected role (1991).

An assumption then can be based upon the 2012 Demographic Profile of the Military Community; female veterans are a minority group, as they represent just 16% of the military (United States Department of Defense). In addition, from the 2012 study, An Investigation of FY10 and FY11 Enlisted Accessions’ Socioeconomic Characteristics by Lien et al., regarding female enlistees in relation to the general population, a higher number of female veterans are from poorer income groups that have limited resources. In conjunction with the 2012 Demographic Profile of the Military Community, more than 88% of active duty females are single (United States Department of Defense, 2012). Then one postulates that because these
student veterans are female, come from a minority group, and are more than likely unmarried, their resources are limited, resulting in a higher level of stress.

When a woman identifies with a certain role (role identity), her self-esteem is determined by the perception of how others feel a person performs that role (role perception). Also, what value a person places on that role identity determines the level of stress. The more an individual understands what is expected of her, and the more she performs according to that role, the greater the well-being (Thoits, 1991).

**Stress Inoculation Theory**. Another scientific theory that lends support toward all student veterans would be teaching them coping mechanisms like those shown in Meichenbaum’s training theory of *stress inoculation*. This theory teaches three phases of coping skills—the first being educational, the second is acquiring coping skills, and the third is adapting these skills with role-playing. This program is said to be effective in reducing anxieties and increasing performance in order to elevate that individual’s level of resilience (Meichenbaum & Deffenbacher, 1988). In 1996, the United States Army Research Institute conducted a meta-analysis on the effectiveness of this training for the Behavioral and Social Sciences. The meta-analysis study showed training was effective in reducing performance anxiety, the level of anxiety, and enhancing stress performance (Saunders, Driskell, Hall & Salas, 1996).

The literature on the effects of the military experience and the stressors that affect both males and females suggests that this type of clinical psychology theory training be used to manage stress. The Defense Centers of Excellence (2015) uses this particular coping mechanism as a type of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) with soldiers who have been diagnosed with PTSD.
The literature on the effects of Meichenbaum’s SIT and applying it to students in an academic environment has been documented by research conducted by Akgun and Ciarrochi (2003) by the use of learned resourcefulness. The construct of learned resourcefulness is defined as “a set of skills for regulating internal events such as emotions that might otherwise interfere with the smooth execution of a target behaviour” (p. 287). This research measured the effects of stress on the GPA of 141 undergraduates. The study revealed that those students who had a low level of learned resourcefulness had a low tolerance for academic stress, resulting in a lower GPA than those students who had a high level of learned resourcefulness (p. 291).

Some of the factors that create academic stress are learning to cope with time management, study habits, exams, and general unfamiliarity with the academic environment. The students with poor responses to stress associated with academics are taught coping skills before it affects their GPA (Akgun & Ciarrochi, 2003).

**Social Baseline Theory.** The last theory defined for this study is SBT described by Beckes and Coan at the University of Virginia (2011). In SBT, stress is reduced through the building of relationships that lead to a healthier and longer life. The relationship-building aspect of this theory is one of the strengths, along with the scientifically proven aspect that sharing of stress with a close friend helps with coping. Another positive aspect is that stress reduction leads to a healthier lifestyle.

In a previous paper by Cohen and Janicki-Deverts (2009) regarding SBT and relationships, they found that subjects who had an extensive social network tend to have fewer health issues. Also, when social interactions are positive, there is less chance of a person having a sense of loneliness. This sense of not belonging is avoided by joining groups that have similar social or recreational interests (p. 377). This feeling of not fitting in is mitigated by effective
interventions that include creating a sense of community, engaging in social activities, and building familiarity and self-confidence. This social network assists a student veteran in gaining control over the stress by sharing experiences and help her gain a sense of purpose (p. 377). The concepts of SBT can be best applied by the campus in encouraging and supporting the establishment of student organizations that create an atmosphere where the student veterans can interact with each other.

Thus, SBT would prove valuable to female student veterans when on-campus programs and services are veteran-specific and trained professional staff is educated about the unique needs of this sub-population. Student involvement and engagement is also proportional to the level of services provided.

However, there needs to be a means to gain the trust of the veteran and for her to face the challenges before her. This trust is built by showing that female student veterans matriculate when they utilize these services, but that by specifically using SBT, the female student veteran will also achieve positive health benefits that will alleviate stress.

The closing paragraph from the paper by Cohen and Janicki-Deverts (2009) states, “Our argument is a simple one. There is an extremely provocative and reliable association between the nature of an individual’s social network and their health” (p. 377).

**Student Engagement Construct.** In the research of Kuh he discusses student engagement and asserts, “…students who are involved in educationally productive activities in college are developing habits of the mind and heart that enlarge their capacity for continuous learning and development” (Kuh, 2003, p. 25). He continues this discussion, in relationship of engagement to learning, from results in the NSSE, which contains data collected from 285,000 first-year and senior students at more than 600 four-year colleges and institutions.
One of the key findings that Kuh discusses from the NSSE is identification of students who are not engaged and involving them in educationally related activities. In addition, in order to keep students engaged, they must be able to devote time and effort into the process and to develop habits needed for the academic environment (Kuh, 2003). These habits, as they relate to student veterans, raise the level of difficulty for those that have health issues related to PTSD.

However, another factor revealed from the NSSE study was the value of exposure to a diverse student population. The returning veteran has a positive relationship in this regard, as they have experienced and lived with diversity not only in their unit, but also from exposure to a foreign population (Kuh, 2003).

**Conclusion.** The strength in understanding the various roles and transition process of female student veterans is in directing them through one of these appropriate stress reduction or other programs to encourage persistence. The goal is that when persistence is coupled with retention the female student veteran eventually matriculates in college, leading toward the successful outcome of graduation.

The weaknesses are in misunderstanding the different roles of the veteran and not having solutions in place to assist them in their transition to a student. If these transition solutions are non-existent, students *stop-out* for a time, as they learn to independently manage their stress. If the absence from campus is for too long a time, this leads to their dropping out altogether. On some occasions, there is a chance for the “stopped-out” student to return and take advantage of the programs available, and this leads to *swirling*. However, in cases of the student veteran's “swirling,” the student veteran either returns to the previous campus or continues on to a "veteran friendly" one.
Conceptual Framework

Several theories are relevant to female student veterans in their navigation through higher education that relate to role conflicts, involvement, engagement and the effect on persistence. The key concept that assists in explaining female student veterans and their navigation through academics in this dissertation can be summarized by a conceptual map based upon Schlossberg’s transition theory that she revised in 2011 (See Figure 5).

Schlossberg posits that, when a person begins to leave an existing role, she encounters stress as she decides to change. The decision to change roles comes about by stress that, for the student veteran, can include whether the event was anticipated (using the G.I. Bill to attend college), unanticipated (being discharged due to an injury), or a nonevent (an event that did not happen, such as a transfer request to a new duty station as planned). These changes and the resulting stress lead to conflicts regarding leaving an old role and taking on a new one if the overall new occurrence is positive (Schlossberg, 2011).

These events can be occurring simultaneously and causing conflict and stress as they clash with existing roles. These anticipated changes then affect the roles and relationships a person has with other people that are in that close social circle of family or friends. As the changes begin, they can cause a shift in a person’s routine that can contribute to stress as she adapts. Finally, regardless of whether these role changes are negative or positive, they affect the assumptions a person has about herself and her attitude toward life in general (Schlossberg, 2011).

The decision process is time-dependent and what type of coping skills are engaged determines the results as either negative or positive. For some individuals, the decision process can take a short time because of an opportunity that may appear to never repeat itself and that
calls for a quick decision. At certain times this process can become agonizing, as a person is unsure about leaving an old role behind. In this case, if the level of role ambiguity is great, some people can drag this process out for years, as they wait until that right opportunity comes along.

Once the person has left the old role, the new one requires additional relationships, changes in routines, and assumptions. A question then arises about how two people can encounter the same role change, such as attending college, and yet cope differently. This coping process can be explained by the Schlossberg model with the use of the four S’s of the coping mechanism: situation, self, support, and strategies (Schlossberg, 2011).

A “situation” is described as what situation a person is in and when she decides to make a transition (Schlossberg, 2011). If, for example, a soldier is close to the end of her enlistment and has explored all her options for using the G.I. Bill, she is more prepared to make a timely decision. This veteran, because she is ready for this role change and with having minimal stress, can transition quickly and do so with little adjustment.

The “self” portion of this theory refers to the coping mechanisms the individual has in place and her ability to be resilient. These coping mechanisms include her knowledge of past experiences and optimism. Of additional importance is whether one blames “self” if a role did not go as planned and whether there are enough resiliencies available to wait until enough time has passed for positive results (Schlossberg, 2011).

Schlossberg continues by describing the value of “support” in this process. As a transition occurs, the quantity and quality of support can have a bearing on the decision to take on a new role (2011). For example, if a soldier upon discharge decides to attend a college that is away from her hometown, the value of the support available on campus can be a factor in that
decision. This does show the value of active campus groups that can be used to encourage support for veterans.

The final coping mechanism is what types of “strategies” are available when a decision is made in the role transition. These are strategies that a person can incorporate as one role appears to be unattainable and requires a change (Schlossberg, 2011). For example, these strategies can be external, such as getting assistance from an on-campus veteran’s counselor in obtaining educational financing or an internal strategy by finding ways to get needed rest that becoming a new student requires.

Challenges to the role transition change process can be summarized by first knowing what type of transition has occurred and then in determining whether a person is prepared for the event. Next, understanding how much of life has been affected by this change can determine the type of support needed to assist her in the decision process. Thirdly, this assistance can be given by having awareness of whether that person is ready for that role and has the awareness of the time required in understanding the new role requirements and expectations. Lastly, additional assistance can be given by understanding how the person got into that situation using the 4 S’s: how did she get into that situation, how she views herself in relationship to the new role, what type of support she finds once she gets there, and, if a challenge comes, what type of strategies are available (Schlossberg, 2011).
Concept Map Strengths and Weaknesses. Schlossberg's theory of transition in concert with the literature on role theory serves as the guiding conceptual underpinnings for this research. According to Schlossberg, there are many life events that can influence one’s ability to adapt when transitioning from one role to another (Schlossberg, 1981). The female student veteran population faces multiple transitional issues that result in stressors, negatively and positively, when they attempt to adapt from a military to a civilian role and the additional role of a student. In addition, some veterans face multiple role transitions repeatedly from being a member of the NG or Reserves.

The strength of this theory would be that the stress awareness found from a particular role increases persistence when incorporated with positive support. Such support can come from student support services and programs geared toward this particular sub-population. For
example, if a college is aware of the resources necessary for this population, a student is encouraged to become involved in positive relationships on campus, resulting in a rewarding academic experience.

The weakness of this theory is that, even though this theory can assist in explaining how a person copes in a particular role, a person can have multiple stressors and multiple roles competing at the same time. Also, it is important to keep in mind that each person has developed unique ways of coping with stress, based upon life events. Anticipating a new role takes a person out of her comfort zone, becoming an extremely stressful experience for a person who, for example, is already withdrawn. This avoidance creates a non-conducive environment, and the adjustment period is time-consuming, which creates additional stress.

**Contextual Factors.** The female student veteran is a non-traditional student, and one theory that can assist in delving into this population is Schlossberg’s transition theory. The student veteran faces multiple transitional events, such as returning from a deployment, adjusting to the role of student, then facing a conflicting role of an additional deployment. According to Schlossberg (1981), a transition: “…occur(s) if an event or non-event results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires a corresponding change in one’s behavior and relationships” (p. 5). The strength of the coping mechanisms in this transition determines the outcome, and they are unique for each person.

This transition is not only determined by the individual, but is also influenced by those who have a relationship to the veteran, such as family, friends, and fellow students on campus, according to the DiRamio and Jarvis paper in 2011. The paper states there are many factors that can affect this transition of the student veteran in particular. One of those issues is being able to control the inner conflict of personal choices, such as in using the V.A. educational benefits and
knowing the responsibilities that come with this decision. The second issue would be role change by understanding the full implications of a role transformation, the stressors, and taking ample time in order to adjust to becoming a civilian, prior to adjusting to being a student. The last would be awareness of the recurring stress that would come from needing proper study habits that may have not been developed or were lost during enlistment (p. 7).

The research of Astin mentions that a majority of student veterans are first-generation students, are older than the traditional student, and many are married. He cautions that institutions should avoid stereotyping student veterans as non-traditional in that they have unique abilities, goals, and needs. In 2011, Astin remarked about the complexity of describing what the specific qualities are of the student veteran population. Astin suggested that even though student veterans are in a sense classified as non-traditional, there needs to be intensive research of this unique population of students and that research should be funded by the Defense Department (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011, p. 32).

**Conclusion.** “The G.I. Bill of Rights has been heralded as one of the most significant pieces of legislation ever produced by the federal government—one that impacted the United States socially, economically and politically” (United States Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013). The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 and the various reiterations that followed, often referred to as the G.I. Bill, have each set the standards for veteran benefits in the realm of education and have opened the doors for generations of student veterans and their families.

The current version of the G.I. Bill, the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill, has seen nearly 1 million veterans enroll in educational benefits that have paid out $25 billion. "It shows that veterans are not only thriving, but they have a desire to succeed and lead in this country in uniform and out of uniform," said Michael Dakduk, the executive director of SVA (Zoroya, 2013). Of those veterans
who are eligible for benefits from the total military force of 2,228,348 service members, female veterans total 356,536 (United States Department of Defense, 2012). These female student veterans are the focus of this qualitative study.

Regardless of student veteran demographics, there has not been a study to illustrate the effectiveness of those taking advantage of the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill. The Center for Public Integrity (2013) published a report that stated the federal government has not tracked the number of students who persisted or matriculated since the bill was passed. Not only is there a lack in tracking of the benefits used, there is also a disconnection with those who are eligible but are not using these educational benefits.

There are many reasons why those eligible are not using the G.I. Bill, such as physical restrictions, mental health conditions and the perceived stress veterans encounter while navigating through the bureaucracies of the V.A. and the educational institutions (Church, 2009). Also, there are issues with obtaining proper credit for military training towards a degree, along with cultural and age differences from those of the traditional college-age student (Lang et al., 2013, p. 7).

The outcome of this qualitative study is to understand the uniqueness of the female student veteran experience. This study focuses on the relationship between the coping mechanisms utilized as roles change and how these relate to motivation, involvement, engagement, and eventually persistence in educational goal completion. As this qualitative study develops, it becomes emergent and will “come alive,” one that specifically addresses female student veterans and contributes to the body of research knowledge (Krathwohl, 2009). This study proposes that female student veterans can be assisted in their higher education journey
when they utilize the study of transitional issues, as the female veterans change roles, and understand the implications of those changes towards goal setting achievement.

The main focus of this study analyzes data using the theory of transition purposed in 1981 by Schlossberg. In this theory, there are multiple events that can affect the transition from one role to another. In this specific female veteran student population, a transition may be compounded by additional factors such as returning from deployments, adjusting to academia, and in some cases the anticipation of another deployment. These roles require behavioral and relationship adjustments that create conflict.

Many theories and concepts can be applied to non-traditional female student veterans that go beyond role transition, are complicated, and entail other factors that affect persistence. Some of these are based upon coping-skills development, student involvement, and relationship-building. The SIT, developed by Meichenbaum & Deffenbacher (1988), employs coping-mechanism skill development through education and role-play. The student involvement theory purposed by Astin (1999) shows that student persistence is relational to involvement. Another theory is SBT, described by Beckes and Coan (2011), where stress is reduced through relationship building, leading to a healthier and longer life. Therefore, having a knowledge base that includes all of these factors improves the outcome of a dissertation.

The positive results achieved in the qualitative study paradigm is also through effective triangulation of data (Golafshani, 2003). The triangulation of data utilized in this study refers to multiple methods that include interviews, self-reflection, and introspection (Fontana & Frey, 1994). It is the hope of this researcher that the quality of this study provides an insight into the female student veterans' transition into and persistence through college. From this insight comes
forth an awareness of the resources needed to ensure completion of the female student veterans’
educational goals.

Data sources regarding student veterans' using educational benefits continue to be
limited. A letter read to the House Committee on Veterans Affairs on November 4, 2013, by the
SVA expresses this frustration:

The lack of empirical data on the drivers of student veteran success creates barriers for
institutions of higher learning. Many are facing budget reductions and increased demand
for services. Without accurate data, schools may be investing scarce resources on
ineffective programs. (p. 1)
Chapter 3: Research Methods

Introduction

According to the V.A. (2013), the total female veteran population as of 2011 (all conflicts since WWII) in the U.S. is 1,853,690. There have been several recent studies that have interviewed student veterans that included limited input by female student veterans. A more recent qualitative study was conducted by Wheeler (2012) in her study, *Veterans’ Transitions to Community College: A Case Study*. In 2011, a qualitative study was done by Capps titled, *Veteran students: What motivates persistence from matriculation to goal completion?* Another was an exploratory study conducted by Bauman (2009), whose work included interviews of female veterans titled, *The Mobilization and Return of Undergraduate Students Serving in the National Guard and Reserves*. However, there need to be additional studies that focus on female student veterans, especially as the combat roles change over time for female veterans and how combat stress affects role transition outcomes.

There have been several recently published quantitative studies that were conducted using both male and female veterans. One of those studies, titled *Buddy-to-Buddy, a citizen soldier peer support program to counteract stigma, PTSD, depression, and suicide*, included demographic measurements and other selected responses using the Likert scale by several hundred NG members to gauge the level of support services provided to those returning from deployment (Greden et al., 2010). Another was a dissertation by Morreale (2011) titled *Academic motivation and academic self-concept: Military veteran students in higher education*; which dealt with student veterans and their transition to academia.

Although there have been several recent quantitative studies of large numbers of male and female veterans, such as those conducted by Greden et al. (2010) and Morreale (2011), there
is a need for a focused study on female student veterans. A quantitative study can force responses by the very nature of checking boxes, and this limits what otherwise may reveal deeper issues of this sub-population. Although there have been qualitative studies, detailed by the examples of Wheeler (2012) and of Capps (2011), there still need to be additional studies, especially as the combat roles of female veterans change over time.

A qualitative study adds to the body of research knowledge, as it creates the measures of the survey as it is developed. The responses that may come from the stressful experiences of female student veterans may then not be limited to a select answer resulting from unique experiences of the various roles they encounter in life. Each role change presents a challenge that determines which coping mechanisms are utilized and how these relate to motivation, involvement, engagement, and eventually persistence in educational goal completion.

One means of conducting a qualitative study is using an oral history that gives a voice to the participant who has experienced an event that is historical in nature or one that had a profound effect on their lives. Oral histories not only include verbal statements, but also nonverbal cues such as the body language of the participants (Errante, 2000).

A qualitative study that specifically addresses female student veterans could then be emergent, one that is useful to the body of research knowledge as the qualitative nature of the study creates the survey measures as it is developed (Krathwohl, 2009). The responses may “come alive” from the descriptive experiences of female student veterans that may be limited in a quantitative study by a selected response (Krathwohl, 2009). A quantitative study would limit the uniqueness of each experience of what coping mechanisms are utilized and how these relate to motivation, involvement, engagement, and eventually persistence in educational goal completion.
Design Methodology

This is a qualitative grounded theory phenomenological study, which is useful for gathering and analyzing data about a small number of persons, issues, or phenomena. The study is emergent and reflects the shared experiences of these women, while attempting to capture their “voice” and understanding of their experience through their eyes.

The interview instrument included general demographic questions followed by seven qualitative open-ended questions (See Appendix B). The participants provided the story that served as the resource for narrative thematic analysis. Evidence supporting these themes and a conclusion were drawn accordingly.

Design Sampling

The study sample was purposeful in that only female student veterans were included. Participants were recruited through flyers posted in general student-frequented areas such as the dining areas, library, and lounges. Flyers were also hung in more specific areas where veterans may congregate, such as the VSO, SVA, and ROTC offices. In addition, flyers were posted in several southeastern Michigan armories. An electronic version of the flyer was transmitted via email to the SVA group and the local Army National Guard liaison officer for distribution (See Appendix C).

Upon generating initial interest, snowball sampling was employed as a technique for finding participants, as one subject gives the name of another who in turn provides another participant and so on. This sampling approach is useful when the researcher wants to contact people with unique backgrounds, experiences, or characteristics who likely know one another or others similar to themselves (Vogt & Johnson, 2011).
Prior to beginning the interview, each potential participant was given a demographic data sheet to verify she meets the study parameters (See Appendix B). Due to the fact that this study is purposeful, only female student veterans were included. Their responses include gender (female only), age, marital status, race and ethnicity, their employment status and current family income. Also asked was whether they were full- or part-time students, their college major/program of study and current class standing.

The selection of the female veterans is intentional, as the proposed study endeavors to add to the literature on a sub-population of veterans that needs additional research (Street et al., 2009). Female veterans are significantly a minority in the military as they represent just 16% of current service members. The largest age ranges in the military, both male and female, are in the 30-year-old and under age groups which in total represents 61% of the Armed Forces. A majority of the female student veteran population falls within those age ranges as well (United States Department of Defense, 2012).

Another justification in targeting those ages is because these groups typically include the older non-traditional students (in one sense because they have prior college credit), and those studied include undergraduate and graduate students, as per the study conducted by DiRamio and Jarvis (2011). Additionally, this age range is meant to capture those female veterans of this population that include officers who have completed the ROTC programs in college and have returned for graduate studies (Lang et al., 2013). However, even though the 25 or younger category was included in the demographic questionnaire, none of those who volunteered for this study were from this age group. All of the participants were in the age 26 or older groups.

In addition, participants are asked whether they are currently in an active duty or reserve status or are no longer affiliated with the military. The importance of this question is to see if
there is a correlation to higher stress levels from being an active member in some capacity in the service (Grossman, 2009). Other background factors of interest to this research are relationship status–divorced, married, or single–or whether they care for another person or have children. The relational issues can affect the role of the female student veteran and either have a negative or positive influence on persistence in educational goals (American Council on Education, 2008).

The students interviewed were those who currently are enrolled as either part-time or full-time and are utilizing any portion of the educational benefits from the V.A. The purpose of this measurement is to capture those students who are actively enrolled in order to understand how they are coping in college and if experiencing multiple roles as students can affect stress levels. Also, the obtaining or maintaining of G.I. Bill benefits can be a financial issue in this study and could contribute to stress levels. In addition, inquiries about current employment status as well as income levels are other possible measurements affecting coping mechanisms and stress.

Due to the fact that this sub-population is narrow to begin with, there were no additional limitations by race, religion, military branch, marital or income status. However, in order to measure the effects of stress and combat exposure, each participant was asked as to whether she had been in either a combat zone or had experienced “combat situations.” These “combat situations” could include harm or threat of harm to oneself, fellow soldiers, or civilians, all of which contribute to stress levels (Grossman, 2009). However, a negative response to this question was not a cause for withdrawal.

If an individual met the qualifications set in the profile, she was requested to participate in the interview process. The goal of this qualitative study was to conduct in-depth interviews with six female student veterans from the student body of Normal University (a pseudonym).
The interview process of this study employed a qualitative approach using the snowball method with an open-ended structure of face-to-face interviews. These interviews lasted from 60 - 90 minutes and were audio-recorded and then transcribed.

**Study Location**

This study was conducted with participants from Normal University in Michigan. Normal University was established in 1849 as a teaching school and is a public 4-year university. Since that time the student population has grown to 23,000 students in undergraduate, graduate, and doctorate degree programs. Approximately 700 of those students are veterans on campus utilizing the G.I. Bill, along with an unknown number of active duty personnel using the Tuition Assistant program. The University has a small but active SVA chapter and provides support to all the student veterans with a Military and Veteran Resource Center and Veteran Lounge.

**Data Collection**

The focus of the data collection and analysis was on illuminating the multiple roles of female student veterans’ experience, the conflict created by those roles and the transition, coping, and persistence as collegians. The request for participants was emailed to the SVA and ROTC groups on campus. In addition, recruitment flyers were posted in high-traffic areas on campus in order to draw volunteers (See Appendix C). The volunteers then signed the informed consent agreement after they understood the study (See Appendix A). Once they agreed, the participants were requested to complete the demographic questions and then preceded to the interview questions (See Appendix B). These interviews were conducted in a natural setting such as the library or coffee shop on campus or some other agreed-upon public place off-campus.

Confidentiality was maintained of the profile survey information collected, as all audio recordings and transcripts of interviews were kept on a password-protected server. No
participants were individually identified in any published research paper or during any presentation of the results. Audio recordings were retained until the end of the study, then destroyed.

**Data Analysis**

The purpose in beginning the study with requesting demographic questions was to develop a profile of those interviewed. This data that was collected could ultimately have many implications, such as the significance of having someone to share life with in both a positive or negative way. In addition, caring for another person or child-rearing responsibilities can necessitate the importance of obtaining adult or childcare support services to alleviate any stress that may add to the veteran’s status as a member of the academic community. The requested level of family income indicated the socioeconomic status of the veteran, which can be a significant source of stress and have persistence ramifications. The current living arrangement of the veteran was also a point of interest with regards to whether they own a home, were renting, or were living with parents or friends, as these arrangements can create role conflict and stress.

The qualitative analysis of this study was conducted using thematic coding to discover themes common across participants’ interviews. Data were analyzed using qualitative research software such as NVivo, in order to analyze and manage the data and bring sense to the multiple themes that may come out of each survey and assist in developing conclusions.

The last factors in data analysis are the field notes and a journal kept to reflect what the researcher experienced after each interview. Upon reflection, each interviewee was viewed as the teacher, as the person took the direction of the interview in a non-structured way, forming additional questions. The purpose of this oral history and analysis of these case study instruments
is to measure how the stress of being in the military, along with the stress from various roles at home, work, or school, and level of support, has an effect on the female student veteran.

The outcome of this study is to understand female student veteran experiences, any stressors felt, and ways of coping and providing support not only for those who participated in this survey, but also for those soldiers who return from future deployments. Many female veterans enlisted with the hopes of utilizing their G.I. Bill benefits. This study hopes to ensure the academic climate is such that resources are available to ensure completion of their educational goals. The participants provided the story, which was the resource for a narrative thematic analysis, evidence then supported these themes, and a conclusion has been drawn.

**Validity and Reliability**

In the making of an ethnographic record, a researcher documents the study with whatever is available to assist in the triangulation of the study for validity and reliability. According to Golafshani (2003) who examined the work of Denzin (1998), qualitative studies have validity and reliability when bias has been eliminated in order to increase trustworthiness.

Golafshani (2003) continues to state that quality in the qualitative paradigm is achieved through triangulation of data. Triangulation refers to multiple methods that include interviews, self-reflection, and introspection (Fontana & Frey, 1994). This is done by using historical timelines, documents, and making tape recordings of the interviews. A journal (research diary) is also kept to monitor the subjectivity of the researcher to assist in triangulation of the study (Peshkin, 1988).

This triangulation through fieldwork documentation, along with knowledge of the topic and understanding of the culture, creates themes that are the result of “brainstorming” (Spradley & Baker, 1980, p. 72). These themes emerge from the experiences of veterans as they tell their
story. Peshkin (1988) also describes self-monitoring as necessary upon hearing these stories and cautions that, when the role between the researcher and participant becomes vague, the researcher needs to regain clarity and manage one's positionality.

**Positionality**

Knowing your positionality and understanding the experience of your participant, it is important to use phrases they are familiar with using a non-hierarchical interview. Studies have shown that veterans, especially combat veterans, never felt comfortable telling their stories to someone who does not understand them (Greden et al., 2010).

However, what needs to be considered in both quantitative and qualitative analysis is that a researcher will come with a certain amount of preconceived thoughts regarding the subject we are analyzing, the people we are interviewing, and in analyzing the outcomes. The use of a qualitative study also complicates these issues as data are analyzed through different lenses and the development of themes.

Positionality is developed over time from culture and, in this case, a military culture. In addition, there are preconceived notions of what a person may be like as the result of their wartime experiences. The key then to a successful study is the use of validity and reliability measures that will make a researcher aware of their positionality and to not inject that into the study.

I am a retired E-7 U.S. Navy Storekeeper who has twenty-two years of experience in the Navy in both active and reserve duty roles. I also have been a veteran student who has taken advantage of several federal programs, such as tuition assistance during active duty, the Vietnam Era G.I. Bill upon discharge, and a supplemental tuition support program for active reservists. I am also an active member of the Buddy-to Buddy program that is sponsored by The University
of Michigan that was developed out of the need to provide support, a “buddy,” to soldiers in a NG unit.

There are certain biases that can come forward with this researcher’s positionality. Being a veteran who has utilized financial and physical resources available could lessen my understanding of another veteran who may not have the knowledge of where to seek those resources on his or her own. My study habits and my ability to focus on the topics at hand have been developed over time and were not affected by any traumatic events such as that of PTSD or MST, like that experienced by some of these female student veterans. There may not be that understanding of how that affects the attainment of educational goals due to a lack of empathy on my part. Also, my positionality has another bias in that a male veteran such as myself may not have the role demands or conflicts that a woman veteran experiences.

Confidentiality and Trust

Several problems could be associated with female student veterans' being interviewed by a retired veteran who currently is associated with a veterans' group that is active in the NG. Those interviewed may have concerns that discussing any adjustment problems that arise from this interview may have these issues revealed to their chain of command. Also, if situations do come forth that deal with possible mental health issues such as PTSD, the participant may feel the researcher has a responsibility to report those negative health issues to the authorities or the V.A.

However, in order to deal with these anonymity and confidentiality issues, there has to be a trust level built. This must be a certain comfort level and rapport between the participant and the interviewer in order to build familiarity to ensure a level of trust, which will increase validity (Fontana & Frey, 1994).
To construct this familiarity and increase comfort levels, there needs to be a mutual level of rapport. Building rapport is being able to understand what the participant is going through with shared experiences. Along with building this rapport comes the building of trust (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). When listening to a veteran’s story, it is important that we gain an understanding of these internal conflicts and find better means of support. This rapport and trust is also built with the researcher's understanding the language and culture of those interviewed (Fontana & Frey, 1994). However, there will be a commonality of language and knowledge of slang that is unique to the military culture through shared experiences by the researcher and participants.

Shared experiences between the researcher and participants builds rapport, as they share an understanding of the military culture. Being a retired veteran who has experienced the adjustment from both the active and reserve components in the military to academia and having utilized educational benefits was a positive factor in trust building. This level of trust built between the participants and the researcher has to be mutual and was brought on by respecting each other. Of utmost importance, participants must have assurances that all statements were treated in a confidential manner.

Another factor could be the gender of the researcher that is different from those of the participants, as well as the possibility of rank differences, both of which can be a hierarchical hindrance. In order to gather “value-free” data, as described by Fontana & Frey (1994), the sex of the interviewer and that of the participant must be “faceless and invisible” (p. 369). According to Fontana & Frey “gender filters knowledge” (p. 369); the researcher being male and the student veterans being female could create a hierarchical “gender” relationship.

In addition, a hierarchical “rank” relationship could exist, depending on the rank of the researcher (E-7) and of those interviewed in the enlistment ranks (E-1 through E-6) or those who
are officers. The researcher had to ensure that neither gender nor rank influenced the questions, analysis, and reporting of the study. Fontana & Frey state that this can be accomplished by being “courteous, friendly, and pleasant” (p. 369).

The female student veterans in this study appeared to be forthright in their experiences as they found an avenue to tell their story to a person who had a genuine interest. It didn’t appear that rank was an issue because the interviewer was in a retired status and not actively involved on campus at Normal University as a faculty or staff member. Also, gender appeared to not be a factor as the women in this study saw the uniqueness of a male interviewing all female veterans. The female participants were willing to assist a fellow male student who happened to be a veteran as well, and one who understood their experiences.

**Limitations**

There are many limitations to this study, with the first being a small sample size. Secondly, the study was conducted exclusively on the campus of Normal University. These limitations would make it difficult to generalize this population to all of the female student veterans. Also, Normal University is a public 4-year college, and the results may not be typical for those in a private 4-year college or those in a 2-year community college setting. Another limitation is that the participants themselves may not be expressing in their responses how they actually feel due to the environment, the researcher, or the questions asked. The participants also may not reflect the cultures of all branches of service, and therefore generalizations may prove difficult towards the entire military community.

There is a limitation in data collected about female student veterans and their persistence in higher education. As a renowned expert in student persistence, Astin stated in 2011 that there
are difficulties in describing the student veteran population due to a lack of research of this non-traditional population (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011, p. 32).

In a paper published by The Center for Public Integrity in 2013, *GI bill covered tuition for nearly a million post-9/11 veterans without tracking their progress. Veterans’ advocates and watchdogs alike seek graduation rate data for students using the GI Bill*, there is a concern regarding data collected of the graduation rates of student veterans in relationship to the nearly $30 billion taxpayer investment. Even though this research project does not deal directly with graduation rates, it does attempt to find the root cause of persistence toward that goal of graduation by female student veterans. In the ACE study of 2012 conducted by McBain et al., they conclude in their report on assessing campus programs for student veterans that additional studies are needed in order for higher education to provide the support deserved by veterans.
Chapter 4: Participant Introductions and Demographics

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to impart to researchers in academia, the military, and the public what may be the underlying obstacles that female student veterans face when they transition from the military to college. This study also hopes to provide information that may prove of value to individuals that provide services to veterans, now and in the future. Understanding the role of female student veterans can be a daunting task, as there are many factors that can affect each experience, which contributes to the uniqueness of the military lifestyle, no matter how short or how long that period of time may be.

This transition between the role of student and service-member can occur many times in one’s military career. While others may experience that transition as they are discharged from one active duty enlistment, others experience multiple deployments throughout their careers that may last until they have 20 qualifying years (for retirement) or more.

This qualitative study involved the participation of six female student veterans whose military experience mirrored these variations. The services represented by these female veterans included the Army, Army National Guard, Navy, and Air Force. They had served on active duty, as a reservist, or as a member of the NG. Their experience is as different as each participant is unique.

Participant Introductions

This section will briefly describe the background of each participant in this study with the goal of assisting the reader in a better understanding of the service-member's experience. Each story will show the uniqueness of the role each female veteran played while in the military and
how this contributes to the challenges brought to campus. These six women (who have been given pseudonyms) are: Rachel, Sarah, Rose, Sadie, Victoria, and Eleanor.

Rachel. At age 16 Rachel decided to join the military in order to bring discipline and order into her life. In a short three-month span during her teen years, she lost both her best friend and boyfriend, who died from drinking- and drug abusing-related car accidents. She knew she was destined to travel down that same path and decided a drastic change was needed, “…I knew I was headed down a road that wasn’t going to do good things for my life and was not what I wanted.” Her parents emancipated her at age 16 so they could “sign her over” to the Army.

One of the Army’s conditions was for Rachel to finish high school before she enlisted, and as soon as she did, she left for the military at age 17. She was on active duty for four years as an enlisted member, then joined the Army NG. Currently she is still serving with a total military service of 10 years (at the time of this interview) and is now an officer. Her main focus of military training has been in the role of a combat medic (nurse).

The family history of Rachel includes two brothers and a boyfriend who are in the Marines. Both of her grandfathers were in the Army, and her father does work on a military base as a contract employee. Her family was poor and made their living off of the skilled trades and did not have any college graduates, nor experience with higher education. Rachel knew that if she did go on to college she would potentially be “…up to my eyeballs in debt, trying to take out student loans, that I would have no idea how I was going to pay for it.” However, Rachel didn’t join the military because of money, she said: “I joined the military for other reasons; to get my life on track, some discipline, get my fitness level where I wanted it to be, serve my country and to follow in my family footsteps.”
Her current family includes living with and sharing in the support of her significant other and his two pre-teen girls. Her significant other is also in the NG and has been deployed three times. During her partner’s second tour, Rachel joined him in Iraq but was assigned to another base in the same area. Regarding their joint deployment experience, Rachel found that unless you have experienced a combat assignment, it can be difficult for people to understand your feelings. She said, “It’s nice to have someone to talk to who understands where you are coming from, where you have been, and where you are trying to go.”

As a flight nurse Rachel was sent on a mission that had MASCAL (massive casualties), “that was probably one of the most challenging missions.” Two of the wounded they picked up that day were her friends from training school in Alabama. “One of them grabbed me by my vest right here in the front and said, 'Rachel I am so happy to see you!'”

During her service, Rachel took advantage of a major university that had made arrangements to provide classes both on-base and online. Since coming home she has been pursuing her nursing degree through various community colleges and now is attending Normal University under the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill. Rachel chose to attend classes at Normal University because they understood her military obligations and told her that, “You just need to get all the requirements done and it doesn’t really matter to us how you do them, they just need to be complete.”

Sarah. When her father became very ill and couldn’t work, Sarah at age 16 found that she had to help support her family by working three jobs. She began to realize that college would not be affordable for her nor could her family support that dream. Also, with her being a first-generation college student, she did not receive any parental guidance in how to obtain loans or grants to lessen the financial burden.
One day Sarah saw a commercial on television (T.V.) for the Navy that resonated with her. She then decided the military might be an avenue to her goal, saying, “I went into the recruiters and talked to them, and the next week I had signed up.” She gave as her reason for enlisting, “I did it on a whim. It was, O.K. I am doing this! This is what I had to do to pay for college.”

Her family has a long legacy of being in the military. Her grandfather was in the Army and Sarah had several other relatives who served. She even had both an aunt and uncle who retired from the Air Force. She decided to join the Navy instead of the Air Force because, “I was like, I want to travel the world, and I don’t want to be stuck in one place. That would be cool to go out on a ship.” However, her Navy experience was not a very positive one; “At that time that is what I thought; I didn’t think about that it would be hard living on a ship and not having much time off.”

Her enlistment was delayed because there had to be an open slot for female recruits to join, either due to someone's dropping out, a pregnancy, or another reason. At the age of 19 she finally got a slot but didn’t regret the delay because she was slightly older than the other recruits, giving her more life experience. She also strived for a non-traditional role in the military because she didn’t want to sit behind a desk. She wanted to work with her hands as a mechanic because, “I grew up working with my hands. My dad was a mechanic and I wanted to do something in that aspect of that.”

Sarah served as an enlisted member in the Navy for about four years aboard an aircraft carrier. While shipboard, she met her future husband and eventually got married. She eventually went on three deployments, two of which were in a combat zone during the second Gulf War. She also was awarded a humanitarian service award for her assistance rendered after a tsunami.
ravaged the Philippines. Upon her discharge she followed her husband, who continued his Navy
career. Later on she then moved by herself to be closer to her parents and is awaiting her
husband’s discharge.

Her college transcript reflects her attendance at universities and community colleges
scattered across the country; needless to say because of that, she had difficulty in obtaining
proper college credits and getting transcripts. She also has issues dealing with service-related
injuries and the VA while attending college. She just recently overcame a bureaucratic obstacle
with the VA, “So I got really screwed on that. It took them another year to get my back pay and I
just got back pay from that date that I submitted it again.” In spite of these prior challenges,
Sarah currently now plans on joining the Michigan NG and will then join the Army ROTC
program at a local college, to become an officer while taking advantage of the Post-9/11 G.I.
Bill.

**Rose.** It was stated very clearly by Rose why in 2010 she joined the Army Reserves as an
MP (Military Police Officer): “I was working at a job and not really doing anything; I just
needed something to help push me so I could get to a better place in life.” The educational
benefits were useful to her, as she had prior college and was accumulating debt. About college
debt she said, “I could have taken out loans like everybody else, but I was tired of taking out
loans; didn’t want to keep going up on debt if I didn’t have to.”

Rose was deployed to Afghanistan in a combat zone and experienced several traumatic
events and MST that she didn’t want included in her interview. She returned home, went back to
college, and was also dealing with working full-time and trying to make a connection within the
VA for treatment. About her experience contacting the VA she said, “I would be working and I
missed the call. I would call back and I told my social worker, and she would be, O.K. I will talk
to them. Whether she did or not, still nothing has changed.” Regardless, Rose was determined to
set goals and meet them: “As far as education and my transitioning, I already had my plan set out
since I was in Afghanistan.”

Rose enlisted in the Army because she knew the recruiter from her high school days and
he was very upfront with her. She didn’t join the Navy because, “I can’t swim, so I never thought
about a boat.” She also didn’t consider the Air Force because, “The Air Force at that time had a
2-year waiting list to join the Air Force.” The Army was more accessible and willing to help her
get her military career started. She now has an assignment in an Army criminal investigation
unit. Neither one of her parents nor any of her siblings have been in the military. Rose did have a
cousin in the Air Force, and her grandfather was in the Army during the Korean War and in the
Reserves as well.

Rose feels that her transition has gone well because she didn’t have anyone waiting for
her when she came home that she had to include in her decision process. Her family is scattered
across the country and she prides herself in getting things done by herself: “I didn’t have to argue
with anybody or fight with anybody so.” She likes her independence, stating that, “Because I
think it was from the aspect that I am a single person and I didn’t have to juggle, and if I didn’t
want to do it, I just didn’t do it.”

Sadie. After high school Sadie attended college for a full year. She had been working at a
temporary employment agency and was certain that they were going to bring her on as a full-
time regular employee. Just as she had been thinking about her work future, she got word that
they decided not to hire her. That very same night fate stepped in when an Army Reserve
recruiter gave her a call. She had been thinking about possibly joining the Air Force, but the
Army called her first and showed interest in her. Her family had a history of being in the Army,
and besides that, the Army was offering a $5,000 enlistment bonus as an Army Transporter and a “kicker” (a supplemental financial bonus based on certain milestones). Not to mention her Reserve unit was 20 minutes from her home.

Sadie was pretty blatant about why she joined: “I joined the Army for monetary reasons; I am not going to lie.” Also, she lived in an area of Michigan where the economy was devastated during the automotive downturn. Thus, she decided to obtain and use the G.I. Bill benefits to finish the rest of her college.

Sadie described what she heard on the radio one day while she was at home and getting ready for classes on September 11, 2001: “…all of a sudden I hear 'And another plane just slammed into the Tower!' What?! So I rushed downstairs and turned on the T.V. and I see all this stuff going on, and I was just in complete shock.” That night she had to attend classes and explained to her professor that she had to leave school to “man” the phones at the Reserve Center. The professor said to her along with some Marines in the class, “…why are you guys in here? Go do what you got to do.” Those events that day changed her life, as well as many of those in this country.

Sadie was assigned to a unit out of New York and was training for eight months to go to Turkey for her first deployment. Turkey was reluctant to provide a passage through their country and eventually her deployment was canceled. Also, during this transition she broke up with her fiancé and called off the wedding (she recently has remarried). Sadie requested and got a job transfer to Iowa, saying: “I was in that time mood where I just moved; I was figuring life out, and getting back into a schedule with work.” But once again fate stepped in, and the Army transferred her to a unit in Michigan, giving her only five days to report. Soon she got another new set of orders, relaying that: “I went home for a few more days, which gave me time to pack,
hope, and cry. I had just gotten my life back to some kind of normal and then I reported to (a unit in) Wisconsin.” After three months of intensive training she got orders to ship to Kuwait.

Unfortunately for Sadie, she was in Iraq during a time when the troops saw heavy fighting. She was in a convoy behind one that made national and international news when that convoy was attacked. The convoy took heavy casualties, which resulted in the capture of (Keith) Matthew Maupin and made the news headlines. Sadie’s convoy that trailed behind was attacked as well by mortars, small arms fire, and RPG’s (rocket propelled grenades). She said about that incident: “Unfortunately the way our vehicles were set up, I had to exit the vehicle on the engagement side and come around the vehicle to get out. I was kind of paralyzed with fear…” Sadie soon learned that being in a war zone means everyone, male and female, is a target, no matter what your MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) is: “You don’t have to be in a combat MOS to get shot at!”

Victoria. It was the opportunity to travel, a sense of adventure, and the opportunity to earn a college education that drove Victoria to join the Army right out of high school at age 17. Being a potential first-generation college student, her family didn’t see spending money on college as a priority, “It was college, wasn’t important, figure it out yourself.” However, due to her deep family roots in the military, it was a viable option for her to serve her country.

While stationed in the Army, she married another soldier, and they had a son. However, Victoria was in an abusive marriage, and as soon as she could leave the military, she divorced her husband and went back home to her parents. Her parents gave their support through the beginnings of her college years, “So they were there to help support me while I was getting back on my feet, and using that G.I. Bill pot of gold, and that was the Montgomery G.I. Bill.” She also started with the community college route because, “Community college is the best place because
it is small and supportive.” Victoria went on to get her Bachelor’s degree, three Master’s degrees, and eventually a Ph.D.

It was the night of President Obama’s first election victory that got her thinking about returning to serve her country again, “…Obama was elected. That was a life-changing night, the night of the full results. That next morning, I called recruiters I was so inspired.” She eventually went to Officer Candidate School for the Michigan NG and is now a commissioned officer. She was then shifted from her guard unit and cross-assigned to another in order to begin the preparations for a deployment. She gave up her internship that she had at a local college, moved her son to get settled and live with her parents, and enrolled him in a new school; all in preparation to go to Kuwait. Then a month before the deployment, her orders were canceled! She did, however, end up working full-time for the NG for two years.

Victoria at times regrets that she was never deployed overseas, “I was looking forward to those rewards; I wanted professional development and like that street credibility within the military. I want that patch on my uniform and I was looking forward to it.” But looking at how things could have been for her, “I don’t have that experience, but I have been safe. My son hasn’t gone through the stress wondering if his mom is going to come home. I don’t have nightmares…”

When asked about whether she perceived that females were treated differently than males, she had an interesting response regarding the military and getting help from male soldiers. She said, “…and also it kind of plays with your head; is this male soldier helping me because I am a poor helpless female, and I need help?” Even more poignant was her training as a personnel officer and the preparations for deploying to Kuwait and the possible hazards during a deployment. Because of her specialization and that she was in charge of a personnel department,
a majority of the soldiers were female. The emphasis on her training was the threat of sexual assault, “I need to make sure that my females aren’t raped! Wow, by other service members. Not, Oh, I hoped we aren’t going to get bombed!”

**Eleanor.** The military has been a part of Eleanor’s family for three generations, her grandfather in WWI, her father was a Marine and a POW in Vietnam, and her brother was in the Navy. However, her mother frowned upon any of her girls going into the military, “Mostly because girls don’t go into the military; it’s a boy thing.” The military was always in the back of Eleanor’s mind when in her 30s she found herself divorced and unemployed. Her options were to go on welfare, take her two kids and move in with her parents, or join the military. She chose the Air Force.

Needless to say, her mother really wasn’t happy with her decision, “So there was a ruckus. I caused a lot of waves in my family.” Eleanor had determined that she was going to take advantage of technical training available through the military and then come back home and find employment with her new skills. She also needed health insurance for her kids, as her ex-husband could not insure them. However, things got worse for her; “Mom and Dad didn’t want to talk to me; they were trying to take my kids away from me because I was making a bad decision…” Even though the military was part of the family legacy, her parents continued to express their displeasure, saying “…no mother in her right mind would leave her children to go follow some dream about being in the military.” Eleanor retorted, “This was about supporting myself, and supporting my children and getting my kids to the doctor; this was bigger than me.”

Eleanor discussed the many stressors that she had during her stint in the military. Her ex-husband agreed to take care of the kids. However, her parents attempted to control the communications between mother and children. Eleanor called them when she could but never
connected with them, and the only letters she got were from her parents, “I received a packet of letters from my mother trying to take my children away from their father and telling me what a bad mother I was…” Her son’s third grade teacher heard about the stressful situation from her son and mailed Eleanor packets of little projects to return to the teacher in care of the school, “…she sent me stuff to fill out so I could send it back and surprise my son with (a note stating that) *Mom filled this out from Texas*, and sent it back to school. She was the only one.”

Eleanor felt that being an older adult (you could say non-traditional) in the military, especially in boot camp, was at first a disadvantage. Late one night a younger Tech Sergeant was walking around banging on the doors. Eleanor responded, “…I am an old person in my sleep and if you are going to bang on my door with a baseball bat, you better open the door and give ME the baseball bat…” However, she soon saw the advantages of experiences gained by her age and graduated with honors and became a member of the Honor Flight (which is a ceremonial Air Force band). Regarding her experience she, “Was top of my class, for the old lady; and I was the Flight Mom because I was the oldest one there, and I had my crap together.”

It was all worth it according to Eleanor, as she gained employment within two weeks of her discharge: “It worked out exactly the way I had intended it and I have worked for the same company ever since.” She used tuition assistance when she attended college after high school, but found out that her current employer offered 100% tuition reimbursement for her college, and she has been using that program ever since. Regarding checking into what she is eligible for under the G.I. Bill, she said, “To be honest, I haven’t even checked.” Eleanor is now remarried. Her husband is a graduate student, and together their family includes six children.

Eleanor is currently on academic suspension for non-completion of a class. She had a scheduling issue due to her “crazy busy life,” and has to wait a year before she can re-apply.
Eleanor is considered a non-student participating in this study because she is not enrolled nor graduated. However, her voice is included, as her story adds to the richness of this study.

**Participant Demographics**

The following Tables 3 and 4 represent the demographics of the six female student veterans. A series of background questions were asked in order to better assist in the understanding of this particular population that has participated in this survey (See Appendix B). However, because of a small population, no quantitative results were analyzed nor posted in this study and are for informational purposes only.

**Female Student Demographics.** Table 3 shows that the majority of the female student veterans in this study were in the 26 or older–30 age groups, those who were married (or had a partner) represented 50% of the group, and the most common race was that who considered themselves as white at 83%. Even though the study population is small, there are some similarities to the overall military population. The statistics from the United States Department of Defense (2012) reveal that the combined male and female age group of 26 or older represents 60.6% of the veteran population. In addition, those who are married in the overall population represent 52.6%, and 71.9% selected white as their race.
Table 3

Female Student Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age Groups</strong></td>
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<td>26 – 30 Years</td>
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<tr>
<td>31 – 35 Years</td>
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<tr>
<td>36 – 40 Years</td>
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<tr>
<td>41 or older</td>
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<td>Caregiver</td>
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<td>Single</td>
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</tr>
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<tr>
<td>Military (paid status)</td>
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<tr>
<td>$50,001 or over</td>
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</table>

Source – Demographic Questionnaire Responses (Note: May not total six, as responses were voluntary).
Female Student Veteran Academic and Military Information. Table 4 represents the academic status and military information of the six participants. The majority of the female student veterans in this study were either full-time or part-time students, with one on academic suspension. The educational programs sought after included students enrolled in Nursing, Business Management, Informational Technology, and Educational Leadership.

A majority of the students in this study were at the senior level, were pursuing a doctoral degree, or had recently graduated. All participants had some college experience prior to attending Normal University. This trend is typical of female student veterans, where 70% of women veterans in school have some college, while only 57% of the male veterans do (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011, p.71). Regarding having been in a combat zone or actually experienced combat, four of the female student veterans made that selection on the questionnaire. The majority of these female student veterans were either in the Army or Army NG, with one each in the Navy and Air Force. The current military status included four in the Reserves (two active, two inactive), one in the NG, and one not currently under any military obligation.
### Table 4

**Female Student Veteran Academic and Military Information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographics</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Student Level</strong></td>
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<td>Full time</td>
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<td>Educational Leadership</td>
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<td>Combat Situation</td>
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<td>Air Force</td>
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<td>Marine</td>
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<td>Coast Guard</td>
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<td><strong>Current Military Status</strong></td>
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<td>Reserves</td>
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<td>Inactive Reserves</td>
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<td>Retired</td>
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<td>National Guard</td>
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</table>

Source – Demographic Questionnaire Responses (Note: May not total six, as responses were voluntary).
Chapter 5: Role Process and Emergent Sub-Themes

Introduction

In order to understand how Schlossberg’s Transition Theory is applied to this thesis, it is first important to understand the role process of each individual. Each female student veteran experienced different roles at different times in their lives, while in many instances those roles experienced fluidity and were influenced by other outside pressures. Several sub-themes became evident as the results of participant interviews and the use of NVivo 10 software. There were several words that were frequently used by the participants as they told their story, and the context was analyzed to see what roles and themes have emerged from each participant.

The central role is obvious in that each participant in this survey is female. The results show that additional roles were that of a student, veteran, family member, and the marital or relationship status (single, single parent, married, or divorced) of each female student veteran (see Figure 6). Additional emergent sub-themes (or pressures) influenced roles and these were time introspection, supportive means, life experiences, decision guidance, stressor influence, and inherent drive (see Figure 7).
Emergent Roles

Throughout female student veterans' academic careers, they find themselves in various roles. The roles indicated below were ones that came to the forefront in the NVivo coding and are presented below with descriptors as they apply to the study participants. These roles included being a female, a student, a veteran, a member of a family, and an individual’s marital or relationship status.

Female. The focus of this study and the center of the role process are female student veterans who at one point were in the military and are either now in college or were previously a student. To these particular female student veterans, several elements emerged from their role in being a female student veteran.
They experienced role conflict and management issues due to juggling multiple roles at the same time. Rachel reflected on managing her multiple roles to her two step-daughters. She said, “…it is so important to me that I show them that you can go to school and you can have a career in the military…a civilian career, and you can…balance them and make them work and be a woman.”

They also experienced role identity issues in that women are not generally perceived by the public as having a military role, and because of that, men were more readily accepted as being a veteran. Women veterans, according to Sarah, have an easier time in the transition from military to civilian appearances than men do. She said, “Females, we throw the earrings in, we let our hair down; you can’t tell except we may look like a really good in-shape female.”

The female student veterans also experienced limited enlistment opportunities into the military, as they had to wait sometimes years before a slot opened to them, unlike their male counterparts, who do not face that challenge. This frustration was echoed in the voice of Rose because the Air Force was over-strength at the time she wanted to enlist, and they had a 2-year waiting period. Rose said, “They figured if you really wanted to do it (enlist), they would eventually get rid of a couple of people and you would be willing to wait a couple of years!”

There were also factors that brought out the “femaleness” in their voices. One female student veteran was the caregiver of her father, who had cancer. She sacrificed her military career by deciding to care for him rather than re-enlist. Another veteran had to take three jobs in order to support her family, as her father had multiple sclerosis and couldn’t work.

When it came to perceptions about being a combat veteran, many of the public, and in the military as well, are more ready to doubt that a woman can be on the front lines of battle. Perceptions can also be deceiving. One female student veteran talked about how she was dressed
in her casual civilian clothes with a more relaxed “feminine” hairstyle and had to change into her uniform before she left class. Her classmates were dumbfounded when she returned later with her hair properly pinned up and in a sharp-looking military uniform. Also, to some of the women interviewed, they felt that being a female meant that there are physical threats of sexual trauma both in the military and on campus.

**Student.** At one point in time all of these women had been a student in an educational institution that included a community college, a four-year institution (public or private), or both. Many of them did some type of military training that for some resulted in college credit while others felt they did not get the credit they deserved. Classes attended included online instruction or in an actual classroom. Like many veterans, Sadie expressed her frustration in not getting college credit for military training. She studied for 6 months to become an information systems technician, and as she described the results, “…I got zero college credit for it!”

These students also had additional roles that included either being single, married, or divorced as well as being a veteran. Within a span of just a few short years, Victoria found herself in the roles of first being single, married, then a mother, then single again as a divorcee, all while being a veteran. However, she stated, “I was young, I had an infant, but I had my Montgomery G.I. Bill.”

The female role, with the student role, can also include being a veteran during active duty for training. Rachel encountered friction as a student veteran due to her military obligations. She expressed her frustrations while attending a community college, “They weren’t able to be flexible with my lab schedule…so I had to step out of the program for a semester and reapply.”
When a mission (or enlistment) is completed, the female veteran can revert back to being a student. This explains why the female student veteran transitions between various roles, and sometimes back and forth in a continuous loop.

**Veteran.** The term “veteran” can have a different meaning, depending on who is using that name. On the one hand, people view a veteran as a person who served in wartime and experienced combat. Rose, a combat veteran, has concerns about male soldiers on the battlefield wanting to be the “protectors” of female soldiers. However, a greater concern of the military veteran status, in her opinion, should be that, “…health systems need to be prepared more for females with PTSD.”

The VA loosely classifies a veteran as one who was on active duty, during wartime or not, or sustained injuries while on orders, in order to become eligible to receive various forms of VA benefits. Others feel that a veteran is a person who deployed overseas, but not necessarily in a combat zone or combat. At times, Victoria felt that she was the “token veteran” in the classroom. Even though she was never in combat or deployed overseas, people were, as she said, “…putting me in their veteran box.”

There are those who feel that any person that signs an obligation to the military, such as ROTC, and dons a uniform at any time can call themselves a veteran. Veterans, according to Eleanor, have a certain look about them, even when not in uniform. She could spot veterans very easily, as she said, “And I immediately picked her out as you are, we are, of the same group. There was that identification.”

Any of these roles described here are used for this paper. In addition, the word “veteran” is used to represent anyone who had or has orders (active duty or active duty for training), who is an Active or Inactive Reservist, or a member of the NG or retired from the military.
**Family.** The female student veteran has a role as a member of a *family* either in an immediate family or extended one. In the instance of this study, family can either represent the parents of the veteran or the immediate family, which could include a spouse and/or children of the veteran. For one participant, Sarah, the bond with her mother was strong and, with her mother living in Michigan, that influenced her decision to locate here and attend school after her discharge. She said, “…I have my mom here…I had been away from her for 6 years, and I wanted to spend time with her.”

The role of the family had a major impact in the lives of these individuals, even to the extent that a family legacy included previous generations having served in the military. Many of these women had generations in their families who have served in certain branches, and the decision to serve in that branch was influenced by those previous family choices and the positive experiences of those individuals. Joining the Army was the decision of Sadie as she said, “So there is always this, I like the Army, the Army has been good, they get to do cool stuff and go places.”

Not to mention that the veteran turned to their family in order to seek support, though at times this was lacking or even non-existent. Even though Victoria started her career in the military, that role was understood by her family because of previous members who had served. However, when she returned home and began her education as a first-generation student, conflict arose. Victoria talked about her frustrations, “So when I talk about my dissertation…they don’t have any idea of what I am talking about.” Her father was in the Navy, but never attended college, “…he wants to talk military, he doesn’t know what I am talking about.”

**Relationship.** The word “*relationship*” in this sense means a female student veteran who at a particular point in time is single, a daughter, single parent, married, spouse, divorced, a
soldier, and how those roles interact and affect each other. Due to the role stressors in the military and combat exposure, Sadie opened up about how frequent deployments caused a rift between her role in the military and her perceived role of becoming a wife. She said, “My fiancé at that time, we had broken up…We had called off the wedding and broke up…” That stress fogged her memory, “…but I don’t remember where I was going to go to school.”

A person can be experiencing many variations of these roles and at different stages of their educational endeavors, and family dynamics can affect role selection. Rachel lives with another soldier and helps support his two girls. She talked about how relationship issues play into their career plans. She said, “…I want to go on active duty again, but when we live a blended family life, we can’t just take the kids and leave because we got his ex-wife to deal with…”.

However, the choice between being in a relationship or just being single can lessen the need to have interactions and be of value, as explained by Rose. She talked about returning home from deployment and in not having relationship issues at home, which made her life-course decisions easier. She said, “I didn’t come home and have people…dependent on me, and…figure out how they would fit into the puzzle. It is just me…if I need alone time, I am already alone.”
Female Student Veteran Emergent Sub-Themes

The emergent sub-themes that came to the forefront in this study were the result of NVivo coding analysis. These sub-themes were the *time introspection* available for a decision to change a role, the *supportive means* available in the process, and the *life experiences* of the individual. Also, *decisive guidance* and *stressor influences* play into this process (*anticipated*, *unanticipated*, or a *non-event*). The last sub-theme that emerged is that of one’s *inherent drive* toward achieving that future role. Listed below are the descriptors of each sub-theme and how...
these forces stress the role process at different times, or in conjunction with one another, to create an environment that required a decision (see Figure7).

**Time Introspection.** *Time* always is a major part of everyone’s life, and there is no escaping the effects of it. In many instances the participants talked about how they viewed time past and how time introspection (looking within oneself) affected their choices. Those periods have relevance because the length of time can determine the career path (or role) of each soldier, sailor, or pilot. Listed below are quotes from each individual when referring to time.

Rachel felt hindered in her educational pursuits due to time limitations: “I am frustrated about the fact that I can only take one math class this semester and that’s it, when I want to do more but just don’t have the time or availability.”

Sarah looked back into time to examine her past choices and how to re-evaluate her identity:

Back when I was younger, no, I hated school. I hated showing up and dealing with teachers. As I matured and got older, I realized how important it was, and I wish I could kick myself and could go back and do better.

Rose was hoping to have time for a few classes while on deployment but realized that idea would have to be put on hold, as her military role in a combat zone made that prohibitive:

When you are out on mission, you are gone all day and when you got back you still had to do guard duty or whatever; you had to do to prep for the next day. You didn’t have time to take one or two hours to study, so I decided to say no, it’s not smart to do anything out here.

Sadie reflects how life just happens for female veterans and how time interfered with her plans:
I put my education on hold basically for 12 years of my life. I mean 10 years more accurately, but we are ready to go back to school. We want to get the piece of paper that supports our skillset or a new skillset.

Victoria was frustrated with the length of time between studies, like most non-traditional students: “There wasn’t like any issues that I carry in with me to college other than not remembering how to multiply fractions because it has been so long; that’s about it.”

Eleanor expressed a similar problem as Sadie with decisions over time and the tension brought on by the transition between multiple roles:

…like every college student you come across, you change your college major six times! And I never finished. I ended up starting a family and being married and working and never finishing my degree, never finishing my undergrad. So it wasn’t until just a few years ago I decided I really, really needed to finish my undergraduate degree.

The dynamics of the transition through multiple roles and time introspection assist these women in examining their past in order to determine the direction of future selections. The type and value of support is also a key to role selection.

Supportive Means. There are many means of support for these female students. The most mentioned was the support offered or given by their family, friends, or colleagues. Support can also come from outside agencies such as the VSO at the college, the VA, or some other community group. Other supportive means can be financial and come from the various military educational bills, Pell grants, or tuition assistance programs. For those individuals who experienced a lack of support, they expressed a great deal of dissatisfaction when that happened. Each participant expressed how support affected their role process.
Rachel and the Army had a shared goal: “Well, because they do support my education and know that this is a part of my degree plan to become BSN Complete, which is my goal and the Army’s goal for me. Then they are willing to accommodate.”

Sarah saw the importance in having support from her mother and what it would be like without support:

She is really my family. My other family is kind of spread out. So some people may not have that type of support at home, so when they go back home they don’t have that follow-through with anything; you have to be a strong person to do it on your own. And I am that strong person on my own. But I have the support as well.

Rose found support from within after no contact with the VA and the lack of family support in the local area:

I think I am different because most people in the National Guard are in the military itself; they have family, whether it is mother, father, husband, wife, and children. I have that but we were always scattered doing our own thing anyway. So I am used to being alone and taking care of myself.

Sadie got financial support from benefits and moral support from her spouse, who also was in the military using the G.I. Bill and was a student as well:

I chose Post-9/11 over the Reserve G.I. Bill because of the housing allowance. My husband and I were trying to save up some money. He was working on his Master’s at that time. He was very encouraging of me working on my undergrad, because you know, he didn’t want to have his doctorate and me still not even having an Associate’s. His quote was: ‘you’re too intelligent for that, you need a piece of paper’ (laughing).
Victoria sought support by other means where possible, with the result being financial support for herself and son that lessened her stress level:

Plus I was getting Pell grants, I was getting financial aid here and there, so I was able to go to school full-time and take care of my son. I didn’t have to worry about money, didn’t have to worry about working, and I was able to be a great student and just devote everything to my education. Which is huge, huge; and the G.I. Bill made that possible.

Eleanor felt that her branch of service was a means of support but not her parents, who placed roadblocks in the way of her goals:

So they (her children) were with my ex-husband the entire time that I was gone and then they moved back in with me when I got home. And they came with me to Reserve weekends and it was great; but (parental) support, nothing!

Supportive means for these women included assistance from some family members and moral support from a significant other. Some branches of service were a means of support in addition to the G.I. Bill, along with other types of financial support. Lack of support, however, from service agencies and some of the parents forced these women to look within themselves. This reflection on previous experiences in life is the basis for future role selection.

**Life Experiences.** Life Experience can determine a person’s role selection based upon their personal past positive experiences or that of others. Role avoidance sometimes is based upon one’s own past negative experiences. Role selection is determined by how that role has played out in that person’s mind and whether they perceived the outcome as being one they anticipated. These participants also experienced events in their lives that they thought were possible because of the role, but never really expected them to come about. Each of these experiences led to a role decision that was either a conscious one or not.
Rachel had a keen knowledge of herself and her identity because of her experiences in knowing herself and her stress levels:

How can I help out at (Normal University)? I am a new student here just starting, like tonight, but I am interested in looking at some of the programs. But I also know not to task-saturate myself. I have a lot on my plate by taking over this new job as a lieutenant. I have 875 soldiers, I am a brand new butter bar, so that in itself is a little bit overwhelming.

Sarah understood in boot camp that she had more experience than others due to her athletic interests in high school:

I went to boot camp at Great Lakes and it was a very interesting experience. There were a lot of women who definitely weren’t ready for boot camp. I think I was very strong at that time with my life experiences already, so I was put into a leadership type of role.

Rose felt that experience taught her where to seek help and did so in an on-campus group that supported her as a sister:

I already had joined a sorority at (Normal University) and that group was helpful. Just like anybody else, you have friends that you can talk to. There isn’t anything spectacular, no different than anyone else would have. You have your family, certain people you know that you can talk to about certain issues and things like that. One day you talk to that person, you need to know about something else because you feel a different way and you talk to another person because you know that they would understand it better.

Sadie determined that her military and college experiences were valuable in leveraging her desire in employment:
I’ve got years of experience, so that when I go and put this on a resume I have six years of experience plus the piece of paper that says I know what I am doing. I can actually walk into a management-level position, which is what I wanted to do!

Victoria and her experience played a part in the evaluation of role switch from enlisted to officer:

I quickly learned after I commissioned there is a big difference between being an enlisted guard member, the responsibilities as a junior enlisted, of course, and being an officer…as an officer, wow, there’s a lot of work between drills and you don’t know that until you’re doing it.

Eleanor had hoped for a role change that had positive results from her tough but temporary decision to be away from her children:

I just…in my mind I felt it would be easier for me to get a job when I came back with military experience and being a reservist. Then there would be just…there is a distinction that goes along with the military. If you see somebody who is in the Reserves you’re going to give them a second look, where you might not give a normal person a second look.

Life experiences not only shape who we are but can be useful as a guide to where we want to go. Knowing the limits of oneself from years of experience can be a means of self-preservation. These experiences in civilian life, the military, and college, are part of the development of self. Once knowledge is obtained, it guides an individual towards a decision.

**Decisive Guidance.** When a decision is made each person decides whether the resulting change is going to be a “good” one, based upon what they have experienced, and they decide a course of action. When that decision is made to make a role change and that new role is not what
was expected, one “decides” or is guided to change roles again, if consequences are minimal. Also, that experience may lead to a decision that one realizes one can’t make, as that window of opportunity has closed. Each participant described how she strategized making a decision and how that would have affected her role.

Rachel made a decision about her military career and, if she continued, whether changing roles to a civilian or from enlisted to officer would be the right decision:

I had been in for quite some time and decided to cross-over. I was at a point where I had to need to make a decision if I wanted to continue my military career or am I going to get out. And I said I was going to continue. I decided if I was going to continue, I had to go over to the dark side and do the right thing.

Sarah discussed why some people make the choices they do and how being prepared for a challenge affects that decision:

I guess that is the biggest struggle I’ve had as far as education. Like you said, why do some people decide to use it (educational benefits) and some people don’t? I think it is a personality thing, I mean some people just don’t have it in them to do school or do anything with their lives. They join the military maybe having that aspect of yes, I could do this, but then they get out and they are lost.

Rose decided not getting VA help wasn’t going to stop her from attending college and having a military career:

You got to work it through yourself; you got to know that it’s not the end and it will get better. I may get down today or for a couple of weeks or a couple of months. But if there is something that you want, you pick a goal and you work towards it; everything else just kind of falls away. So all I want to do is to go to school, concentrate on going to school
and getting back to school. You can’t be trying to get better to go to school if you are
down and out.

Sadie made a subconscious decision that was a reaction to an emergency situation, but
her nursing training that was ingrained from years of military training was a life-saver:

And literally right before I came home, our Stars and Stripes delivery guy, everyday
drove up from Baghdad in his little Toyota hatchback, he had a heart attack at our gate. I
was the CLS (Combat Life Saver) on duty. So doing cardiopulmonary resuscitation
(CPR) and getting an intravenous (IV) in his arm, as we are careening down the road that
would make Michigan roads look like glass (laughing), I am in the back of the Humvee,
with this guy’s head on my ankle to keep it from bouncing on the floor, his arm between
my legs, because I’m trying to get the IV in his arm.

Victoria made a decision that was the best for her, but not necessarily what other people
thought she would make:

God, I need college money and I want to go somewhere and do cool things, but go to
college, I don’t know. Because that was a decent decision in my family. I hate when other
people, when they assume that I joined the military as a last resort, because I didn’t have
any other options, and I can’t stand that. I can’t stand that! Oh my gosh, that drives me
crazy.

Eleanor’s amount of time away from her kids and the value of her independence
influenced her role decision:

So I got put into the Air Force; my ASVAB’s (pre-enlistment test scores) were pretty
high so I was given my choice of jobs. I could have been a translator, I could have been a
lot of different things, I probably should have gone with the translator, but the program
was six months. The idea of being away from my children for three months for basic and
then another six months to a year for tech school was unthinkable.

The decisions made by these women were guided by many factors. For some the decision
was guided by an unknown future, but past roles made that choice more comfortable, as there
was a familiarity in the process. Some women relied on self for the decision, while others had to
consider what the perceived outcome would be on others because of those choices. The decisions
made are influenced by the amount of perceived stressors and can cause dissatisfaction.

**Stressor Influence.** Changing roles come with stressors, and changes can be positive
ones that influence a person to do things they thought were beyond their capabilities. They also
can be negative external stressors faced by a person, who must rely on her training and physical
abilities to get her through the event. Stress comes about when roles are changed, when physical
limitations are experienced, and from other outside forces.

Even a positive change, such as the transition from the role of veteran to a student,
though appearing to be positive stress, can be a difficult and thus a negative one. This stress can
also be expected when one changes a role (one that is anticipated), when a role is not expected
(unanticipated), or when a non-event has impact on the role but not directly (Schlossberg, 1981).

One woman, Rachel, talked about the positive stress in her anticipated role of becoming a
college student: “I made the choice to leave active duty and come home to the Michigan Army
National Guard…I was home for three days and I started classes.” Sadie (sarcastically) was
guarded in her stress in changing roles in the military from a convoy driver to gate guard duty
and the anticipated danger that can present itself: “So yeah, I go from its o.k., it’s a convoy, I
might be able to see it coming, to I am going to watch it coming, when I open a trunk and it’s a
bomb.”
Sarah talked about her role of being a member of the aircraft carrier flight-deck crew and how she experienced unanticipated stress from the noise: “That’s where I actually ruptured my eardrums and that set me back.”

Rose didn’t anticipate the stress in having to change her educational plans while deployed:

But when I first got to Little area where I was going to be staying, they didn’t even have the Internet set up. It was really shaky at that and then it would be out, then when something would happen, then the area was down, and I said that I wouldn’t be able to take any classes.

Victoria wondered about her military role and the effects of gender stress and whether help was given as soldier-to-soldier, or because she is a woman: “Or is it because it is my turn to get help and next time it is going to be his turn and I am going to be helping him like we do, regardless of gender?”

Eleanor saw how stress came from her family, but in her mind was developing her options:

My mom was pushing welfare and she was pushing come live with us, come move in with us. I kept thinking, no, I am a grown woman, I have two children, I am perfectly capable of supporting those two children, and I have always wanted to be in the military.

The negative and positive stress influenced the pathways chosen by these women. The type and amount of stress affected their health, mental well-being, and their course of action. There is something more to role determination than just stress; it is the drive within a person that keeps her pushing forward.
**Inherent Drive.** As each interview was examined, it came forth that it was their inherent drive to push forward in completion of their goals that determined their roles. People face different obstacles that could be internal (such as our perception of a certain role and how we can accommodate that role), or external, such as facing training that requires a certain level of athleticism. Thus, the amount of drive of an individual might determine their continuation in a particular role or if the amount of drive they may need to exert is worth putting into a new role. The drive shown by the participants is different, based upon many individual factors that each person finds within.

Rachel displayed her drive by setting an example to her significant other's daughters and discussing with them their limitless opportunities:

…it is important to me that I show them that you can go to school and you can have a career in the military, and you can have a civilian career; and you can do all of these pieces and balance them and make them work and be a woman.

Sarah’s drive came from her athleticism: “I actually was the top female physically wise; I did the most sit-ups and push-ups and running; out of all the women and some of the men.”

Rose's drive was influenced by her determination: “I knew what was important, that I needed to finish school and concentrate on school. That was my goal to help me push myself to finish school.”

Sadie was driven by survival: “Unfortunately the way our vehicles were set up, I had to exit the vehicle on the engagement side and come around the vehicle to get out. I was kind of paralyzed with fear and shooting…”
Victoria’s drive came from her desire towards her educational goal: “I had my high school diploma, I was young, I had an infant, but I had my Montgomery G.I. Bill! So I just went for it.”

Eleanor’s family needs drove completion of her military service: “…you better believe I didn’t wash out of any of my sections because I needed to get through, and I needed to get done, and I needed to get home.”

Life presents challenges, and how one meets them is determined in part by his or her drive to overcome them. This drive can be from one’s physical abilities, self-image, or a basic need for survival.

In summary, the role process of these six female student veterans involved these emergent themes: time introspection used in the process, the supportive means available, the effects of role life experiences, the decisive guidance process, the stressor influences, and one’s inherent drive. However, there seems to be one central emergent theme that came from the voices of each of these women. When they faced the challenges in life that were positive and negative and had uncertainty about their future, they all expressed one trait, and that is of resilience (see Figure 8).
Parise Resilience Theory Model

A new emergent central theme is that of resilience, which brings all of these emergent sub-theme elements together. In a 2002 essay from Luthans, at the Department of Management at the University of Nebraska, he described resilience as “…the capacity to rebound, to ‘bounce back’ from adversity, uncertainty, conflict, failure or even positive change, progress and increased responsibility” (p.702).

An article in the Journal of Clinical Psychology by Richardson (2002), postulates that resilience is more than the ability to “bounce back.” The author said resilience is the ability to face adversity and grow from these experiences. These manifest themselves as stressors, disruptors, and opportunities for change, and at times occur in concert with multiple stressors.

The less traumatic events can pass in a few seconds. More traumatic ones can cause a person to take years to become resilient, after learning new coping skills.

The Mayo Clinic has developed a test for resiliency and how it can be developed with resilience training. The Mayo Clinic article states that a person who is resilient is a person who has the ability to “bounce back.” This resilience then can be determined by the strength of relationships, a sense of meaning and goals, past experiences, positive attitude, maintaining one’s health, and problem-solving with an action plan (Mayo Clinic, 2015).

**Resilience Resources.** In addition, according to a taxonomy found in literature as published by Schetter and Dolbier in 2011, there are six main categories of resilience resources that an individual can draw from when under stress. These categories also include subsets of which only those listed here are those exhibited by this study’s participants. The first of these categories is *Personality & Dispositional Resources*, which include positive affectivity (e.g., sense of humor) and a goal-oriented disposition. The second resource listed is that of *Self and Ego-Related Resources* that include self-esteem, self-confidence, ego strength, self-efficacy, autonomy, and independence. The third resource is *Interpersonal and Social Resources* that include the social network and integration, social connectedness, available (or perceived) support, and social cohesion (work, family). The fourth resource is that of *World Views & Culturally-Based Beliefs* that would include world assumptions (e.g., benevolence, justice, meaningfulness). The fifth is that of *Behavioral & Cognitive Skills* that involve active or proactive coping skills and social skills. The final resource is that of *Other Resources* that include social position & SES (social economic status), intelligence, healthy behavioral practices, and physical fitness (see Figure 7).
The word resilience can have many definitions, but in the case of this study it refers to a person’s ability to face a stressful situation encountered in a role transition and have the wherewithal to draw upon various resources in order to overcome obstacles; in other words, the ability to “bounce back.” The female student veteran participants exhibit their resiliency, having drawn from more than one of these resiliency resources, as shown in the transcript excerpts below.

**The Resiliency of Rachel.** Rachel displayed her resiliency in *Category III / Social Cohesion*, and *Category VI / Physical Fitness*, by her reliance on her interpersonal and social resources for her resiliency. First she displayed her *Category III / Social Cohesion* resources (work and family) by the support she received from her significant other. He also was on active duty at various times in his career and because of that was even more aware of what Rachel had experienced during her multiple deployments, and especially post-deployment, in regard to obtaining healthcare and attending college. She said,

> It’s nice to have someone to talk to who understands where you are coming from, where you have been, and where you are trying to go. Not just an academic counselor or a friend who is not in the military and really doesn’t have a clue.

Rachel was also frustrated in taking only one class at a time, but the support of her significant other helped her to realize she was still heading towards her educational goals. She said this about that situation, “He was like no, just calm down, it’s not like you are taking just one class, you are taking one step further to where you want to be.”

Rachel was able to obtain her resilience in the military and as an adult through a healthy lifestyle and her physical fitness that she obtained prior to her enlistment as shown in *Category VI / Other Resources (Physical Fitness)*. Regarding her lifestyle she said, “Plus I was an athlete:
a gymnast for 14 years, a cheerleader, a dancer. Not conventional sports, but sports that require multiple hours per day of practice, and training, and things like that.” She went on to explain when she accepted her new role as a service member that her previous lifestyle made her boot camp experience less taxing, “The physical part wasn’t scary to me because I was already training between three to five hours per day for whatever my athletic thing at the moment was.”

**The Resilience of Sarah.** Sarah, like Rachel, relied on *Category VI / Other Resources (Healthy Behaviors)*, in that she felt that being healthy and athletic was an integral part of her life. Regarding her health in boot camp she said, “I actually was the top female for physicality wise; I did the most sit-ups and push-ups, and running; out of all the women and some of the men.” Her physical strength led to a leadership role, “I was a lead for all the fitness and actually helped people pass their physical test at the end.”

Another resilience component displayed by Sarah was that of *Category II / Self-Esteem*, that of self and ego-related resources. Sarah displayed her self-esteem by her continuing role of being in the military and using education as a tool towards that success. She said, “I figured if I am going to make something of myself, I need to be educated.” She continued by saying, “Now it is important for me to have and do well in school.”

**The Resilience of Rose.** Rose also utilized resilience resources but in her unique way. She displayed *Category II / Independence* by her autonomy and independence, when she reflected on the very lack of support from her family. She mentions, “I have that (family) but we were always scattered doing our own thing anyway so I am used to being alone and taking care of myself.” She also mentioned the advantage of coming back from a deployment without that support: “It is just me, what do I need to do? Let me figure it out and if I need alone time, I am already alone. I didn’t have to argue with anybody or fight with anybody so.”
Having to deal with her own issues and not sharing them, Rose developed a sense of resilience, as she found it crucial to problem-solve for her own survival, such as that found in *Category V / Problem Solving*. This resilience component was shown in Rose when she attempted to interact with the VA from her role in transition from a deployed service member (who experienced combat) to civilian life. She said, “I was dealing with PTSD but couldn’t get into the VA; it was impossible to make an appointment. I knew what was important--that I needed to finish school and concentrate on school. That was my goal, to help me push myself to finish school.”

**The Resiliency of Sadie.** Sadie’s resiliency first came to the forefront by her *Category I / Humor*, by her sarcasm and laughter that was exhibited several times during her interview, regarding high-stress situations. In her comments regarding being entrapped during a firefight and having to remove her vehicle from the area, she said, “Lots of, lots of, lots of, three-point turns!” She laughed when asked if she anticipated that she would experience combat because she knew her MOS would expose her to a potential combat situation (she did not have that MOS), “Oh, God NO!”

During her deployment to Afghanistan, Sadie’s mission brought her into a remote village as one of only two military female members. Because this was a humanitarian mission and as she described herself as the most feminine, she soon was surrounded by little Afghani girls. She said that even though the time was short, she was able to bond with a few of the girls and shared her picture of herself being encompassed by many smiling little faces. That interaction had great meaning for Sadie and was healing for her: “It's insane how many little girls were surrounding me. But I had literally a whole village worth of little girls just surrounding me.” This resilience resource in *Category IV / Purpose in Life*, which encompassed the worldviews (world
assumptions and purpose in life) of Sadie, came about from her military role and experiencing the good that can come from her being in the service.

**The Resilience of Victoria.** One of the main components of resiliency is the personality and dispositional resource, in having a goal-oriented disposition and applying that to various roles, as found in *Category I / Goal Orientated*. Victoria displayed this resource in that she had very high educational goals, set them, and met them in her role of a student. “So I got to (University), still a total civilian at this point, and I stayed there for my Bachelor of Sociology, got a Master’s degree in Sociology, and got another Master’s in Culture Studies.” She wasn’t done with her education as she continued, “I then moved on to (another University) and got a Ph.D. in Mass Communications.”

Victoria also tapped into the resilience resource of *Category VI / Other Resources (SES)* by her social position (not to mention her previous resource of intelligence listed above). She explained the value of family and financial support, “I returned to Ohio, and that would have been in 2000, and moved back in with my family. So they were there to help support me while I was getting back on my feet and using that G.I. Bill pot of gold, and that was the Montgomery G.I. Bill.”

**The Resilience of Eleanor.** Eleanor had displayed her resilience of *Category II / Self Efficacy* in her role of being a non-traditional-age recruit. That particular role caused her to rely on her self-efficacy in completing boot camp, as she had to find a means to support her two children. The end result was that she, “Graduated with honors and I was in the Honor Flight, played in the band. Was top of my class for the old lady, and I was the Flight Mom because I was the oldest one there and I had my crap together.”
Even though Eleanor currently is facing an obstacle to her educational goal because of overwhelming obligations and stress, she still is determined to achieve this goal with tenacity and persistence, both of which are components of resilience found in *Category I / Goal Orientated*. She stated, “I ended up starting a family and being married and working and never finishing my degree, never finishing my undergrad…So it has always been something that I need to finish. I need to get it done.”

The study participants expressed their usage of their resilience resources in ways that were unique to them, yet they fell into the six main categories as described by Schetter and Dolbier. Some subsets of these resources are humor, goal orientation, self-esteem/efficacy, independence, and family support. In addition the other resource categories are life purpose, problem solving, physical fitness/healthy behaviors, and SES.
Chapter 6: Conclusions, Limitations, and Implications

Conclusion

This study was designed to gauge from an academic viewpoint what conflicts women face who are transitioning between their roles from the military to that of a college student. The Parise Resiliency Theory brings together the emergent roles and sub-themes of this study. The voices of these women not only identified themselves with being veterans but also with seeing themselves in other roles within their families and with how relationships influenced their choices. What came forward from this study was that the Schlossberg Transition Theory model did show the transition was linear between the various roles but with exceptions. The women who were interviewed for this study not only experienced that linear process but were vacillating between roles and at times experienced roles simultaneously. For example, some of the study participants would transition between multiple roles such as that of a veteran, to a student, then back to the role of being a veteran on active duty again.

There were also other roles that were evident while being a veteran that exerted stressors, such as that of being a spouse and/or a mother; these added to role conflicts. For those women who were a mother, and a student, and also had a career in the military, there was a fine balance between those roles and how the ability to maintain those roles was affected by outside forces.

These six emergent outside forces, or sub-themes, are included in the Parise Resiliency Theory and they are the following: the amount of time introspection, the supportive means, and life experiences, all of which gave decisive guidance toward a particular role. The role process had expected and unexpected benefits, positive and negative stressor influences, and overall whether decisions produced positive results. The last sub-theme was the inherent drive found within oneself to overcome obstacles that stood in the way of a role decision. These sub-themes
were a constant in the lives of these women and even occurred at the same time and ultimately influenced their role selection and identity. However, an emergent central theme in the Parise Resiliency Theory came to the forefront, resiliency, and that was the common trait all these women shared.

According to Shetter and Dolbier (2011), there are multiple categories and subsets that describe resiliency in individuals. Six of these categories (along with several subsets) were selected for this study: goal orientation, self-efficacy, social cohesion, purpose in life, problem-solving and healthy behaviors. The central theme of resilience is reflected in these women by their high degree of being able to “bounce back” from the challenges they faced as they strove toward certain goals. In addition, even though female veterans’ transition was anticipated at the onset of this study, role identity also became prevalent.

Role identity for each of these women meant that they had certain expectations of these roles. They had to balance what it meant to be a woman, a student, and a veteran, as well as the expectations of how others perceive these roles in order to maintain them effectively. Women who were then successful in a role have a high degree of self-efficacy by having their confidence built, and they are then willing to take on new roles (Jackson & Hogg, 2010).

Limitations

At the onset of this study, the focus was limited to the experiences while in transition between themselves and the various roles encountered by these female student veterans. Later on, in addition to this transition, it became evident that role identity was also a factor.

During analysis another limitation came forth, and that was that all of these women who were studied exhibited various degrees of resiliency. The limitation here would be the fact there
are women outside of this study who do not show a high degree of resiliency and, if they had been included, this study could therefore have had different results.

Even though these women were attending or had attended Normal University, a limitation is that they did not express any major dissatisfaction with the college. Those women who were totally dissatisfied possibly would be attending another college or would have dropped out all together, and thus their stories would be missed. The benefit of including women who dropped out can be valuable in that those voices not included can enhance the ability to see where the military, higher education, and other organizations need to bolster their support programs or adapt them to current student needs.

A final limitation in this study is a comparison to male student veterans and the fluidity of roles. Even though most studies include male veterans as a majority, a side-by-side comparison might expose the differences in how male veterans identify themselves not only as veterans but as students and caregivers as well and their levels of resiliency.

**Implications for Practitioners**

This study examined the role stressors had on female student veterans and how resiliency affected their ability to remain involved and to persist in higher educational goal attainment. According to Love et al. (1993), academic institutions that understand these stressors can create a positive environment. These institutions can provide supportive means that will create a welcoming environment for veterans and enhance their persistence to remain in college in order to gain employable skills.

Past research has shown that institutions with a strong presence of a student organization such as the VSO or SVA play a significant part in building a bond between the student veterans with college experience and new student veterans regarding navigating college. Leaders in these
organizations can ensure the formation of these groups and become bridge-builders to support services available in the community for the student veteran.

The female student veteran population coming to campus in the near future will have experienced combat roles more than those of previous enlistees. In January 2013, then-Defense Secretary Leon Panetta authorized the DOD to open 237,000 combat positions previously held by male soldiers to females (Roulo, 2013). This new role opportunity will place additional stressor influences upon the female veteran, and those in the academic realm will need to provide the leadership in order to ensure there is additional support in place for these women as they begin to enroll in college.

With the military's opening of additional combat roles and the inclusion of women's taking on more male-dominated roles in the service, there will be more gender fluidity. This non-stereotypical view of whether a role is male or female will have implications for practitioners and society as a whole. For example, both male and female student veterans will return to civilian life from being a soldier mechanic in a combat role to a mechanic in a local dealership. Those in leadership positions will need to develop policies that result in gender equity, full inclusion, and equitable outcomes for both men and women.

There are many training opportunities for those enlisted in the military. There is technical training for your MOS and also training for leadership roles. Leaders in the military and academia need to sit down together and develop a more comprehensive approach to a master occupational plan that gives credits for certain training classes in the military that convert to higher education credits. Also, the MOS needs to be in alignment with civilian occupations to ensure effective college placements.
Many returning veterans are those who not only received military training but also took advantage of civilian educational training as well. We are seeing this “swirling” between multiple higher educational institutions during active duty stints because of the very nature of frequently activating those in the Reserves and NG. The retention rate of these veterans could be affected because that mechanism in receiving college credits from higher educational institutions across the country and world lacks cohesion.

Adding an understanding of the life experiences of veterans, to the knowledge base of faculty, staff, and students can be a training priority of academic leaders. This training could include building awareness of the female veteran role stressors and the location of resources to alleviate them. Again, with the military's depending more upon the Reserves and NG members, those soldiers do not come home to an active military base. Those in leadership roles in school counseling need to find resources available by contacting organizations such as the VSO or SVA, the American Legion, or through programs similar to Buddy-to-Buddy (currently only active in the State of Michigan) and raise awareness of these resources. Female student veterans themselves can take the lead in their persistence in college by getting involved in on- and off-campus groups for support, and academic leaders can encourage the formation of these groups.

Families that live in states such as those in the State of Michigan lacking an active duty base must do their part by giving decisive guidance through becoming aware of local resources in order to provide a course of action. Last, society needs to understand it is not just about helping veterans set higher educational goals and employment skills but in also understanding what has worked in the past in order to adapt for the future.
Implications for Theory

There were several theories examined in this study, and one early on was that of Kuh (2003) and how he discussed student engagement and the way in which the lack of engagement needs to be identified in order to assist with retention. This theory holds true for the female veterans, as those in this study discussed the value of both student and outside organizations and their support, in part alleviating stressors that interfered with their engagement.

Bean and Metzner and their Conceptual Model of Non-Traditional Student Attrition (1985) demonstrate how a student lacking persistence is affected by the academic environment. The female student veterans in this study found the academic environment at Normal University supportive of their military service and benefits, demonstrating the value of this theory. However, this study adds to this theory in that, when outside organizational or family support was lacking, that contributed to the stressors affecting the female student veteran’s ability to persist.

The Social Baseline Theory by Beckes & Coan (2011) finds success with relationship-building and that sharing of stressors with a close friend helps with coping. The female student veterans in this study reflected that, when others understood what they were going through, such as a veteran’s military spouse, they could easily relate to the same problems. However, when the veterans attended college as a first-generational student, there was stress from the family who had little or no understanding of the higher-education process.

The United States Army Research Institute incorporated the concepts of Meichenbaum and Deffenbacher's (1988) Stress Inoculation Theory (SIT) and, even though it was developed for the active-duty military, its concepts incorporate the need to build resilience in soldiers in order to have positive outcomes. The research using this theory conducted by Akgun and
Ciarrochi (2003) discusses the use of learned resourcefulness when a set of skills is learned, and a student can draw from these (life) experiences.

According to life-course theory as discussed by Elder (1998), military service aided in the developmental process of a group of men in his study. Life-course theory, as it pertained to military service, created a new means of starting over for those men who were troubled youths. It also provided a means for the (male) veterans to reflect on the experiences and direction of their lives and how the training and world exposure broadened their horizons. This theory could be useful in showing how life experiences could be applied to women veterans and their decisive guidance toward a role.

The main theory used throughout this study was that of Schlossberg’s Role Transition Theory, which is based upon a linear transition from one role to another. What emerged is a stronger construct, The Parise Resiliency Theory that proposes that the transition theory of Schlossberg is limited in that the transition is not linear from the military to academia but is affected from a constant conflict of roles and role identity. The Parise Resiliency Theory posits that during the transition of the six female student veterans in this study, they vacillate between multiple emergent roles. These roles and their role identity development are influenced by a constant variation of emerging stressors and the ability to overcome these role conflicts is influenced by one's resiliency.

All of the theories discussed in this study, in part, contribute to the overall theme of female student veteran resiliency. The Parise Resiliency Theory includes suggestions for training such as that provided in the Mayo Clinic (2015) in student orientation in order to learn the balancing of multiple roles and building of confidence that adds to the inherent drive toward these various roles. The retention of female student veterans can also be supported by a
university that maintains a bond with the local military branches and civilian resources, in order to provide assistance and decisive guidance for those women, especially those who are deciding about making the military a career.

**Implications for Research**

An area of study that was revealed during the interviews was the role of family history and traditions, and whether that affected the decision process to enlist. Did this enlistment come about from the SES of the family as an avenue of college goal attainment?

Future research could include a comparison of women veterans to non-veterans to see how the various roles and themes play out in the non-military group. Such a study could reveal similar findings in that all women multitask through various roles.

Another study could examine the differences between roles and identities. Role identity is an evolving process, and the perceptions given can differentiate between individuals having the same role. This dichotomy could go beyond the male and female roles. The military will have to grapple with these changes as it opens more combat roles to women, but also, as gender becomes more fluid, the military will need a broader lens.

Each branch of the military approaches training in different means, along with the offering of higher educational courses on base or online. Research should include how effective these programs are and how the branches differ. This research could include a recommendation for a new national policy on the transfer of credit between the military and other institutions.

This more fluid and yet complex identity will need further research as the gender roles in the military blend. Higher education will be required to adapt to this new reality as well and will need to measure how effectively counseling services and academia adjust to these additional stressors in order to contribute to persistence and retention in female student veterans.
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Appendix A: Informed Consent Agreement

Project Title: The Resiliency of Female Student Veterans in their Role Transitions Based Upon Schlossberg Transition Theory

Investigator: Michael “Mike” Parise, Doctoral Student @ Eastern Michigan University

Purpose of the Study: The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences of female veteran students in their various roles as they transition from the military to college, the resulting conflict and stressors they face, and the coping mechanisms they use to complete their educational goals.

Procedure: The principal investigator will explain the study to you, answer any questions you may have, and witness your signature to this consent form. You must be a female student veteran at EMU or a recent graduate (within 2 years); of any service branch who is either in an Active Duty or Reserve role, Retired, or is honorably discharged. Female veterans who have experienced combat or combat “situations” are sought; however those student vets who are non-combatants are eligible as well. The female veteran can be either a full time or part time student in any discipline; and is an undergraduate, graduate or previous student who is using/has used the G.I. Bill or any other VA educational benefits. The participants need to be married, a single parent, caregiver, or is a single person.

During the initial study process you will be asked to complete a questionnaire about your demographic information and then we will proceed to the interview that will include up to eight qualitative open-ended questions. The interviews will be audiotaped of approximately one hour to 90 minutes in duration. Completion of this confidential study is voluntary and I hope that you will choose to participate. You may choose to complete any portion that you wish. For those who are eligible and agree to participate, upon completion of the initial survey a $50 gift card will be given as a thank you. With your agreement, I may also request to meet with you for a second follow-up interview for further clarification.

Upon completing the questionnaire, you will be given a duplicate copy of this informed consent, which includes follow-up contact information, if needed. The approximate total time to complete the questionnaire and interview should be about 90 minutes.

Confidentiality: Your confidentiality will be protected at all times and that a code number will identify your questionnaire responses. Further, a fictitious name will be assigned by me after the interviews are completed, and that any identifying characteristics about you or your family will be deleted. The results and transcripts of the tapes will be assigned a numerical code and kept in a locked filing cabinet in a password protected computer file and at no time will your name be associated with your responses. At the end of this study all tape recordings will be destroyed.
Expected Risks: There are no foreseeable risks to you by completing this survey and interview. All results of your participation will be kept confidential.

Expected Benefits: There are no anticipated benefits to you by participating in this study.

Voluntary Participation: Participation in the study is completely voluntary. You may choose not to participate. If you do decide to participate, you can change your mind at any time and withdraw from the study without negative consequences.

Use of Research Results: Results will be presented in aggregate form only. No names or individually identifying information will be revealed. Results may be presented at research meetings and conferences, in scientific publications, and as part of a doctoral dissertation being conducted by the principal investigator.

Future Questions: If you have any questions concerning your participation in this study now or in the future, you can contact the Investigator: Michael “Mike” Parise, Doctoral Student, Eastern Michigan University @ 734-615-2043 or via e-mail mparise@emich.edu. In addition, you may also contact dissertation co-chairs: Dr. David Anderson at 734-487-0255, John W. Porter Bldg., Suite 304, Ypsilanti, MI, 48197, danderson@emich.edu and/or Dr. Eboni Zamani-Gallaher at 217-300-0897, ezamanig@illinois.edu. Also included are some mental health resources should you require assistance: Veterans’ Crisis Hotline: 1-800-273-8255 Press 1 or: Text to 838255. If you desire local assistance: VA Ann Arbor Healthcare System, 2215 Fuller Rd., Ann Arbor, MI 48105 via their 24/7 phone line: 800-361-8387.

Consent to Participate: I have read or had read to me all of the above information about this research study, including the research procedures, possible risks, side effects, and the likelihood of any benefit to me. The content and meaning of this information has been explained and I understand. All my questions, at this time, have been answered. I hereby consent and do voluntarily offer to follow the study requirements and take part in the study.

This research protocol and informed consent document has been reviewed and approved by the Eastern Michigan University Human Subjects Review Committee for use from May 6, 2014 to May 6, 2015. If you have questions about the approval process, please contact the UHSRC administrative co-chair at human.subjects@emich.edu or call 734-487-0042.

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PLEASE PRINT YOUR NAME HERE: ______________________________________

Participant Signature: _____________________________ Date: ____________

Investigator Signature: _____________________________ Date: ____________
Appendix B: Demographic and Interview Questions

Thank you for participating in this doctoral study. This study will add to the research that has examined the experiences, concerns, and transitions women face, as they navigate from military service to college. Furthermore, this study seeks to understand female veterans' collegiate experiences, whether they experience role conflict/stress, and how they remained in college to reach their educational goals. Your participation in this study will hopefully bring benefit to you, the female student veteran, and to women who follow in your footsteps.

Remember that you may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences.

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Please continue to the next page for demographic questions.
Demographic Questions

Please note: Because this is a study of female student veteran’s only females may participate.

Q. Age: What is your age group?

☐ 25 or Younger

☐ 26 – 30 Years

☐ 31 – 35 Years

☐ 36 – 40 Years

☐ 41 or older

Q. Relationship Status: What is your relationship status? (Check all that apply).

☐ Married or domestic partnership

☐ Single parent

☐ Caregiver (Provide care for another person living in your household)

☐ Single

☐ Other ________________________________

Q. Ethnicity origin (or Race): Please specify your ethnicity.

☐ White

☐ Hispanic or Latino

☐ Black or African American

☐ Native American or American Indian

☐ Other ________________________________
Q. Employment status: Please check all that apply.

☐ A student in any capacity

☐ Military (Receiving Active duty and/or Reserve status pay)

☐ No longer under Military contract and not receiving military pay

☐ Working full-time

☐ Working part-time

☐ On disability (From either the Military or civilian)

☐ Retired

☐ Other ________________________________

Q. Current Family Income

☐ $20,000 or below

☐ $20,001 to $30,000

☐ $30,001 to $40,000

☐ $40,001 to $50,000

☐ Over $50,000

Q. Student Level

☐ Full time

☐ Part time

☐ Other ________________________________
Q. Education:

What is your current college major/program of study:
__________________________________________?

What is your current class standing at EMU?

☐ Freshman

☐ Sophomore

☐ Junior

☐ Senior

☐ Master’s degree level

☐ Doctoral degree level

☐ Pursuing other degree

☐ Graduated from EMU (no more than 2 years ago)

Q. Military experience:

Have you been in a designated “combat zone?”

☐ Yes ☐ No

Have you experienced a “combat situation” that would include harm or threat of harm to oneself, fellow soldier, or civilian?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Were you not in a combat zone, or never in a combat situation (a non-combatant)?

☐ Yes ☐ No
Select what service you are in/or served:

☐ Army  ☐ Navy  ☐ Air Force  ☐ Marine  ☐ Coast Guard  ☐ National Guard

Please select your current status in the military:

☐ Active Duty  ☐ Reserves  ☐ Inactive Reserves  ☐ Retired

**Qualitative Interview Questions:**

The overall guiding research question that will be explored in this study is: What are the transition experiences of female veterans to college, and how do they navigate shifting roles to cope and remain in college to reach their educational goals? The interview questions will begin with those listed in successive order to obtain enough data in the timeframe allotted (60 – 90 minutes).

**You may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences.**

- Can you share with me a little about yourself and your military experience?
- What was the deciding factor in your choice to utilize the educational benefits available?
- What were some of the reasons you decided on the specific school you are now attending?
- Can you share with me how the actual transition went from military service to college?
- What were some of the obstacles you encountered during this transition?
- What (or whom) helped you cope with these obstacles?
- What are your perceptions of the level of support you receive as a female student veteran versus male student veterans?
- If you were to change any process or service that affected your transition, what would you change?

*Thank you for your participation!*
Appendix C: Recruitment Flyer

RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS NEEDED

PURPOSE: The purpose of this qualitative study is to understand the experiences of female veteran students in their various roles as they transition from the military to college, the resulting conflict and stressors they face, and the coping mechanisms they use to complete their educational goals.

ELIGIBILITY: The participant must be a female student veteran at Eastern Michigan University or a recent graduate (within 2 years). This student veteran would have served in any service branch and has experienced combat, a combat “situation,” or as a non-combatant; and is either in an Active Duty or Reserve role, or honorably discharged. The female veteran can be either a full time or part time student in any discipline; and is an undergraduate, graduate or previous student who is using/has used the G.I. Bill or any other VA educational benefits. The participants need to be married, a single parent, caregiver, or is a single person.

BENEFITS: There are no anticipated benefits to participants of this study.

COMPENSATION: **Completion of this confidential study is voluntary.** You may choose to complete any portion that you wish. For those who are eligible and agree to participate, upon completion of the initial survey a **$50 gift card** will be given as a thank you.

SURVEY: Research will be conducted using a short demographic survey and one face-to-face interview between the researcher and participant, taking about 60 – 90 minutes, with a possible follow-up interview. All interviews, recordings, and data will remain **confidential.** The location will be either on EMU campus or some other agreed upon public place off-campus.

CONTACT: Principal Investigator Michael “Mike” Parise, EMU Doctoral Student at mparise@emich.edu. Daytime phone: 734-615-2043.

For additional information you may also contact dissertation co-chairs: Dr. David Anderson at 734-487-0255, John W. Porter Bldg., Suite 304, Ypsilanti, MI., 48197, danderson@emich.edu and/or Dr. Eboni Zamani-Gallaher at 217-300-0897, ezamanig@illinois.edu.

Thank you in advance for your participation!

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