A Thesis
entitled
Veteran-Students in Transition at a Midwestern University

by
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Submitted to the Graduate Faculty as partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Master of Education Degree in Higher Education

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Although much research has been conducted on military veterans who enroll in institutions of higher education following their returns from deployment, much of that work has focused on issues such as veterans' finances or academic achievement, rather than the individuals' transitions from deployment to student life. Prior to the 2008 passage of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, only 22% of institutions offered transition assistance to veteran-students; four years later, that figure has dramatically increased to 37%. Due to the rapidly growing interest in transition assistance among student-veteran services practitioners, it is clear that more research is needed on these transitions. Utilizing a qualitative case study approach for this study, I interviewed six returning veteran-students at a large, research university in the Midwest. I then analyzed the subjects' responses within the framework provided by Schlossberg's Transition Theory. I found that the influences that most strongly impacted the participants' transitions were assets and deficits that were financial, physical, emotional, psychological, and, most significantly, social in nature.

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Chapter One

Introduction

America's most recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan differ from the United States' previous foreign entanglements in terms of the national sentiments regarding the conflicts, the military personnel involved, and the campus responses to returning service members. Today's veterans, a group that includes historically high proportions of women (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009) and disabled individuals (DiRamio & Spires, 2008), return to campuses where their fellow students' lives have been largely unaffected by the wars. Because less than one percent of the nation's population currently serves in the armed forces (compared with nine percent, for example, during World War II), there is a great disconnect between veterans and non-veterans on today's college campuses (Tavernise, 2011). This fundamental lack of understanding among non-veteran students, faculty, and staff with regard to the experiences and needs of veteran-students is perhaps reflected in the relative scarcity of research on the transitions of the current generation of veteran-students from the military into institutions of higher education. The present study will attempt to help reduce the size of that gap in the literature by utilizing in-person, one-on-one interviews to examine the soldier-to-student transitions of six veteran-students at a large public university in the Midwest.

Background

In the aftermath of 9/11 and the subsequent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, veterans' issues have once again gained prominence in America's national conversation. On August 1, 2009, the Post-9/11 Veterans' Educational Assistance Act (Public Law 110-252; known colloquially as the Post-9/11 GI Bill) went into effect, dramatically

increasing veterans' benefits by covering 100% of "the cost of in-state tuition at the most expensive public college in a veteran's state, a monthly housing stipend based on the college's location, and an extra \$1,000 annually for books" (Redden, 2008, para. 3). Even private colleges became eligible for funding under the "Yellow Ribbon" program, in which the federal government pledged to "provide matching funding to private colleges that cover part of the difference in tuition over and above costs at public universities" (Redden, 2008, para. 3). Institutions of higher education responded to the anticipated influx of veteran-students by "creating veterans' offices, streamlining their admission and registration processes, expanding their counseling center capacity, establishing mentoring programs, and training faculty and staff" (Redden, 2009, para. 7). According to a survey of 690 institutions conducted by McBain, Kim, Cook, and Snead (2012), 89% of the institutions in the sample that already provide services geared toward veteran-students have expanded those services for veterans since September 11, 2001, with a disproportionate amount of that growth occurring after the passage of the Post-9/11 GI Bill. However, the same study found that only 37% of the institutions that provide services to veteran-students assist those students in the transition from military life to college—nonetheless, that number represents a dramatic increase from the 22% that provided such assistance prior to the Post-9/11 GI Bill.

This influx of veteran-students will be even greater at institutions in states like Ohio, which in 2008 announced a program known as the Ohio G.I. Promise. The Ohio G.I. Promise "declares all veterans, spouses, and dependents to be considered 'honorary Ohioans' regardless of state of residence and charged in-state tuition rates for attending college on the G.I. Bill" (McBain, 2008, p. 5). By 2010, 1,340 of the 10,876 veteran-

students at Ohio's public colleges and universities were enrolled under the Ohio G.I. Promise (Albrecht, 2011). Therefore, institutions such as the site of the present study, a public research university located in Ohio, will play an increasingly significant role in educating military veterans in the coming years—especially because of the likelihood that the Ohio G.I. Promise will attract some veteran-students from neighboring states.

Statement of the Problem

This study seeks to discover the challenges that veteran-students face during their transition from the military into institutions of higher education, in order to provide institutions with information on how to effectively serve the rapidly growing veteran student population. The reason that it is necessary that institutions have such information available to them stems from the difficulty in tracking veteran students' success at the national level. Although one widely quoted but also widely disputed document from the Colorado Workforce Development Council estimated that as many as “88 percent of newly enrolled veteran students drop out of college by the end of their first year,” the reality is that there simply is insufficient data available on which to base many claims about today's veteran students (qtd. in Briggs, 2012). This is why it is even more important to gather exploratory information on veteran-student transitions that student affairs practitioners can then add to their arsenals of knowledge.

The need to explore the way veteran-students make meanings of their transitions can be exemplified by establishing that the current research attempts to fill a void in the existing knowledge of these transitions, seeks to address a new situation currently facing American college campuses (namely, the new wave of veteran students enrolling on the Post-9/11 GI Bill who bring different experiences and needs than previous generations of

veteran students), and is important to a particular audience (namely, college personnel who serve veteran students). Throughout the literature review in Chapter Two, I will attempt to solidify that this research convincingly addresses all three elements. Data on the transitions of veteran students is important to college administrators (who must manage institutions that serve an increasing number of veterans), student affairs professionals (who must assist veterans with such transitions), and faculty (who may need to be aware of such transitions). The question of whether American college campuses face a new situation that warrants data on veteran student transitions ultimately concerns whether these transitions are different in the contemporary post-9/11 era from those experienced by veterans of previous wars. As Mark C. Bauman (2009) points out, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan differ from both the Vietnam War and World War II in terms of the national sentiments regarding the conflicts, the military personnel involved, and the campus responses to returning service members. Today's veterans return to campuses where their fellow students' lives have been largely unaffected by the wars. In addition, today's veterans (and, consequently, veteran students) are increasingly likely to be women (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009). Furthermore, because of advancements in military and medical technologies, today's veterans are increasingly likely to return from their deployments disabled (DiRamio & Spires, 2009).

Conceptual/Theoretical Framework

The present study is grounded in Schlossberg's Transition Theory, first proposed by Nancy K. Schlossberg in 1981. Schlossberg's Theory of Transitions, framed in the transitional perspective of adult development, is an appropriate lens through which to examine the topic of the present study, which is the change veterans experience when

they shift from military life to student life, because it provides a structure that makes it possible to categorize the individual components of the transitions and organize those components in a meaningful way. Schlossberg's Transition Theory constitutes an attempt to describe the ways in which adults (including college students) experience life changes, or transitions. Schlossberg developed her theory after examining a vast array of work previously conducted by other researchers, gleaning the most important concepts from those writings, adding her own insights, and creating a model that attempts to provide a solid foundation for practitioners in the human services professions. The 4S System provided by Schlossberg's Transition Theory is a way to frame how adults experience transitions through considering aspects categorized as *situation*, *self*, *support*, and *strategies*. Thus, the 4S System will serve as the framework through which I shall organize the present study's findings, to be presented in Chapter Four. Each of the components of Schlossberg's 4S System—situation, self, support, and strategies—will then be divided into sub-themes, or experiences that were common among the participants in the present study.

Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2012) define the term “transition” as “any event or nonevent resulting in change in relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles” (p. 39). (In order to avoid confusion, it is worth noting that Anderson and colleagues build on the foundation of Schlossberg's Transition Theory, originally developed in 1981 by Schlossberg alone.) Schlossberg's Transition Theory, then, can be thought of as a model that provides a vehicle for analyzing an individual's adaptation to, and movement through, a transition that he or she is facing. For the purposes of this study, the theory provides insight into the phenomenon of veteran-students' transitions from deployment to

campus life by shedding light on what affects veteran-students' progressions into, through, and out of higher education settings.

Transitions, according to the authors, must be examined in terms of type, perspective, context, and impact—these are the factors that can influence the success or failure of an adult to adapt to a transition. Types of transitions include anticipated events, unanticipated events, and nonevents. Considering the perspective of an adult in transition means keeping in mind that one person's anticipated event, such as having a child, can be another person's unanticipated event. The authors include gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and geographical and historical setting among the contextual factors that influence transitions. Anderson and colleagues (2012) describe the impact of a transition as the degree of difference between the person's pre-transition and post-transition relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles. The authors assert that rather than having some end point, a transition is "a process over time that includes phases of assimilation and continuous appraisal as people move in, through, and out of it" (p. 59).

Anderson and colleagues cite Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) in asserting that transitions consist of four categories of variables, known as the 4 S System: The characteristics of the *situation*, including trigger, timing, source, role change, duration, previous experience, and concurrent stress; the personal characteristics and psychological resources of the individual *self*, including socioeconomic status, sex, age, health, ego development, personality, outlook, and values; the *support* systems (e.g., family, friends, institutions) and options (which can be actual, perceived, utilized, or created) available in the individual's environment; and the coping responses, or *strategies*, that are available. Successfully coping with transitions, the authors write,

involves balancing assets and liabilities that fall into each of those categories of variables. For veteran students, as an example, assets that fall into the category of support can include not only friends and family, but also fellow service members. On the other hand, a support liability could be the lack of certain institutional policies or services at the veteran-student's college.

According to Anderson and colleagues (2012), helpers who are working with adults in transition (such as veterans making the transition to student life, for example) should have three goals: Helping the clients explore the transition by providing them with nonbiased relationships; helping the clients understand their coping resources by providing them with new perspectives; and helping the clients cope with the transition process by influencing action or inaction. The authors conclude by describing ways to help adults in transition in various institutional environments, asserting that helpers must “work on both the individual's perspective and the institution's opportunity structure simultaneously” (p. 165).

Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of the present study is to discover the challenges that veteran-students face during their transition from the military into institutions of higher education, in order to provide institutions with information on how to effectively serve the rapidly growing veteran student population.

- 1.) What challenges do veteran-students in transition experience?
- 2.) How do veteran-students make meanings of their transition experiences?
- 3.) What ways can institutions of higher education help veteran-students cope with those challenges?

Significance of the Research

As Ackerman, DiRamio, and Garza Mitchell (2009) argue, the volume of scholarly literature studying veteran-students is both slim and dated. Although there is plenty of research on students who served during the Vietnam era (e.g., Joanning, 1975; Card, 1983; Horan, 1990), life in the United States armed services has transformed dramatically since then, especially with regard to the implications of the military's changing gender composition (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009) and the nature of modern warfare (DiRamio & Spires, 2009). Moreover, the focus of the previous research has been centered primarily on issues such as mental health and academic achievement, with little attention paid to the notion of transition. The qualitative literature on the transitions of contemporary veterans into higher education environments is extremely limited (e.g., Rumann & Hamrick, 2010; Ackermann, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009). Because there remains a void in the knowledge about how veteran students make meaning of their transition experiences, further qualitative inquiry is warranted. Therefore, conducting a qualitative study grounded in the transitional perspective of adult development will allow for a broader examination of the challenges facing today's veteran-students.

Methodological Approach

The present study employed a qualitative case study approach as the guiding methodological framework in order to describe the veteran-students' lived experiences and how the veteran-students make meanings of those experiences, thus illuminating the soldier-to-student transition as lived and experienced by six subjects. Data collection for the present study included six one-on-one, semi-structured interviews. All of the participants were students at the same large public research university in the

Midwest. All interviews were conducted face-to-face in person and audio recorded, with the participants' consent. I then transcribed the interviews verbatim for analyses and explored emerging themes in the data. These themes will be discussed in Chapter Four.

Assumptions

My findings rely on two assumptions. First, I assume that the subjects answered my questions honestly. Second, I assume that I coded the data in emergent categories that were cohesive and relevant, while recognizing that as a researcher I am unable to avoid imposing my own biases on my interpretation of the data.

Limitations

One limitation of the present study is that I relied entirely on data that was self-reported. In addition, the study is limited by both the depth of the interviews and the number of participants—I used a somewhat small sample of only six subjects. However, it is worth noting that Rumann and Hamrick (2010) used a sample of six veterans for a similar study. Nonetheless, I conducted only one interview with each subject and, while I attempted to conduct member checking with all of the subjects in order to improve trustworthiness, I was unable to reach Tony and Matt to confirm and clarify their comments.

It could be argued that the lack of generalizability of the present study is a limitation. However, because this was a qualitative study, there was no intention to make the results generalizable to the broader population of veteran students. Rather, the present study provides a snapshot of veteran students' experiences at a large Midwestern research university in 2012.

Summary

The primary purpose of the present study is to discover the challenges that veteran-students face during their transition from the military into institutions of higher education. Using qualitative methods (one-on-one, face-to-face interviews with six participants), this study will potentially influence institutions of higher education by providing them with data that can inform their approaches to serving the nation's rapidly growing veteran-student population. It is my hope that the findings can enlighten further research with rich contextual information, assist university staff members who work with veteran students, and ultimately humanize and give voice to a student population that is so often misunderstood.

Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

The following literature review consists of two major areas of theory and research. The first area of literature to be reviewed concerns the previous studies on veteran-students' transitions into institutions of higher education. The chief focal points of the studies to be reviewed in this area include: Post-deployment enrollment and re-enrollment; the experiences of female veteran-students; and the experiences of disabled veteran-students. The reason that I chose to give special attention to these three subpopulations is primarily because of the relative abundance of literature that focuses on the experiences and needs of these groups. That being said, it is worth pointing out that the current body of literature on women veteran students, disabled veteran students, or veteran students who transition from enrollment to deployment to re-enrollment, is by no means exhaustive.

The second area of literature to be reviewed concerns initiatives, both by government and by individual higher education institutions, designed to improve access and outcomes among veteran-students. In this section, the aforementioned report by McBain, Kim, Cook, and Snead, which will serve as the starting point for discussion, will be explained in greater detail than it was in the introduction.

Studying Veterans in Transition

Post-Deployment Enrollment and Re-Enrollment

Ackerman, DiRamio, and Garza Mitchell (2009) interviewed 25 veteran-students in order to investigate "how combat veterans who become college students make the transition to campus life" (p. 5). Based on the veteran-students' responses, the authors

were able to identify four clear transitions: Joining the military; deployment; serving in a war zone; and moving from combat into the classroom. In terms of joining the military, respondents indicated that they had chosen to enlist for the following reasons: Patriotism and a sense of duty, particularly following the 9/11 attacks; a family tradition of military service; the need for financial support to attend college; and the desire for adventure, challenge, escape, or change. In terms of deployment, several students reported that they had been forced to temporarily withdraw from school as a result of their being activated mid-semester. Withdrawing from college caused the respondents financial difficulties, emotional stress, and administrative challenges.

In terms of serving in a war zone, Ackerman and colleagues observed that several respondents had gained skills and qualities during deployment that would help the respondents as students, including self-discipline, time management, and the ability to establish goals. However, the respondents also reported struggling with challenges such as: adapting killing and survival skills to civilian life; losing friends to death or serious injury; and coping with personal injuries, disability, and post-traumatic stress. Women veterans reported facing additional challenges, such as struggling to earn acceptance as female soldiers (who, as women, have until recently been formally excluded from serving in armed combat units) and trying to navigate the male-dominated social environment of the military.

The fourth transition, moving from combat to the classroom, was the primary focus of Ackerman, DiRamio, and Mitchell's (2009) study. The authors noted three areas of concern in this transition: 1) Navigating the bureaucracy of the Veterans Administration; 2) Gaining access to services provided by campus veterans services

offices; and 3) Re-entering civilian life and becoming a student. Regarding the veteran's administration, some respondents reported delays in receiving payment of their educational benefits; in addition, National Guardsmen tended to be better informed about the Veterans Administration, likely because of the presence of an educational officer for each National Guard unit. Regarding campus veterans services offices, respondents reported everything from being unaware of any of the services available through their veterans services offices, to developing close relationships with the offices that go beyond simply processing educational benefits. The most "veteran-friendly campuses," the authors found, had veterans services providers who "anticipated issues and offered suggestions and solutions before [soldiers] realized there was a concern," including handling "withdrawals from classes [and] financial aid issues, [keeping] in contact with the soldiers while they were deployed by e-mailing campus news updates...[and] initiat[ing] re-entry and benefits paperwork" (p. 10). Finally, with regard to re-entering civilian life and becoming a student, respondents reported the following: 1) Having to re-learn study skills; 2) Facing conflicts with others over the fact that they had served, including questions about whether they had killed anyone; and 3) Struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and challenges related to attention span, patience, anger, depression, and nervousness when in large groups of people.

DiRamio and Jarvis (2011a) adapted Schlossberg and colleagues' 4S System specifically to veteran-students. According to DiRamio and Jarvis, three of the situational elements identified by Schlossberg et al. are particularly salient to the experiences of veteran-students, including role change, control, and concurrent stress. Veteran-students experience role loss (that is, they move out of the role of combat

soldier) and role gain (that is, they move into the role of student). These role changes can create difficulties with which the veteran-students must cope; for example, “college-level study skills...can suffer while serving in the military” (p. 13). The issue of control is related to role change; although the transition from military service to college is an internal role change choice that the veteran-student controls, DiRamio and Jarvis suspect that pressures such as the Post-9/11 GI Bill have likely caused some veteran-students to lack “a conscious sense that college attendance is indeed a personal choice, not to be taken lightly or hastily” (p. 14). In addition, concurrent stressors such as attempting to reunite with loved ones or dealing with emotional or physical health problems can increase the possibility of veteran-students becoming overwhelmed during the transition period.

In terms of the 4S System’s second element, the self, DiRamio and Jarvis point out that “socioeconomic standing, whether [a veteran] is a first-generation college student, gender...age, ethnicity, psychological and health condition, and personal characteristics related to self-efficacy, spirituality, values, and resiliency” are all particularly relevant to veteran-students’ transitions (p. 15). For the third element of the 4S System, support, the authors write that veteran-students can find both non-role dependent sources of support, such as family and friends (that is, people who view the individual as a loved one, not as a soldier or a student) and role-dependent sources of support, such as veteran-student organizations on campus. DiRamio and Jarvis conclude by offering various strategies, the fourth element of the 4S System, for veteran-students having trouble coping with their transition. These strategies range from academic tutoring to psychological counseling.

Although the DiRamio and Jarvis lay out an excellent, broad foundation for examining veteran-students in transition, there are certain subpopulations of veteran-students that merit further attention. For example, a decreasing proportion of veteran-students are following the traditional model of high school (or workforce) to military to higher education. In response to this trend, Rumann and Hamrick (2010) explore the transitions of students who have returned from war zone deployments and have subsequently re-enrolled in college. As Rumann and Hamrick point out, the issues facing students who re-enroll following deployment are particularly relevant in light of the use of National Guard and Reserve units in Iraq and Afghanistan, among other locations. As a result of this deployment strategy, an increasing number of students must make the transition from student to soldier, and then again from soldier back to student. After conducting interviews with six student-veterans and reviewing campus newspapers published from 2001 to 2008, Rumann and Hamrick identified four major themes in the soldier-to-student transition experience: 1) Role incongruities; 2) Changes in maturity; 3) Changes in relationships; and 4) Identity renegotiation. Within the realm of role incongruities, the respondents all cited the disconnection between military and academic life, the “incompatibilities of lingering stress and anxiety with returning to college,” and the difficulties of continuing to be a student during deployment or a service member during college (p. 440). With regard to changes in maturity, the respondents consistently described themselves as now having “clearer perspectives and increased goal commitment” compared to their non-veteran peers (p. 441). With regard to changes in relationships, the respondents tended to point out the difficulties in establishing and re-establishing interpersonal relationships with non-veteran students; consequently, the

respondents actively sought out the company of veterans. Finally, with regard to identity renegotiation, respondents reported the following: 1) Possessing increased awareness of the significance of their veteran statuses, and even simply their military uniforms, to other people; 2) Being faced with different treatment (such as favors) by civilians, including strangers; and 3) Possessing increased awareness of social class, cultural diversity, and politics.

The changes in relationships that veteran-students experience during their transitions to student life merit further examination. DiRamio and Jarvis (2011c) base their work on the premise that “if a student only comfortably connects with like-minded peers and those with similar experiences and backgrounds (whether civilian or military), it is more likely that he or she may depart from school before graduation” (p. 35). Given veteran-students’ preference for the company of other people with military experience, therefore, veteran-students may be particularly vulnerable to the threat of attrition caused by an inability to connect to people of different experiences and backgrounds. DiRamio and Jarvis adapt Vincent Tinto’s (1993) model of student attrition to the experience of students with military experience. Tinto’s model holds that a student’s personal attributes, which include “family background, socioeconomic status, prior schooling, and skills and abilities[,] all affect a student’s initial intentions before entering college and point to the veracity of the commitment to persist as well as shape the student’s goals” (cited in DiRamio and Jarvis, 2011c, pp. 36-38). DiRamio and Jarvis assert that for veteran-students, the most relevant personal attributes include: 1) Financial concerns (such as access to GI Bill benefits); 2) Physical and psychological health issues (such as post-traumatic stress disorder); 3) Family background (such as whether veterans are first-

generation students); 4) Skills and abilities (such as those acquired during military service, including cultural sensitivity); and 4) Prior schooling (as well as the decline in academic prowess brought on by the gap between high school and college enrollment). Such personal attributes influence the strength of veteran-students' goal commitments, such as a student's desire for specific career-related educational outcomes, and institutional commitments, such as a student's degree of loyalty to his or her university. External forces such as parenting commitments and continued part-time military service may also play a role in whether veteran-students drop out of school, but the personal attributes listed above do not directly influence such factors.

DiRamio and Jarvis argue that for institutions that serve veteran-students, "helping students with military experience to meet each other on campus...is a worthwhile *initial* strategy for transition and adjustment [emphasis added]" (p. 41). Such connection strategies might be academic, such as creating veterans-only orientation classes, or social, such as hosting veteran-student organizations. However, the authors point out that such strategies have a self-segregating effect on the veteran-students, failing to help them "fully transition and integrate with the broader 'civilian' campus community" (p. 42). Thus, it is crucial for higher education professionals who serve veteran-students to also emphasize "integration with the broader academic and social community present on campus" (p. 44). DiRamio and Jarvis argue that such integration is crucial, not only for the veteran-students' social and academic development in the campus community, but also for the development of marketable civilian career skills. Once again, strategies for integrating veteran-students into the broader campus community can be academic, such as by inviting veteran-students to speak at sponsored

colloquia, or social, such as by having veteran-student organizations partner with other student organizations in support of a mutual cause. As for cultivating civilian versions of military skills and qualities that are attractive to potential employers, campus' offices of career services can create career classes that help veteran-students deal with job preparation and culture shock and expose veteran-students to the needs of the civilian workforce. Once veteran-students undergo academic, social, and career integration, they will reformulate their goals and commitments, and then either persist or depart from their institution.

Women Veteran-Students

As Ackerman, DiRamio, and Mitchell (2009) found, female service members and veterans face additional challenges with which their male counterparts do not have to struggle. The number of women serving in the military has dramatically increased. Moreover, women's locations in combat zones have changed, resulting in increased exposure to the stresses of war traditionally experienced by male servicemembers. Although women were, until recently, barred from serving in combat arms units, Baechtold and De Sawal (2009) point out that "the lines between combat and noncombat missions in the current conflicts are frequently almost nonexistent...[and] support units are as susceptible to attack as frontline units" (p. 35). The reality of modern warfare is that, like their male counterparts, female soldiers have long engaged in firefights, have taken prisoners, and have become casualties. Baechtold and De Sawal, therefore, emphasize the need for campus professionals to become aware of how issues related to mental health, sexual assault, and gender identity can affect the women veterans' transitions from military life to campus life.

With respect to mental health issues, Baechtold and De Sawal preface their assertions by first making clear that although returning combat veterans need a safe place where they can process their experiences, campus professionals should not be misled to believe that all or even most combat veterans suffer from mental health problems. However, student affairs personnel do need to be prepared to serve as helpers to veterans who arrive on campus with experiences that are not common to the traditional college student. The National Center for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder estimates that 18% of Iraq veterans and 11% of Afghanistan veterans suffer from PTSD (cited in Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009, p. 36). The authors point out a paradox: Because of the tendency of doctors to diagnose women's mental health problems as depression or anxiety rather than combat-related PTSD, women are more likely than men to suffer from PTSD, but less likely to be diagnosed with it. As DiRamio and Jarvis (2011d) assert, this discrepancy in treatment may be a manifestation of the fact that the "history of women in the armed forces in many ways parallels the devaluation of women as workers in American society in general" (p. 69). In other words, some mental health professionals may be more likely to trivialize the psychological concerns of women veterans or associate those concerns with their patients' womanhood, rather than with their patients' military experience.

Other barriers to psychological treatment include the fact that female veterans tend not to define themselves as veterans, as well as the fact that they show a greater concern than men do "about maintaining the emotional and psychological strength expected of military members" (p. 37). With regard to the issue of sexual assault, Baechtold and De Sawal point out that although studies vary greatly in reporting the exact numbers of women who experience sexual assault and sexual harassment in the

military, common effects of such problems for women during their transitions back to civilian life include loneliness, anxiety, substance abuse, depression, and anger. The authors suggest that student affairs practitioners should be aware that because the day-to-day stresses and crises of civilian women may seem trivial when compared with the dangers of combat, it is important to note that female veterans make meaning of their experiences differently than women without military backgrounds.

Regarding the issue of identity development, Baechtold and De Sawal contrast the forced identity re-negotiation of the military—that is, the depersonalization that soldiers undergo in basic training—with the more natural identity development that college students undergo. The authors argue that because the military imbues soldiers with self-images that are characteristically male, women must move “away from natural expression of gender to a more forced and conscious one. This learning may be difficult to counteract upon return to civilian life” (pp. 39-40). The notion that military women feel pressured to not act “too feminine” is reinforced by the findings of a survey of 285 women in all branches of the armed services (Herbert, 1998). Herbert found that almost two-thirds military women felt that there were penalties for behavior that was “too feminine”; the penalties included ostracism or disapproval by other women, being viewed as a slut or sexually available, being viewed as incompetent, not being taken seriously, and being limited in career mobility. At the same time, Herbert’s study found that there were similar penalties for behavior that was “too masculine,” including ostracism, ridicule, limits on career mobility, and being viewed as a lesbian. Thus, the transition from soldier to student may be complicated by the fact that female veterans experience a

crisis of identity in which they “are often unsure of how to fulfill not only their specific role as a student but also their role as a woman” (Baechtold & De Sawal, p. 40).

Women veterans also experience unique challenges in the classroom. For example, female veteran-students are less likely than their male counterparts to find same-gender faculty and staff on campus who have military experience and who can serve as role models and mentors. Moreover, as Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule observed (1997), women in general often *feel silenced* (one of the “ways of knowing” identified by the authors), which the authors attribute to the tendency of women to learn from a young age to be passive and view authorities as having all power. For female veteran-students, who come from the notably authoritarian institution of the military and are at high risk of being past victims of military sexual trauma (MST), this tendency can cause them to be hesitant to express their views, particularly in discussion-style courses and even more so when military-related topics arise—as Belenky and colleagues note, women who feel silenced have a profound lack of confidence in their own meaning-making and meaning-sharing abilities.

Disabled Veteran-Students

DiRamio and Spires (2009) introduce another subpopulation of veteran students that merits special consideration: Disabled veteran-students. According to the authors, advances in medical service delivery and armor technology have caused the ratio of wounded-to-dead among American service members in Iraq to be roughly sixteen to one; this stands in stark contrast with the three-to-one ratio among veterans of the wars in Korea and Vietnam. Consequently, the authors suggest, disabled veteran-students will

have a presence on college campuses to an extent for which campus personnel may not currently be prepared.

In addition to PTSD and bone and muscle injuries, one disability common among today's returning veterans, according to DiRamio and Spires, is traumatic brain injury (TBI), which is sustained primarily from blast explosions, motor vehicle accidents, and gunshot wounds. Symptoms of TBI can be cognitive (such as memory loss or inability to concentrate), physical (such as headaches, dizziness, and blurred vision), or behavioral (such as irritability, anxiety, sleep disorders, and depression). Ostovary and Dapprich (2011) suggest that because "[v]eterans may choose to ignore or minimize PTSD/TBI symptoms, given the social stigma associated with mental health disorders and the desire to fit in with their peers," they may avoid disclosing their disabilities to people on campus or elsewhere who might be able to offer help (p. 65). Aside from failure to disclose disabilities, other barriers to successful educational outcomes for disabled veteran-students include the following: 1) Enrolling too soon after returning from deployment, which places students at higher risk of anger outbursts, poor concentration, and increased irritability in classroom settings; 2) Problems associated with academic demands, socialization with peers, and access to campus services; and 3) A lack of coordination among agencies providing services to disabled veterans.

One approach to helping veteran-students cope with such cognitive, physical, or behavioral disabilities is the American Council on Education's (ACE) initiative known as "Severely Injured Military Veterans: Fulfilling Their Dream" (DiRamio & Spires, 2009, p. 83). This project supports disabled veterans through the transition to college by employing ACE academic advisors at military hospitals to do the following: 1) Assist

clients in developing individual educational plans; 2) Help clients find information about particular colleges' academic offerings, orientation programs, and campus culture; and 3) Connect clients with volunteer mentors, known as “champions,” who can provide further information, guidance, and advocacy for the veteran-students on campus.

Initiatives to Improve Veteran-Student Access and Outcomes

Government Initiatives

Government initiatives pertaining to veteran-students have been designed primarily to improve access, not outcomes. However, it is worth noting that difficulty in accessing benefits can be a factor that contributes to unsuccessful educational outcomes among veteran-students. The Post-9/11 GI Bill is only the latest federal act that assists veterans with the financial burden that higher education can impose. Another law, the Higher Education Relief Opportunities for Students (HEROES) Act of 2003 (Public Law 110-93), provides “relief to activated service members who are repaying student loans” (McGrevey & Kehrer, 2009, p. 90). Still another law, the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act (SCRA) of 2003 (Public Law 108-454), protects veterans in financial matters such as rental agreements, security deposits, prepaid rent, eviction, credit card interest rates, mortgage foreclosure, insurance, and tax payments.

It is important to remember that all of the programs described above play a role not only in ensuring that service members can afford college, but also in ensuring that the transition back to civilian life has as few stressors as possible, thus making academic success more likely. In addition, however, the Veterans Administration offers educational counseling and testing services for veterans, and there are various programs administered at the state-level that focus more on outcomes, such as Troops-to-Teachers,

which “provides guidance, counseling, and mentoring to eligible military personnel who are seeking a career in” the field of teaching and who wish to serve in high-needs schools (Ohio Department of Veterans Services, 2010). Defense Activity for Non-Traditional Educational Support (DANTES), an office of the Department of Defense, administers Troops-to-Teachers at the federal level, along with three other programs that help improve educational outcomes among veteran-students. The first of these programs is the Military Evaluation Program, in which courses and occupations held by service members are translated into college credit recommendations. The second program, Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC), is a consortium of institutions that meet criteria pertaining to reasonable credit transfers, reduced academic residency requirements, credit for military experience, and credit for nationally-recognized testing programs. The final program, known as the Third Party Assessment Program, periodically ensures the quality of institutions that enroll veteran-students (DANTES, 2012).

Institutional Initiatives

According to McBain and colleagues (2012), 62% of the 690 institutions in the authors’ study currently provide programs and services specifically designed for veterans; an additional nine percent reported that adding such programs is part of their long-term strategic plan. These numbers, which represent increases from the 2009 version of the same study, make sense, given the dramatic increases in average institutional enrollments of active-duty military students and veteran-students—in fact, the average enrollments of both groups roughly doubled between 2009 and 2012.

Among the institutions surveyed in McBain and colleagues' study that reported providing services specifically for veterans, the following findings were salient to the present study. One-third of the institutions surveyed offer scholarships for veteran-students. About 82% "have an established policy regarding tuition refunds for military activations and deployments" (p. 8). Roughly two-thirds have special campus social or cultural events for veteran-students. Eighty-four percent offer counseling services for students with PTSD, but only 55% have programs designed to assist veterans with physical disabilities. Eighty-three percent award academic credit for military training, but only 63% award credit for military occupational experience. Finally, 71% of institutions that offer services for veterans have a central office dedicated specifically to serving veteran-students and military service members; this represents a drastic increase from the 49% of institutions who reported having such an office in 2009. Institutions with such an office are much more likely to offer various services (ranging from financial to academic to social), and are similarly more likely to have expanded such services over that three-year period.

Based on an empirical evaluation of the 2009 version of McBain and colleagues' study, DiRamio and Jarvis (2011b) make four key recommendations that continue to ring true. First, institutions must immediately address psychological and counseling services, given the increasing number of veteran-students with physical or psychological injuries. Second, institutions should consider increased support for veteran-students in the areas of academic advising and career services. Third, institutions should investigate problems related to veterans' finances, including tuition refunds and transcript evaluation. Finally, "institutions that have the wherewithal to dedicate physical space, focus support, and

marshal resources” should indeed establish a one-stop veterans’ support office (p. 112). Haley Chitty (2008) concurs with that final recommendation, suggesting that “[i]deally, the veteran affairs, financial aid, admissions, and various academic departments would collaborate to provide aid, admission, academic, and living support to veterans to ensure full access and success at the institution” (p. 43). Chitty points out that although it is not always possible for an institution to provide all this information in one physical office, every institution can take steps such as creating a website with all pertinent information for veteran students. Rumann and Hamrick (2009) are even more ardent about the importance of unifying veteran- and student-services into one sphere, arguing that to do otherwise would not be “consistent with transition processes that at some level aim to integrate and reconcile a student’s various roles and experiences rather than separate or compartmentalize the sets of experiences, social roles, and, ultimately, personal identities” (p. 30).

Despite the volumes of emerging literature on best practices for facilitating veteran-students’ transitions, the bottom line, as Elizabeth O’Herrin (2011) insists, is that “[b]ecause veterans are a diverse population with an incredibly wide range of experiences, it is impossible to take a one-size-fits-all approach to serving them” (p. 16). In other words, campus administrators must gauge their own institutions’ veterans’ specific needs and devote resources to new initiatives based on direct input from the veteran-students themselves. In order to receive such input, writes O’Herrin, institutions should devise innovative methods of tracking and contacting veteran-students, such as by revising admissions forms. O’Herrin also suggests that, despite the differences among individual veterans, seven initiatives undertaken at a number of campuses have received

particularly positive feedback from veteran-students. First, institutions should establish specific points of contact within campus offices. Second, institutions should create an interdepartmental working group on campus. Third, institutions should collaborate with community organizations. Fourth, institutions should provide a thorough orientation for veterans. Fifth, institutions should improve campus climate using tools such as veteran student organizations, a designated veterans' resource center, and education for faculty and staff regarding veterans' issues. Sixth, institutions should streamline disability and veterans services. Finally, institutions should create veteran-specific learning communities.

In Ohio alone, four institutions—Cleveland State University, Kent State University, Youngstown State University, and the University of Akron—have created veteran-specific learning communities by adopting a curriculum model known as the Supportive Education for the Returning Veteran (SERV) Program. O'Herrin describes the SERV Program as “a cohort-based learning community model where general education courses (such as English, psychology, and sociology) are offered as ‘veterans-only’ courses” (p. 18). Another example of an Ohio institution creating veteran-specific learning communities is The Ohio State University's conversion of a former fraternity house into a veterans-only residence hall that houses 17 veteran-students (Albrecht, 2011, para. 19). Similarly, in 2011, the University of Akron opened Musson Military Veterans Lounge, located on the third floor of the school's football stadium, where veteran-students can socialize, study, and receive transition assistance. As O'Herrin points out, these veteran-specific learning communities are “extremely helpful” because they aid in the development of close relationships among veteran-students, which “enhance veteran

success [by providing] a sense of community and identity for student veterans” (pp. 17-18).

Perhaps the fastest-growing approach to helping veterans build close relationships among themselves in order to support their transitions from the military to the campus is the creation of student veterans organizations (SVOs). For example, the organization Student Veterans of America has grown from twenty chapters nationwide in 2008 to over 500 in 2012 (Sander, para. 6). John Summerlot, Sean-Michael Green, and Daniel Parker (2009) write that effective SVOs share four traits in common. First, they are usually egalitarian organizations, “without regard to rank, branch of service, or time in service” (p. 78). Second, effective SVOs provide services that help veterans to orient themselves with campus and become reacquainted with civilian life. Third, effective SVOs advocate on behalf of student-veterans to individual institutions. Finally, effective SVOs provide fellowship and support, which are crucial for veteran-students’ transitions from military to student life.

Conclusion

The review began by discussing the previous studies on veteran-students’ transitions into institutions of higher education. The chief focal points of the studies in this area pertained to: Post-deployment enrollment and re-enrollment; the experiences of female veteran-students; and the experiences of disabled veteran-students. Indeed, female veteran-students and disabled veteran-students both represent growing subpopulations that merit further research in their own right.

The second area of literature to be reviewed concerned initiatives, both by government and by individual higher education institutions, designed to improve access

and outcomes among veteran-students. In this section, a 2012 report by McBain, Kim, Cook, and Snead, served as the starting point for discussion.

Chapter Three

Methodology

The present study adopted an interpretive perspective grounded in constructionist epistemology. My goal, based on my own assumption that knowledge is socially constructed, was to interpret and provide deep insight into “the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it” (Schwandt, 1994, p. 118). Michael Crotty (1998) offers a definition of constructionism as “the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices, being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (p. 42). That is, this epistemology stands in stark contrast with traditional objectivism, which holds that “truth and meaning reside in their objects independently of any consciousness” (p. 42). The goal of the present study, then, was not to discover a singular meaning of the soldier-to-student transitional experience, but rather to examine how each veteran-student *individually* experienced the transition and only then to find commonalities and trends where I could. Indeed, I acknowledge that no two soldier-to-student transitions are the same, a fact that Schlossberg and colleagues (1995) assert regarding *all* transitions. This particular perspective can perhaps better inform institutions of higher education looking to improve services for veteran-students by offering detailed examinations of a diverse array of veteran-student experiences. Studies grounded in a traditional objectivist perspective may not reveal much information, for example, about veteran-students’ attitudes toward their peers in the classroom; however, being aware of these attitudes is an important part of understanding soldier-to-student transitions.

Research Design

The present study employed a qualitative case study approach as the guiding methodological framework in order to describe the veteran-students' lived experiences, thus illuminating the soldier-to-student transition as lived and experienced by six subjects. I chose this research design primarily because qualitative literature on the transitions of contemporary veterans into higher education environments is limited (e.g., Ackermann, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). Because there remains a void in the knowledge about how veteran students make meaning of their transition experiences, further qualitative inquiry is warranted. Moreover, the approach for the present study is appropriate to critical examinations of new phenomena; as I discussed in the preceding chapters, the transitions of veteran students in the contemporary period may be sufficiently different from those previous generations' veteran students to necessitate new qualitative studies. Therefore, the qualitative approach allowed for an exploration of the participants' distinct perspectives, thus helping to answer questions "that stress how social experience is created and given meaning" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 8).

A case study approach is appropriate to the present study because, as Colin Robson (1993) asserts, a case study involves "an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context" (p. 146). Moreover, as Sharan B. Merriam (1988) argues, case studies are useful "in presenting basic information about areas of education where little research has been conducted" (p. 27). Indeed, although there are volumes of research on the broad topic of veteran students dating back at least

as far as the post-World War II period (e.g., Flynt, 1945; Howard, 1945), there is little that specifically examines the ways in which veteran students experience and make meaning of the transitions they are undergoing in the particular historical, cultural, technological, and political contexts of the early 21st century. Therefore, a case study approach is suitable for describing this experience and meaning-making.

Data collection for the present study included six one-on-one, semi-structured interviews; this method allowed me to establish rapport with the participants and allowed the participants to think before responding to questions. All interviews were conducted face-to-face in person and I audio recorded the interviews with the participants' consent. I then transcribed the interviews verbatim for analyses and explored emerging themes in the data. These themes will be discussed in Chapter Four.

Participants

I found subjects for the present study by means of criterion sampling, which, according to Patton (2001) can be defined as “selecting cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance” (p. 238). I initially contacted the military service office at a Midwestern public research university and asked that an email be sent out to all veteran students. The only selection criterion was that subjects had to be military veterans enrolled for class at the research site at the time of data collection who were willing to speak openly about their perceptions of their experiences transitioning from the military to college. I left the criteria intentionally vague (for example, excluding factors such as combat experience and time of deployment) in order to attract a group of respondents who is demographically and experientially diverse. However, when this approach garnered only two responses, I was forced to find participants through other

channels. This may have been necessary because of the tendency of veteran students to avoid self-identifying as veterans—almost all respondents noted either that they do this or that they know fellow veterans who avoid such self-identification, and one respondent went so far as to respond to a question regarding other people’s perceptions of his veteran status with the assertion, “You try to keep it a secret.” Although I did not change the selection criteria for the convenience sampling, I did make phone calls to veteran students, some of whom were recommended by acquaintances of mine who knew about my thesis topic. For example, three participants were referred to me by friends who were eager to assist me with the present study. I also found another participant when I walked by him one day and happened to notice he was wearing a military-issued camouflage backpack that had his last name embroidered on it. I have replaced all of the respondents’ real names with pseudonyms. The participants received no incentives for their participation. All data has been kept in a secure location for the duration of the study, in accordance with the IRB process.

Site of Study

All respondents were enrolled at the same public research university in the Midwest. The institution enrolls over 20,000 students and offers a wide range of academic majors and professional programs. The institution also has an Army ROTC program, and a total of 37 National Guard units (not counting field maintenance facilities) are located within a 100-mile range of campus. In addition, there is a Veterans Health Administration outpatient clinic located on campus within walking distance of the institution’s medical college. Finally, the institution was on the 2012 list of “Military Friendly Schools” published by the magazine *G.I. Jobs*.

Because of the potentially sensitive nature of the interview data, I chose to allow the subjects to decide where the interviews would be conducted; I wanted the subjects to be as comfortable as possible. I offered to reserve quiet study rooms in a library at the subjects' university and most subjects agreed to use these rooms. However, because of scheduling constraints, Kyle wanted to hold the interview during his lunch break at a sandwich shop on campus. I made Kyle aware of my concerns regarding the confidentiality of his data if it were acquired in such a public setting; however, he insisted that that was the only way he would have time to speak to me. Nonetheless, I went to as much effort as possible to ensure confidentiality in the interview setting.

Procedure

Questionnaires

Once potential subjects were identified through criterion and convenience sampling, I provided further detail to those subjects who were interested in participating (see Appendices A and B). Once the subjects and I had determined when and where to meet, I gave the subjects informed consent forms that had been approved by the University of Toledo's Institutional Review Board (IRB). I offered the subjects time to discuss the forms with any spouses or loved ones; no subjects found this to be necessary. Once I met with the subjects, I had them fill out a personal background questionnaire (see Appendix C). This was designed to gather background information such as age, gender, program of study, and military branch. The findings of the questionnaire are displayed in Table 1 (see next page).

As Table 1 demonstrates, the subjects in the sample varied in age, race, gender, academic major, military occupational specialties, deployment lengths, deployment

Table 1: Responses to Personal Background Questionnaire

	<u>Tony</u>	<u>Matt</u>	<u>Kyle</u>	<u>Juan</u>	<u>Mike</u>	<u>Jessica</u>
Age	23	33	35	31	39	30
Gender	Male	Male	Male	Male	Male	Female
Race/Ethnicity	White	White	White	Hispanic	Black	White
Family history of military service?	No	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Why enlist?	No answer	No answer	Desire to be a police officer for a few years	Opportunity	School benefits offered by recruiters	Desire to see the world
Major	Criminal Justice	Respiratory Therapy	Business	PhD: Theory and Social Foundations of Education	Information Technology	Early Childhood Education
Change major on return?	No	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Affiliation	Marine Corps active duty, no longer affiliated	Army active duty, now Reserve	Air Force active duty, then Reserve, no longer affiliated	Marine Corps Reserve	Air Force National Guard	Marine Corps active duty, no longer affiliated
Locations of Deployment	Iraq, Afghanistan	Iraq	Saudi Arabia, Japan	Europe (various locations)	Germany, Turkey Honduras	Japan, Argentina, Greece, China
Length of Deployments	7 months each	18 months	6 months, 2 years	3-6 months	1-2 weeks for training	1 year each
Military Occupational Specialty	Infantry	Medic	Law Enforcement	Combat Engineer	Civil Engineering	Ammo supply & security guard
Transition type	Military to College	Military to College	Military to civilian work and college	College to Deployment to College	College to Deployment to College	College to Deployment to College
Financial Challenges	Needed summer job for expenses	Problems with federal loans	None	No longer eligible for GI Bill	None	Living expenses- rent, gas, etc.
Used campus veterans' center?	Yes	Yes	Yes, for parking & GI Bill Process	Yes	Yes	Yes, for benefits, SVA, making friends
Has it been helpful?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Aware of veteran support programs at institution?	No	No	No	No	No	SVA, counseling center, VA at medical college
Physical injuries or disabilities made transition harder?	No	No	No	No answer	No answer	No answer
Psychological or emotional concerns made transition harder?	Yes	No	No	No answer	No answer	No answer

locations, and family history of military service. All of the subjects lived off campus

independently of their parents, so that data was excluded from the table for the sake of

brevity. Similarly, none of the subjects had any Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC)

experience, so that data was excluded from the table. The subjects failed to consistently answer questions regarding their socioeconomic status, so that data were removed.

Although socioeconomic status may play a role in future studies on veteran students' transitions, the subjects in the present study appear to have been confused by the way the questions were worded.

One interesting coincidence that I noticed in the survey results is that Tony and Matt, the two respondents who had actually served in combat roles in Iraq and Afghanistan, failed to answer the question regarding the factors that contributed to their decision to enlist in the military. Without examining a larger sample, however, this can be regarded as nothing more than a coincidence. I was unable to reach Tony and Matt for further comment.

Jessica's notes about the SVA refer to the Student Veterans of America chapter at the university that served as the site of the study. SVA is an organization that was founded for the purpose of providing peer-to-peer networks, connecting student veterans to resources, and advocating on student veterans' behalf (Student Veterans of America, 2008). Her mention of the VA is a reference to the Veterans Health Administration outpatient clinic on campus.

Every subject reported having used the veterans' services office on campus, and all subjects found it to be helpful in satisfying their needs. However, only Jessica was aware of any of the institution's programs aimed at supporting or reaching out to veterans.

Interviews

After each of the six subjects completed the preliminary questionnaires, I engaged each subject in a one-on-one, face-to-face, semi-structured interview designed to gather information about the subjects' transitional experiences. The length of the interviews ranged from 15 minutes to over an hour, as some respondents were far more talkative than others. All of the interviews took place in quiet study rooms in the main library of the university that served as the site of the study (except for Kyle's interview, which took place near a dining facility on campus, per his request). I recorded all of the interviews on a handheld digital audio recorder. I conducted only one interview with each subject, although I did later attempt to strengthen the validity of the accounts by informally following up with subjects over the phone for clarification and additional information as part of the member checking process, which is when data, analytic categories, interpretations, and conclusions are tested with members of the groups from whom the data were originally obtained (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Data Analysis

Upon completion of the interviews, I transcribed the audio recordings and coded the transcripts for themes during the fall of 2012. It was during this time that I attempted to contact every subject as part of the member checking process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, I was unable to reach all of the participants for follow-up.

As John W. Creswell (1998) notes, the data analysis components of qualitative case studies that consist of several cases (such as the present study) typically are comprised of a within-case analysis, followed by a cross-case analysis, followed by a

summary that describes the lessons the researcher has learned from the cases. I chose to follow Creswell's model.

Assumptions and Limitations

All studies are both framed by assumptions and bound by limitations. My findings rely on two assumptions. First, I assume that the subjects answered my questions honestly. However, given my earlier concern about the two combat veterans failing to answer the question regarding what motivated them to enlist, that portion of the data's trustworthiness remains questionable. Second, I assume that I coded the data in emergent categories that were cohesive and relevant, while recognizing that as a researcher I am unable to avoid imposing my own biases on my interpretation of the data.

One limitation of the present study is that I relied entirely on data that was self-reported. Another limitation is that the present study used a somewhat small sample of only six subjects. However, it is worth noting that Rumann and Hamrick (2010) used a sample of six veterans for a similar study. Nonetheless, I conducted only one interview with each subject and, while I attempted to conduct member checking with all of the subjects in order to improve trustworthiness, I was unable to reach Tony and Matt to confirm and clarify their comments.

Because this was a qualitative study, there was no intention to make the results generalizable to the broader population of veteran students. Rather, the present study provides a snapshot of veteran students' experiences at a large Midwestern research university in 2012. It is my hope that the findings can enlighten further research with rich contextual information, assist university staff members who work with veteran

students, and ultimately humanize and give voice to a student population that is so often misunderstood.

Demographics of the Veteran Students

All six subjects were military veterans taking classes at a large Midwestern research university. Of the six, only two had served in combat roles, but all had served overseas in some capacity. The subjects ranged from 23 to 39 years of age. Five subjects were male and one was female. Four were White (non-Hispanic), one was Black (non-Hispanic), and one was Hispanic. Two subjects had a family history of military service; the other four did not. They varied in terms of academic program, military branch affiliation, military occupational specialty, transition type (deployment-college or college-deployment-college), reasons for initially enlisting, and lengths and locations of deployments. Although the questions on the preliminary questionnaire that dealt with socioeconomic status did not yield consistent answers, some subjects reported encountering financial challenges as a result of their status as veteran students, such as running out of eligibility for GI Bill benefits or having problems accessing federal loans; other reported simply having trouble with day-to-day living expenses.

The Cases

Tony

Tony was a 23-year-old combat veteran who had experienced two seven-month deployments: One to Iraq (Operation Iraqi Freedom, or OIF) and one to Afghanistan (Operation Enduring Freedom, or OEF). He joined the Marine Corps immediately after graduating high school and served for four years. Shortly following his honorable discharge, he began to attend college.

Matt

Matt was a 33-year-old Army reservist who had been deployed in Iraq for 18 months prior to coming to college. Like Tony, Matt joined the military shortly after graduating high school. However, Matt served ten years active duty in the Army before being deployed for OIF, and (as of the time of the present study) has remained an Army reservist for the three years that he has been back from that deployment.

Kyle

Kyle was 35-year-old Air Force veteran who had been stationed in Saudi Arabia for six months and in Japan for two years during his time of service. Kyle joined the Air Force when he was 19 years old and, like Matt, decided to commit to the Reserves for a time following his deployments. However, Kyle is no longer affiliated with the military.

Juan

Juan was a 31-year-old Marine Corps reservist. A first-generation college student with no family history of military service, Juan cited “opportunity” as his primary reason for joining the Marine Corps reserves. Having been activated during his undergraduate years, Juan served in various locations in Europe before returning to finish his degree and go on to graduate school at the same institution. Experiencing deployment and subsequent re-enrollment meant that Juan was faced with unique challenges.

Mike

Mike was a 39-year-old Air Force National Guardsman. Although most of his service took place in the United States, he had traveled to Germany, Turkey, and Honduras for one-to-two-week training exercises. Mike joined the Air Force National Guard when he was 18 years old in order to gain the education benefits that recruiters had

offered him. He completed his associate's degree at the university that served as the site of the study, continued his military service, and later returned to the same institution to complete his bachelor's degree, toward which he was working at the time the interview was conducted.

Jessica

Jessica was a 30-year-old Marine who had served for extended periods in Japan, Argentina, Greece, and China. Jessica started at a community college near her parents' house in Ohio before deciding to join the Marine Corps, acting on a desire to see the world. Upon her return from her most recent deployment, she enrolled at the university that served as the site of the present study. Of the six subjects in the study, Jessica was the only woman veteran.

Chapter Four

Findings

Some of the findings of the present study are consistent with the findings of research on veteran student transitions dating back as far as the post-World War II period. For example, all of the subjects reported feeling that they had experienced accelerated personal growth, maturity, and/or global awareness as a result of their deployments (e.g., Newby, McCarroll, Ursano, & Zizhong, 2005; Elder, 1987). Other findings, however, were more surprising.

This chapter consists of a two parts. First, I created a series of within-case analyses, in which each participant's case is analyzed individually (Creswell, 1998). Next, I conducted a cross-case analysis, in which themes, similarities, and differences across cases are examined. The within-case analyses are designed to provide a context through which to view the cross-case analysis. The cross-case analysis, on the other hand, is designed to be useful for college and university personnel who hope to improve their understanding of the experiences of veteran-students in transition—however, as with any case study, consumers of the present research should be careful not to attempt to generalize the findings to all veteran students in transition.

Within-Case Analyses

The section is designed to provide a narrative summary of what each of the subjects stated during the interviews. The within-case analyses will focus on the four defined veteran student transitions identified by Ackerman, DiRamio, and Mitchell (2009): joining the military; deployment; serving in a war zone; and moving from combat into the classroom. These findings will be interpreted within the context of

Schlossberg's Transition Theory (Anderson et al., 2012) in Chapter Five. In order to maintain the subjects' anonymity, the subjects have been assigned pseudonyms and the findings will be presented in a random order.

Tony

Tony was a 23-year-old combat veteran who had experienced two seven-month deployments: One to Iraq (Operation Iraqi Freedom, or OIF) and one to Afghanistan (Operation Enduring Freedom, or OEF). Having joined the Marine Corps "the day [he] graduated high school," he was forced to mature quickly: "If you don't get stuff done, it's major consequences in the military...transitioning from that to college, college is easy." Tony noted that during his deployment to Afghanistan, he gained a surprising level of respect for the Afghan people:

Honestly, even though I hated the majority of them, I respected how they lived. They were like, no shit, Stone Age. Their biggest technological advance was probably irrigation...it actually opened my eyes. I was really surprised. When I was in Afghanistan, there were no real buildings over there, and when I was walking through this village, there was a father and his two young sons building this mud house for themselves, and they're just laughing and having a good time, and it reminded me of when I was young shingling the roof with my dad. It kind of hit home for me. It made me realize these people aren't so different, it's just how they live...They have nothing, but they're still laughing.

Upon his honorable discharge after four years of service, Tony began to attend college as a 23-year old freshman. Tony noted that although his classes have caused him to experience very little stress academically, he feels hurt and neglected as a result of being "surrounded by a bunch of kids" who "have no what's going on in the world and no one really cares." Tony reported that he deals with these feelings by keeping them "bottled up," "cover[ing them] up with humor, so people don't know," and "not say[ing] anything about it." He also noted that he avoids disclosing anything about his military

experience, or even self-identifying as a veteran: “I keep it a secret. Nobody needs to know my opinion.” Tony reported experiencing little difficulty resuming or initiating social relationships since his return to civilian life. He noted that adjusting to being a student after serving in the military requires more thinking, but the problems he experiences as a student are less stressful: “If it’s a problem with a grade, big deal. It’s not the end of the world, I’m not gonna die...For the most part it’s been pretty easy.” Tony reported that when other people find out he is a veteran, they may thank him for his service or ask what branch he was in, but mostly he perceives that other people treat him with “negligence...they don’t really mean it [when they offer thanks], they’re just saying it to get it out there, to make me feel better. But I already know that no one cares...they don’t even know about the situation, what’s going on in the world.”

Schlossberg’s 4S System provides a framework through which to analyze Tony’s case. First, Tony’s *situation* can be thought of as consisting of the *trigger* that induced his transition, the *timing* of his transition, the *control* he has (and perceives himself to have) over his transition, the *role change* associated with his transition, the *duration* of his transition, the *previous experiences* that impact his transition, and the *concurrent stress* that may inhibit his transition. As indicated in Table 1, Tony did not give a reason as to why he had enlisted in the military, but instead only said that he joined immediately upon his graduation from high school. Because I was not able to reach Tony to follow up with him on this point, the question of his trigger remains unanswered. The timing of Tony’s transition, on the other hand, was quite clear; Tony swiftly made the transition from high school to the Marine Corps to college, with little down time in between. This timing schedule may serve as an asset to Tony, as he is not that much older than his

classmates (as he pointed out, he has had few problems initiating social relationships) and he lacks the family and full-time job responsibilities that typically act as concurrent stressors for older adult students. On the other hand, Tony's quick transition from deployment to enrollment may also act as a liability to his academic success. As DiRamio, Ackerman, and Garza Mitchell (2008) found in their interviews with twenty-five student veterans, several participants felt that it would have been helpful to give themselves personal adjustment periods instead of transitioning directly from deployment to enrollment, often noting that their ability to focus on their studies would have improved if they had taken time to become used to civilian life.

Tony made it evident that he felt he had a healthy level of control over his situation, going so far to describe it as "pretty easy." This is perhaps in spite of the fact that, as most people would assume, there is a dramatic role change associated with the transition from combat duty in Afghanistan to college life in the Midwest; nonetheless, Tony was rather stoic regarding his role change, avoiding going into the degree of detail about the subject that other participants did. As for the duration of Tony's transition, it is clear that his transition is ongoing. Despite reporting that college is "pretty easy," he also described several emotional challenges—most notably, the feeling that none of his peers genuinely cares about world events, which he takes as a personal offense to his service—that may determine whether he makes a successful transition through college.

As for Tony's *self*, it is helpful, for the purpose of analyzing student veterans, to divide this second element of the 4S System into four main categories of resources and deficits, according to DiRamio and Jarvis (2011a): 1) Tony's financial conditions; 2) his psychological status; 3) the state of his physical health; and 4) his outlook or self-

efficacy. Tony revealed on his preliminary questionnaire that one financial challenge he faced was that he needed a summer job to meet the extra expenses he had to meet—despite the fact that Tony was attending school on the Post-9/11 GI Bill, which provides veteran students with money, not only for tuition, but also for living expenses. Tony's interview revealed that his psychological status provides Tony with both resources and deficits. While he reported having confidence in his ability to perform well academically, he also reported feelings of neglect from his peers and from society more broadly. Perhaps more importantly, Tony revealed that a friend from his unit had died in Afghanistan; I suspect that this traumatic experience had more of an impact on Tony's psyche than Tony was willing to reveal. With regard to both psychological health and physical health, Tony also reported that he suffered from insomnia as a result of his experiences. Despite this, however, he had a largely positive outlook and high levels of self-efficacy, frequently noting that life as a student is easy compared to his previous duty in Afghanistan.

One disconcerting aspect of Tony's interview and questionnaire responses was that he revealed very few sources of *support*. For individuals in transition, support can be role-dependent (in this case, military- or university-related) or non-role dependent (such as friends or family). Tony stated in his questionnaire that he was unaware of any veteran support programs at his institution (in reality, there are many), and he noted in his interview that the few recent interactions with friends he had prior to his deployment have been “weird” and “pretty brief.” Moreover, he said that his closest friends “know not to ask any questions” about his service, reinforcing his assertion that he prefers to keep his feelings “bottled up.”

As for transition *strategies*, Tony revealed that he has done little beyond that “bottling up” of feelings. He did reveal that he usually covers his stress with humor, which, as other interviews will reveal, may be a coping strategy that is ingrained in the culture of the military.

Matt

Matt was a 33-year-old Army reservist who had been deployed in Iraq for 18 months prior to coming to college. Like Tony, Matt joined the military shortly after graduating high school. However, Matt served ten years active duty in the Army before being deployed for OIF, and (as of the time of the present study) has remained an Army reservist for the three years that he has been back from that deployment. Matt noted that his service in the Army has provided him with a degree of self-discipline that continues to serve as an asset to him as a student: “All people benefit from the military. It teaches them how to structure their lives and be more focused.” At the same time, however, Matt noted that other skills he gained in the military, such as small group management, have not helped him academically. In the transition from the military to college, Matt encountered several difficulties. Chief among them was that “there doesn’t seem to be a single person in charge of anything in the academic world.” Matt found this “spiraling bureaucracy” to be much more frustrating and challenging to navigate than the more straightforward hierarchy of the military. Comparing the university both to Wal-Mart and to the Department of Motor Vehicles, he said that “there’s almost no accountability” and “it’s definitely not like a military institution, where people are looking out for one another.” Another contrast between the two lifestyles that Matt encountered was the difference between methods of conflict resolution:

In the military, it's almost might-makes-right. If somebody mouths off to you, and you're confident you can win, you can beat them up. In the civilian sector, that's completely frowned upon. Even if somebody keys your car in the parking lot, if you beat them up you'll probably still go to jail. Or in the college setting, they'll probably want you to go to some peer remediation and sit around and hold hands and cry on each other for a while. Whereas in the military, it's much simpler. If somebody beats you up, you were probably wrong. So it sounds like an uber-chauvinistic way of showing it, but it eliminates all the backstabbing and cattiness. You don't have to worry if the person who's friendly to your face is badmouthing you behind your back. It's more clean-cut.

In addition, Matt noted having more global awareness, maturity, empathy, and patience than his fellow students, although he admitted that the improved patience may be attributable to his age, rather than his military experience. Matt asserted that being older than his peers also had negative aspects, such as in having conversations with people who are fifteen years his junior. Moreover, Matt noted that his peers are so far removed from the reality of military conflicts that they fail to grasp what he considers to be straightforward problems for returning veterans: "It's strange trying to explain a back injury. [People might say], 'Why would you have a back injury from being in the army? I play *Call of Duty*, my back's not injured.'" Like Tony, Matt articulated that although people show respect when they find out that Matt is a veteran ("I've had people offer me coffee at Starbucks...when I'm in my uniform"), the vast majority of students and even non-combat veterans utterly lack any understanding of his experience.

Schlossberg's 4S System can serve as a helpful tool to frame Matt's case, beginning with the first element, the *situation*. The trigger that served as the catalyst for Matt's transition is, as was the case with Tony, unknown. Both combat veterans in the present study avoided revealing why they joined the military or why they chose to make the transition to higher education, and both were unable to be reached for further

comment on the matter. The timing of Matt's transition played a different role than the timing of Tony's transition did, as Matt was 30-years old by the time he enrolled in college. Matt suggested that his age had likely contributed to his increased patience, but also to his problems relating to his much younger classmates, who tended not to understand his dated pop-culture references. As for control, Matt's mention of having high levels of self-discipline, especially with regard to having the ability to structure his life, gave some indication of the strong degree of control he felt he had over his situation. Nonetheless, he expressed frustration with aspects of his situation that were beyond his control, such as the behavior of university employees. As for role changes, Matt noted he viewed his change from being an Army medic to being a student as primarily a gain rather than a loss, noting that his military experience had imbued him with self-discipline, global awareness, maturity, empathy, and patience, all of which have helped him academically. Matt implied that he felt the duration of his transition was temporary; he appeared to have confidence that he would persist to graduation. He did not mention having any concurrent stressors unrelated to the transition or previous experience with a similar transition.

As for Matt's *self*, Matt revealed relatively little about the state of his finances, psychological health, or physical health. He did note on his questionnaire that he had experienced problems with his federal loans, implying that he needed money beyond that which was provided by the G.I. Bill. In addition, although Matt did not disclose any diagnosed psychological, emotional, or physical problems, he did express frustration with certain aspects of the transition, such as adjusting to the institutional norms of the university. He also appeared to have a high level of self-efficacy, noting that although he

was having some minor trouble adjusting, many of the skills he had gained from the military were helping him as a student.

Like Tony, Matt did not discuss any sources of *support*, either role-dependent or non-role dependent. On his questionnaire, he noted that he was not aware of any of his institution's veteran support services (of which there are many) and said that he had utilized the university's military service office only for processing GI Bill benefits (which is required of all students on the GI Bill). However, Matt did repeatedly mention one *strategy* that he used in order to progress through the transition, which was to maintain the same structured schedule each day that he had when he was in the army, making sure to "wake up, work out...eat meals at the same time, study at the same time, [and] get the same amount of sleep" each day.

Kyle

Kyle was 35-year-old Air Force veteran who had been stationed in Saudi Arabia for six months and in Japan for two years during his time of service. Having joined the military at 19 years of age, Kyle believes that he has changed drastically as a result of the rigors of military life; he suggested that the Air Force turned him into "a self-initiator, a self-motivator." Kyle recalled being exasperated by the lack of maturity and responsibility exhibited by his younger classmates: "I show up with my homework. Nobody else did. It's just frustrating because I have a career, run two Boy Scout troops, I've got kids, a family, a wife, and I can seem to get it done, and these kids who are twenty or so, they have all kinds of time." Kyle reported dealing with this frustration by sitting in the back row, crossing his arms, and chuckling. He implied that the maturity the military gave him caused a rift between himself and his friends from high school:

“My best friends growing up, I’m no longer friends with. They got into drinking and drugs, and they’re living the life they’ve chosen. [Without] the military, if I had stayed home, I imagine I’d be in the same place.”

Another difficulty Kyle reported was losing the support system of what he called “the Air Force family,” which afforded him material benefits such as paid leave, medical services, and paycheck advances when necessary. Perhaps revealing something about his perception of military life as being somehow separate from “the real world,” Kyle pointed out that when “you come into the real world, there are no benefits.”

On the other hand, Kyle felt that the routines, schedules, and problem-solving approaches with which he complied in the military are very similar with those characteristic of student life, with the exception of the constant possibility of being transferred at a moment’s notice. In addition, similar to the sentiments expressed by Matt, Kyle pointed out that the military’s straightforward, “no B.S.” nature has made him more direct and frank in social situations as a student: “People don’t want to know the truth. You ask me if a dress makes you look fat, yeah, it makes you look fat...I say it the way it is. People don’t like that.”

Interestingly, Kyle’s change in global awareness differed greatly from that of the other subjects in the study. Kyle noted that as a high school student, he had already been “very international” and loved “the languages...the people...[and] the diversity” of other cultures. After being stationed in Japan for two years, he noticed a dramatic change in his feelings toward Americans:

I came back hating Americans. Couldn’t stand them... I was noticing how rude and arrogant and full of themselves Americans are. When I went back to Japan, it was great. I was back home. I was there for another seven months, so I finished up my tour, came back, and I couldn’t stand

Americans again. It took a few months, I'd say close to six months before I could stand Americans...On campus, you see a lot of the international students, I understand why they are who they are. I lived in their country.

Kyle noted that when people on campus find out he is a veteran, he usually does not receive any kind of different treatment, although he has been thanked for his service.

Again, the 4S System is useful for analyzing Kyle's transition. Regarding Kyle's *situation*, the trigger that prompted Kyle to make the transition from the military to college was Kyle's desire to learn the skills necessary to help run his father's business. Although his original plan after graduating high school was to gain experience in the Air Force working as a police officer (his military occupational specialty was law enforcement), he decided after working for his father's business to use his GI Bill benefits to earn a bachelor's degree in business. Kyle said in the interview that he plans for the duration of his transition to be longer than that of the other interviewees, noting that he intends to continue his education and wants to eventually earn an MBA and a Ph.D., "just because [he] can, just to prove it to [him]self."

The timing of Kyle's transition, like that of Matt, played a role because Kyle was so much older than most of his classmates. As Kyle pointed out, the difference in maturity between him and his classmates caused Kyle a great deal of consternation. Moreover, Kyle had to juggle the concurrent stressors that so often come with being an older adult student, including responsibilities to his family and his career. Despite these concurrent stressors, Kyle implied that he felt a relatively high level of control over his situation, summarizing his ability to achieve his academic tasks with the phrase, "I'm doing my job." That is not to say, however, that the role change has not come with some aspects that Kyle perceived as negative, including his difficulties re-adjusting to

American culture and initiating social relationships; however, as with Tony and Matt, Kyle noted that the military provided him with many intangible skills, without which his success as a student would not be possible.

Kyle did mention a previous experience that shared some similarities to his current transition—he stated that he had studied abroad in France when he was in high school. However, he said that because “the French are just as abrupt as Americans, [he] didn’t notice a difference [in culture] going there or coming back. It didn’t bother [him] a bit.”

In terms of Kyle’s *self*, it became clear during the interview that Kyle was extremely well-financed, saying, “I make more than most doctors.” He was also apparently in healthy psychological and physical condition, noting that he had experienced no physical injuries or psychological concerns during his transition. Moreover, it was clear that despite minor setbacks such as frustration with classmates’ work ethic and trouble adjusting to the social structures of student life, he maintained a high level of self-efficacy and confidence in his ability to achieve his goals.

However, Kyle did complain about losing a major source of role-dependent *support*, to which he referred as “the Air Force family.” Other participants in the study also used the image of a family as a device to describe the tightknit social structure of the military, not to mention the tangible monetary benefits described by Kyle.

Finally, one noteworthy *strategy* that Kyle mentioned for coping with the negative aspects of the transition is responding to his frustration with his classmates’ laziness by sitting in the back row, crossing his arms, and chuckling. There may be a connection

between this coping mechanism and other respondents' use of sarcasm and humor to manage their emotions.

Juan

Juan was a 31-year-old Marine Corps reservist. A first-generation college student with no family history of military service, Juan cited "opportunity" as his primary reason for joining the Marine Corps reserves. Having been activated during his undergraduate years, Juan served in various locations in Europe before returning to finish his degree and go on to graduate school at the same institution. Experiencing deployment and subsequent re-enrollment meant that Juan was faced with unique challenges, including what he referred to as "dead time":

I felt, at times, I was lagging behind my peers on campus because of not only deployment status but overall military service. During undergrad, there was a transition like two or three years where I began to see friends graduate from college or to stop attending and I was on active duty so it felt like dead time, to where I wasn't making any progress academically. And even though I was on active duty and serving my obligated time, I had a real hard time adapting to that at that time of my life.

Juan noted that although student life entails more independent thinking and fewer instructions than military life does, he prefers student life "because any decision I make, in that structure, is based on my interests. I don't have to follow anyone else's orders but my own." Juan believes that his service in the military gave him a "better perspective on life," as well as skills that help him understand and question what he learns in the classroom. Moreover, Juan suggested that his newfound global awareness has led to greater maturity, but at the same time, he feels that he exhibits slightly poorer academic achievement and less extracurricular participation than some of his peers who have not had their education interrupted by military deployment.

As Kyle expressed, Juan has also grown distant from his friends who did not enter the military or go to college. Juan believes that these individuals do not understand his lifestyle: “It’s hard to explain, because if no one’s ever had to write papers, or had to go to drill, or had to balance it all, they just think you’re blowing them off or you no longer want to be social with them, which is never the case.”

Juan noted that on campus, the first question people often ask when they find out he is a veteran is whether or not he has killed anyone. Other students also assume that he wants to tell war stories, in the same way that “everyone wants to reminisce about the good old days in high school.” Like Matt, Juan noted that his military experience has made him less politically right-wing, despite the perception that most veterans are conservative Republicans. In addition, people assume that Juan’s personality traits all come as a result of his military experience; for example, students think of him as a “drill instructor” when he is teaching a fitness class, when the reality is that his stern attitude comes from being a mixed martial arts (MMA) fighter. As a result of all these misconceptions people make, he avoids revealing his veteran status to other students.

Juan noted that one challenge he has faced is that although people are inclined to put more trust and confidence in him because of his veteran status, potential employers fail to view his military work experiences as relevant or transferable. Juan noted that it can be difficult to alter his resume to convert military occupational specialties into employers’ “own language.”

The 4S System is useful for analyzing Juan’s transition. First, in terms of his *situation*, the trigger that caused Juan to make his transition was Juan’s perception of the military as a chance at “opportunity,” as Juan pointed out in his questionnaire. It was

clear from the interview that for Juan, a first-generation college student from a low-income background, the Marine Corps represented a shot at gaining options in life:

“Growing up the way I grew up, there was really no option. No one went to college, no one went to the military.”

The timing of Juan’s transition was problematic because his deployments postponed his graduation to the point that people who started college at the same time as him began to graduate two or three years ahead of him. Juan lamented but acknowledged that this aspect of his transition (namely, the fact that he continued to be deployed and thus had to postpone his education) was beyond his control. Another aspect that Juan seemed to feel he could not control was his marketability to employers—unlike Kyle, Juan was pursuing a Ph.D. not to prove something to himself, but because he could not obtain a full-time job in his chosen field within the geographical area to which he was limited due to family obligations. These concurrent stressors regarding employment prospects and providing for family members stemmed partly from the fact that Juan was an older adult student, resulting from his deployments postponing his education.

Regarding Juan’s *self*, it was apparent that Juan did not have a great degree of financial resources available to him. Not only had he come from a low-income background, but he worked three part-time jobs at the same time to put himself through graduate school. Moreover, he was no longer eligible for GI Bill benefits at the time of the interview. Although he did not disclose any psychological problems or physical injuries that have hampered his transition, he did discuss the vague loneliness associated with people not understanding the lifestyle to which veteran-students in his situation must adhere. In addition, Juan seemed to have lower levels of self-efficacy than the other

participants, noting that his deployments may have damaged his ability to perform in the classroom and participate in extracurricular activities.

Juan did not discuss any sources of *support* that he could use to progress through his transition. One *strategy* he mentioned for coping with the misconceptions that people make about him is to avoid revealing his veteran status altogether.

Mike

Mike was a 39-year-old Air Force National Guardsman. Although most of his service took place in the United States, he had traveled to Germany, Turkey, and Honduras for one-to-two-week training exercises.

Mike joined the Air Force National Guard when he was 18-years old in order to gain the education benefits that recruiters had offered him. He completed his associate's degree at the university that served as the site of the study, continued his military service, and later returned to the same institution to complete his bachelor's degree, toward which he was working at the time the interview was conducted. As a result of interruptions in Mike's coursework, Mike was forced to stretch out the length of his education. Returning to school after almost two decades, Mike had trouble "just trying to navigate [his] way around a large university" and had difficulties adjusting to technological innovations: "I'm used to lines, I'm used to talking to advisors... Things are a lot different now... It's almost like being a freshman again."

Mike stated that the military taught him "the value of an education, and I take my studies a lot more seriously than I did" prior to serving. The disadvantage of this, however, is that "things are a lot more stressful because [Mike] care[s] more than [he] did before." Nonetheless, Mike described the routines of student life as being "random"

when compared to the structures of military life. He described the strangeness of transitioning from the military, where the decisions he made affected the lives of other airmen, to the university, where his decisions affect only himself.

Mike noted that the maturity and self-discipline that the military gave him allowed him to overcome the distractions and social and economic pressures that he has faced as a student. Along the same lines, Mike suggested that veterans transitioning to college “view everyone else as slackers” and experience a sort of “culture shock” in this regard:

The military teaches everyone to work as a team, as one unit. There is no individuals. So if you feel like you’re striving harder in anything—the way you dress, anything—if you feel like you’re striving harder to perfection or the benefit of the whole, you expect everybody else [to do the same]. What you forget, in civilian life, there’s more individuality. People have their own minds, people have their own goals and intentions, and it might not be yours. And that’s one of the things that you have to re-learn, because you can set bars and standards for people around you pretty high. Once you become relaxed, you start to digress a little bit, you start becoming more relaxed. It’s kind of a culture shock, I guess, people describe it.

Mike said that he has not experienced any trouble with resuming or initiating social relationships. He attributes the ease with which he has accomplished this to the fact that he served in the National Guard, which “makes it easier to balance the life between military and [non-military]—you get to a point when you can almost turn it on and off.”

In contrast with the other subjects, Mike’s exposure to foreign cultures was somewhat limited. However, he did not fail to discuss his increased global awareness, mentioning the overwhelming poverty he encountered in Honduras and the prevalent attitudes toward appropriate clothing in Turkey.

Mike echoed Juan's sentiment that people assume all veterans have killed someone; in reality, Mike never saw combat. Mike also said that people "think [he has] made a lot of money" when they find out he is a veteran. Mike noted that the opposite is true: He has met a surprising number of military personnel who had to take part-time jobs off-base to support their families, and even many soldiers who were enrolled in government assistance programs. In terms of how people treat him when they find out he is a veteran, Mike stated that unlike in the Vietnam era, students today show more empathy for returning veterans and often shake his hand, thank him for his service, and even pay for his meals at restaurants: "The last couple conflicts, we were treated very much like rock stars."

The 4S System is useful for analyzing Mike's transition. The trigger that prompted his *situation* stemmed from his reason for joining the military in the first place, which was to gain the educational benefits that recruiters had offered him. In other words, Mike had always intended on making the airman-to-student transition. The timing of Mike's transition is complicated, as the duration between his associate's degree and his bachelor's degree studies was almost twenty years. As a result, Mike not only had to balance his studies with concurrent stressors such as family and career responsibilities, but also felt like he was "a freshman again." Nonetheless, he appeared to feel relatively high levels of control over his transition, noting that the fact that he was a National Guardsman—rather than a member of the Special Forces, to cite an example he used—helped ease the transition between military and civilian life.

In terms of Mike's *self*, Mike did not mention that he had faced any major challenges related to his finances or his psychological or physical health. In terms of

self-efficacy, he has had to deal with the problems associated with resuming his education, but has also gained helpful and positive attitudes about education, which he attributed to his military service.

Mike mentioned public attitudes about today's veterans as a source of *support*, noting that he has been treated almost like a celebrity both on- and off-campus. While other participants' appreciation of these attitudes were often tempered by feelings of being misunderstood, Mike was enthusiastic about the ways in which people have thanked him for his service. Perhaps because of the largely positive experiences that Mike has had in his transition, he did not mention any special *strategies* for progressing through his transition.

Jessica

Jessica was a 30-year-old Marine who had served for extended periods in Japan, Argentina, Greece, and China. Of the six subjects in the study, Jessica was the only woman veteran.

After graduating high school, Jessica began to attend a community college with no particular goals in mind, "just to figure it out and get away from home and get a degree...[and] get a job, a good job, not some nine-to-five working at K-Mart." However, she joined the Marine Corps after a semester of school because she had a great desire to see the world. During her service, she had time to learn about herself and realized that she wanted to be a teacher, so upon her return she transferred to the university that served as the site of the study and began to pursue her bachelor's degree in early childhood education.

Jessica believes that her military service gave her more than just time to think about her future, however. For example, like all the other subjects in the study, Jessica mentioned that her experiences abroad have made her more accepting and aware of other cultures. However, the transition back to college has not been without its challenges. Jessica noted that despite the fact that she never saw combat, she—and most of her veteran friends—have difficulty sleeping:

I don't know if it's because we're used to having the constant protection [of guards on the base] or we're used to the constant threat of danger and then we fall asleep only as a necessity to survive, and they no longer have that constant threat on their lives and they can't fall asleep. So most of my military friends take drugs, actually, for sleep.

Jessica has also faced financial challenges, as she attended school on the Montgomery G.I. Bill, which provided her with only “enough benefits to pay for school.” In contrast, the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill provides additional benefits for living expenses. Jessica also noted having trouble resuming relationships with old friends and initiating relationships with new friends. For old friends, the problem was that they “had all moved on and had kids” and “my opinions had changed a lot and theirs had stayed very similar.” For making new friends, one issue was that she had the most ease connecting with other veteran students because, as she pointed out, non-veterans do not understand the insulting and sarcastic sense of humor that the military gave her. In addition, she feels that she does not get along with her female peers because “their ideas of social interaction [are] a lot different from mine and my experience is a lot different from theirs.” Moreover, she finds it very difficult to hold conversations with traditionally-aged students because “their ideas are just too uninformed.” As a result, most of her friends are older male students with military experience.

Jessica has also faced challenges that she believes are specific to the experiences of women veterans. For example, people often do not believe her when she mentions that she served in the Marines. She also believes that her being a woman Marine can intimidate some men: “I literally told a guy once in a bar that I was a veteran and he stopped talking to me.”

Like other subjects in the study, Jessica has become frustrated by the lack of work ethic and ignorance of world affairs exhibited by her younger classmates. Interestingly, she reacts to such situations in the same way that Kyle reported doing so: “As much as we’d like to argue, it’s too stressing, so we [veteran students] just sit back and laugh.”

As other respondents pointed out, adjusting to the lack of “exact answers” in student life has been hard for Jessica: “As a student, your teachers are very vague about things they want...In the military, you’re constantly training for the answers...It’s like rote memory.” Early in her degree program, Jessica found herself frequently asking, “Who do I report to?”

Overall, however, Jessica feels that she has been treated with a great deal of respect by people who find out she is a veteran—particularly by her female professors. Unfortunately, some of her fellow students “don’t know how to react very well to me as a veteran. They look at me like I’m kind of crazy.” As a result, she has become very active in her institution’s chapter of Student Veterans of America in order to find friendship and support.

The 4S System provides a useful framework for analyzing Jessica’s transition. First, the trigger that prompted Jessica’s *situation*—that is, her decision to enroll in college—was that fact that the military gave her the opportunity to realize what she

wanted to do with her life. Prior to joining the Marine Corps, Jessica was an aimless student attending community college with no definite plans for the future; after joining the Marines in order to “see the world,” she gained the clarity of focus to realize she wanted to attend school to become a teacher.

The timing of Jessica’s situation played a role in her transition, as she has had trouble resuming social relationships with non-military friends, who have “moved on” in life by getting married and having children; similarly, as a nontraditional student, she has found herself lacking the patience to socialize with her younger classmates. Despite these challenges, however, Jessica’s responses suggested that she felt that very few aspects of her transition were beyond her control. She felt she would persist to graduation, and thus felt that the duration of her transition would be temporary. She did not mention any concurrent stressors such as family or a full-time job, but she did suggest that the role change associated moving from the male-dominated Marine Corps to the civilian world had impacted her identity as a woman; in particular, she described the challenges she faced when attempting to interact with other women.

In terms of Jessica’s *self*, Jessica described the state of her finances in some detail, noting that she had faced challenges meeting basic living expenses. Moreover, she discussed the psychological and physical challenges associated with her insomnia. Nonetheless, she maintained a high-level of self-efficacy, showing confidence that she felt she would succeed through her transition because of the strong work ethic and focus that the military had helped her cultivate.

Jessica spoke more than any other participant about the sources of role-dependent *support* she had utilized in order to progress through her transition. Jessica disclosed that

she was a member of the university's chapter of Student Veterans of America, which she had used as a way of meeting friends—this is a particularly salient point, given most veteran-students' preference for associating with other veteran-students. Moreover, Jessica revealed that she had used the university's counseling center for her psychological and emotional needs, but she did not reveal many specific concerns beyond her insomnia and her challenges with social relationships. One coping *strategy*, beyond seeking out those sources of support, included employing sarcastic humor or sitting back and laughing to deal with her frustration stemming from her classmates' laziness.

Cross-Case Analysis

The cross-case analysis is comprised of conceptual categories that emerged from the interviews. I determined the categories by examining the trends indicated by the data within the framework provided by Schlossberg's Transition Theory (Anderson et al., 2012). I then further defined themes within each of those categories based on the frequency or number of subjects who spoke about a particular issue, such as trouble sleeping or the challenges associated with forming social relationships with non-veteran peers. Next, I matched themes with quotations from the data that best illustrated those themes—these quotations are presented in Chapter Four. Finally, I summarized the findings by describing the lessons I learned from the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

I shall begin by utilizing as categories four broad areas through which the transitions of adults can be examined. These categories will be described within the context of Schlossberg's 4S system, which consists of the four major factors that influence an individual's ability to cope with a transition: Situation, self, support, and strategies. These elements can impact the success of the transition by acting as strengths

(resources) or challenges (deficits) (Schlossberg, 1981). Within each of those categories, I shall examine various themes that emerge. By *situation*, I mean the features of a transition and how they may influence its significance to the adult going through that transition. *Self* is comprised of a person's outlook on life, as influenced by personal and demographic characteristics and psychological resources. *Support* can be thought of as the resources available to the adult in transition. Finally, *strategies* are actions that individuals take in response to transitions.

Situation

In the 4S system, the category of “situation” consists of seven variables: Trigger, timing, control, role change, duration, previous experience, and concurrent stress. Each of these elements can have dramatic impacts on adults’ transitions.

Trigger: Why Make the Transition?

For several of the subjects in the study, military service itself acted as the *trigger* that prompted their choice to attend college. For example, Mike and Juan explicitly stated that they joined the military in order to gain the educational benefits. Similarly, Jessica attributed her time in the Marine Corps to the fact that she realized she wanted to be a teacher, which meant that she would need to acquire a bachelor’s degree.

Other respondents, such as Kyle, noted that the military gave them the self-discipline necessary to reject the lifestyles of siblings and friends from high school, and instead attend college.

Timing: Starting School at 24 (or 30, or 35!)

For most of the subjects, the *timing* of the deployment-to-college transition fit relatively well into their current life situations. However, veteran students inherently

have to cope with the same challenges faced by nontraditionally-aged students. Indeed, several subjects commented on the challenges associated with returning to school after being away from an academic setting. As Mike joked, “It’s like in *The Avengers*, Captain America waking up thinking he’s in the ‘60s but now he’s in the 21st century.” Moreover, some of the subjects, such as Kyle and Mike, had priorities including spouses, children, and full-time jobs that took precedence over their studies.

Control: Learning to Cope with Uncontrollable Situations

The subjects’ responses revealed that they were able to *control* many aspects of their transitions. Because they had all consciously decided to attend college and they had all taken the initiative to utilize the military services office on campus, it is clear that the subjects—perhaps to a greater extent than other students, who lack G.I. Bill benefits—were able to control parts of their college experience. Nonetheless, several respondents expressed frustration at being unable to control the lackadaisical or distracting behavior exhibited by their younger and less mature classmates. The following statement by Jessica illustrates a complaint that was common among the respondents:

When you’re expecting people to sit still and do their job and be in college, it was really just mentally frustrating to not want to just go over and stand up in front of them and tell them, ‘If you don’t want to be here, I’d appreciate it if you just walked out and left. Because I am trying to be here, I am trying to do this, this is important to me, and if you don’t care, just don’t be here.’

Role Change: Relationships, Academics, and Gender

The subjects all experienced a *role change*: From soldier (or Marine, airman, etc.) to student. However, the subjects all experienced their role changes differently. For example, Mike, a National Guardsman, emphasized the ease with which he has been able to adjust to student life: “Being in the National Guard, you’re only part-time

military... You spend most of your time in civilian life... with your family and friends, so it's easy to maintain social ties, healthy relationships with them, because you become both, a civilian and a military personnel." In contrast, Tony, a combat veteran, noted that the dramatic difference between dealing with life-and death situations in Afghanistan and dealing with tests in college has made it difficult for him to take school seriously. Notable, too, is Jessica's role change. As a woman Marine Corps veteran, she has left a world that is male-dominated and now finds herself unable to get along with most other female students. She asserted that the reason for this discordance is that "their ideas of social interaction [are] a lot different from mine."

Concurrent Stress: Work, Family, and Sleep

Several respondents exhibited *concurrent stress* that complicated their transitions. Kyle, for example, emphasized how busy his life has been: "It's just frustrating because I have a career, run two Boy Scout troops, I've got kids, a family, a wife." Other respondents, such as Tony, noted that emotional or psychological concerns had made their transitions more difficult. Jessica cited trouble sleeping as a stressor. Finally, the present study did not examine the *duration* of the veteran students' transitions or *previous experiences* that they had experienced that were similar to the transition from deployment to student life.

Self

It is helpful to think of the components of transitioning veteran students' individual selves as consisting of two groups: Resources and deficits. Resources are personal assets that help the veteran students cope with their transitions; conversely, deficits are personal liabilities that can act as roadblocks in the transition process.

DiRamio and Jarvis (2011a) suggest that four categories of resources and deficits are particularly salient to veteran students' transitions: 1) Their financial conditions; 2) their psychological status; 3) the state of their physical health; and 4) their outlook or self-efficacy.

Financial Conditions: "Veterans Are Not All Rich"

As the results of the pre-interview personal background questionnaire demonstrate (see Table 1, p. 26), the financial conditions of the subjects varied. Not only did the subjects come from a wide range of family socioeconomic backgrounds, but they also experienced varying degrees of financial success upon their return. Contrary to Mike's assertion regarding the popular perception of veterans as possessing great wealth, there was no strong trend among the subjects in terms of financial resources or deficits.

Psychological Status: Combat vs. Non-Combat Experience

The psychological statuses of the subjects also varied, although this was almost certainly due to the fact that two subjects had combat experience and the other four did not. With the possible exception of Jessica's insomnia, most of the non-combat veteran students' psychological concerns were less debilitating and were more social in nature: Frustration and lack of patience with lazy classmates, difficulties making friends with non-veteran peers, etc. On the other hand, the two combat veterans, Tony and Matt, discussed the psychological and emotional toll of witnessing friends die or sustain paralyzing injuries, only to return to academic settings where they perceived that other students failed to understand or simply did not care about the plight of the troops. For example, Tony stated multiple times that he felt neglected and that even his peers'

occasional attempts to show him respect (such as thanking him for his service) were largely disingenuous. Matt expressed similar feelings of being misunderstood:

The military is such an abstraction to America nowadays. People don't know what to make of it. You tell people you're in the military, they'll say, 'Oh, my dad was too.' But they don't understand. Military bases are usually way out in the sticks, so it'd be rare for an American to interact with an American soldier.

Physical Health: Fitness, Injuries, and Insomnia

In terms of the state of the subjects' physical wellbeing, all of the subjects were generally healthy—that is, none had any physical health concerns that prevented them from living relatively normal lives. Indeed, the four youngest subjects all had extremely athletic physiques, likely attributable to their military experience. However, three subjects did discuss physical health concerns. First, Matt twice mentioned back injuries as an example of a transitional issue a veteran student might have, specifically pointing out the problem of both students and non-combat veterans failing to understand why a combat veteran who seems otherwise unscathed may not be able to run as quickly as other people. Matt stated bluntly, “Well, he may have copper in his spine.” Second, both Jessica and Tony noted that they suffered from insomnia as a result of the transition from deployment. Jessica, who had not served in a combat role, suggested that her insomnia was likely due to losing the feeling of safety she had experienced on the well-guarded bases on which she had lived during her deployments. Tony, on the other hand, attributed his insomnia to just the opposite development; rather than moving from the relative security of the base to the heightened awareness that came from sleeping in an unguarded house (as Jessica had), he moved from a situation in which his life was constantly on the line to a situation that no longer required that heightened awareness.

Jessica, who noted that insomnia was a common problem among her veteran friends, described what Tony was experiencing: “[Combat veterans] are used to the constant threat of danger and then fall asleep only as a necessity to survive, and they no longer have that constant threat on their lives and they can’t fall asleep.”

Outlook and Self-Efficacy: “College is Easy”

Finally, there are the elements of outlook and self-efficacy. Psychologist Albert Bandura (1997) defines self-efficacy as “a belief about what one can do under different sets of conditions with whatever skills one possesses” (p. 37). By that definition, all of the subjects in the present study demonstrated high levels of self-efficacy. Despite the various transitional challenges that they all discussed, none felt that they would be unable to excel academically and graduate from their degree programs. As Tony commented, “College is easy. People stress about certain things, about exams. Me, I don’t really. I just plan accordingly. I do study...but it’s not as big of a stress emotion, going to college, as it is in the military.” All of the other respondents echoed this sentiment, suggesting that the rigors of military life had helped prepare them for the academic challenges of college. Only Juan implied that his deployment had negatively impacted him academically, noting that he felt he was less engaged in his studies and extracurricular activities than he might otherwise be if he had not spent time away from college.

Support

Support for transitioning veteran students can be role-dependent or non-role dependent. Both types of support can contribute to the outcomes of the transitions.

Non-Role Dependent Support: Friends and Family

Non-role dependent support comes from “people who view the transitioning individual as a loved one, not as a soldier or a student” (DiRamio and Ackermann, 2011a, p. 15). A typical example of this type of support is family or friends—people who knew the veteran student before he or she joined the military and enrolled in college. Tony described his typical meeting with someone he had known from high school: “If I [encounter] someone that I know, it’s pretty cool. For a lot of people, I haven’t seen them in five years or so, it’s crazy. It’s pretty brief, though.” Kyle, Juan, and Jessica all made similar comments about losing touch with friends whom they had known prior to their enlistment. Jessica and Kyle explicitly stated that they had grown apart from old friends because the military had turned them into different, more motivated people. Thus, few of the respondents had that type of non-role dependent support. However, deployment did not appear to deteriorate the respondents’ family relationships. In addition, both Kyle (who disclosed that he was very close with his father) and Mike had spouses to serve as further support.

Role-Dependent Support: The Military and the University

As for role-dependent support, one trend among respondents was to describe the military itself as a sort of family, where everyone “is looking out for each other,” in contrast with the individualistic nature of student life. As Jessica said, the relationship among veterans (and veteran students) is “like family. It’s like you just walked into your sister’s house, they’ll invite you in, they’ll sit you down, you’ll have lunch. It’s very family-oriented. We take care of each other.” Several respondents discussed the problems they encountered making this switch from the cooperative nature of the military

to the independence, and even selfishness, of college. Matt, for example, felt that in college, “everyone’s out for themselves. There’s not a team effort to approach anything.” Interestingly, however, only one respondent, Jessica, had sought support through the institution’s chapter of Student Veterans of America.

On the other hand, all of the respondents reported that they had found the institution’s veteran’s services office helpful in satisfying their needs. There is a wide variety of sources of support at the institution that served as the site of the present study. For example, other services the veterans’ services office provides include: 1) assistance with registering for federal financial aid; 2) assistance with requests for military transcripts; 3) career assistance; 4) a monthly newsletter with information relevant to veteran students. The veterans’ services office also provides detailed guidelines for what military students should do when they are called to active duty. The institution also has several other veteran-friendly features: 1) an array of online courses (which tend to be favored by adult learners, of which veteran students are a subpopulation); 2) a counseling center available for any student suffering from psychological or emotional distress; 3) a “Veterans’ Plaza” that serves as a memorial walkway; and, perhaps most impressive, 4) a Veterans Health Administration outpatient clinic located on campus near the institution’s medical college. All of these institutional supports can help veteran students with the psychological, emotional, financial, academic, and physical challenges associated with their transitions.

Strategies

Sarcasm

As the interviews progressed, it became apparent that the culture of the military had influenced how some of the respondents coped with the challenges they faced as students. Both Jessica and Tony mentioned that they use sarcastic joking as a coping mechanism, which Jessica noted is common among military personnel. For example, Tony commented, “I usually cover up [my emotional stress] with humor or whatever, so people don’t know.” Another coping strategy that Kyle and Jessica cited is sitting back, crossing their arms, and chuckling when faced with frustration stemming from the immaturity of their younger classmates. Tony’s comments echoed this internalizing behavior when he stated “I get bottled up...[because] nobody needs to know my opinion.”

The Challenges of Being a Nontraditional Student

Something that surprised me is that only Jessica had become involved with Student Veterans of America. As Summerlot, Green, and Parker (2009) assert, such student veteran organizations “serve as an important starting point for student veterans who are new to a campus, helping them to find information about support services and opportunities” (p. 75). Indeed, the fact that the only subject involved in Student Veterans of America was also the only subject who was able to identify other resources available to veterans on campus (excluding the veterans’ services office) reinforces Summerlot and colleagues’ argument. However, the reality is that veteran students are adult learners who often have priorities such as families and full-time jobs that take precedence over extracurricular organizations such as Student Veterans of America.

Summary

As the interviews progressed, it became apparent that three main trends were emerging. First, all of the respondents indicated that from their experiences in the military, they gained two primary assets that would serve them in some way as students: maturity and global awareness. Second, it was clear from the comments made by some respondents that sleep disorders such as insomnia are a liability, not just to the transitions of the subjects of the study, but to many veterans trying to enter civilian life. Finally, as I shall demonstrate in the third part of this section, it became clear that in many cases, perceived assets became liabilities that hurt the veteran-students' abilities to successfully transition to student life. I will now provide a cross-case analysis, discussing each of those trends in more detail.

Assets: Maturity and Global Awareness

In summation, the results of the interviews show that the subjects tended to gain a great deal of maturity and global awareness from their military experiences, and these gains served as assets to the subjects when they entered a college setting. The degree of gains in global awareness may have some correlation with the extent to which the subjects were immersed in foreign cultures. For example, Mike, who spent a few weeklong trainings on bases in Honduras and Turkey, gained a relatively superficial knowledge of the harsh poverty in Honduras and the social conservatism of Turkey. Juan and Jessica both stated that because of their newfound knowledge of American military and covert interventions, they now understand the negative feelings that citizens of certain other countries have toward the United States. At the other extreme, Kyle, who lived for two years in Japan and spent much of his time off-base, returned to the United

States almost feeling more culturally Japanese than American. For this reason, he continues to identify with the international students on his campus, who experience the same culture shock that he felt.

Liabilities: Insomnia and Social Relationships

Unfortunately, the subjects also incurred liabilities as the result of their military experience, such as the emotional and psychological trauma associated with combat. Two subjects reported suffering from insomnia as a result of their experience, despite the fact that only one of those insomniacs had served in a combat role. Jessica noted that insomnia is common among her friends who are veterans. The subjects also frequently reported having difficulty connecting with non-veteran peers and having feelings of being misunderstood.

From Assets to Liabilities: Turning Lemonade into Lemons

Interestingly, the subjects' perceived assets sometimes became liabilities. A common trend among the subjects' discussions of their experiences on campus was to express frustration with what they perceived to be the poor work ethic, immaturity, or ignorance exhibited by their fellow students. Thus, having become used to the culture of the military, the subjects became frustrated when their fellow students did not demonstrate the same characteristically soldier-like self-discipline, hard work, maturity, and worldliness. Another common source of frustration that the subjects reported was that although they receive support, well wishes, thanks, and even free coffee or meals from strangers who wish to show appreciation and respect for veterans, the truth is that most of their fellow students have a poor understanding of the lives of service members.

Chapter Five

Discussion, Conclusions, and Implications

Discussion

As DiRamio and Jarvis (2011a) point out in their adaptation of Schlossberg's Transition Theory, an individual's transition can be viewed as the function of type, context, and impact. The remainder of this section will interpret the findings of present study through the lens provided by these three elements.

Types of Transitions

Types of transitions, according to Schlossberg and colleagues (1995), include those that are anticipated, those that are unanticipated, and those that are nonevents. Veteran students' transitions are largely anticipated (in that they come as the result of veterans' conscious decisions to attend college), although elements of the transitions can be unanticipated (such as problems with processing G.I. Bill benefits) or nonevents (such as when veteran students expect a level of support that their colleges fail to provide). Indeed, this was the case with the transitions experienced by the subjects in the present study—mostly anticipated, but sometimes unanticipated or nonevents. For example, Kyle did not anticipate that he would have so much trouble interacting with Americans after returning from Japan; thus, his fits of impatience with what he perceived to be the rudeness of Americans were unanticipated events.

Contexts of Transitions

The contexts in which transitions take place depend on several factors, including the demographic data of the person in transition. For example, Jessica's gender has strongly impacted her transition in ways that the male subjects have not experienced.

Having maintained social relationships almost entirely with men during her time as an active duty Marine, she now has difficulty interacting with women. The work of Baechtold and De Sawal (2009) suggests that this challenge for Jessica, common among women veterans, may be rooted in the differences in experiences between civilian women and women with military records. The authors make the claims that the day-to-day stresses and crises of civilian women often seem trivial to women veterans, and that women veterans are often forced to undergo a sort of identity renegotiation as they return from the macho world of the military.

Another demographic factor that several of the subjects reported had influenced their transitions is military branch affiliation and type of duty served. For example, Mike, an Air Force National Guardsman who has spent most of his service in the United States, has had very little difficulty making the adjustment from being an airman to being a student. On the other hand, Matt, who had served as a combat medic in Iraq, compared becoming a student to moving to a different country. It is worth noting, also, that the interviews did not yield any evidence that race or ethnicity played a role in the veterans' transitions to college. This may be due to the common speculation traditionally held among sociologists that the United States military "is a model of good race relations." (Burk & Espinoza, 2012, p. 401). (Although James Burk and Evelyn Espinoza ultimately reject that assumption, their full argument is beyond the scope of the present study.)

In addition to demographic information, the context of a transition includes the specific historical time and geographical place in which the transition takes place. As Mike noted, the prevailing attitude on college campuses toward today's veterans is primarily respectful, especially when compared with the college campuses of the

Vietnam War era. Similarly, the transition of the veteran students in the present study was likely made easier by vast resources already available for veterans at this particular Midwestern public research university. In fact, the institution that served as the site of the study would have been able to satisfy most of the items outlined in McBain and colleagues' (2012) national survey on the services that colleges provide for veteran students. Indeed, the institution boasts a host of social events, counseling services, physical therapy, and academic support services geared specifically toward veteran students.

Impacts of Transitions

According to Schlossberg and colleagues, the impact of a transition can be viewed as how a transition alters an individual's daily routines. As the subjects all noted, their daily routines have changed to varying degrees as a result of their transitions from military life to student life. Rumann and Hamrick (2010) identify four major themes as part of the soldier-to-student transition, including role incongruities, changes in maturity, changes in relationships, and identity renegotiation. For example, Matt, Mike, and Kyle all indicated that they have matured by incorporating the routines of the military into their lives as students. This development reflects the findings of Rumann and Hamrick, who found that veteran students have "consistently clearer perspectives and increased goal commitment" as compared to their non-veteran peers (p. 141). Matt explained the reasoning behind this behavior:

I would say that my routine is pretty structured. I wake up, work out, go to class...eat meals at the same time, study at the same time... I would say all people benefit from the military. It teaches them how to structure their lives and be more focused, so [I'm] just trying to carry that into the civilian world.

As the participants' cases demonstrate, these themes can affect each other. For example, Jessica's identity renegotiation impacted her ability to relate to women following her discharge. Similarly, Kyle's identity renegotiation impacted his ability to relate to Americans following his return from Japan. Moreover, most of the respondents indicated that they had matured in such a way that impacted their relationships with non-veteran peers. Some of the participants in the present study coped with these difficulties much in the same way that Rumann and Hamrick's subjects tended to do: By actively seeking out the company of other veterans.

Beyond those examples, the subjects reported several ways in which their transitions had deeply altered their routines. In addition to the changes that Jessica and Tony reported regarding their sleep schedules, several of the respondents reported trouble adjusting to the discontinuity between the schedules of military life and the schedules of college life. Although I cannot responsibly make any inferences based on information beyond what the participants reported to me, I suspect, based on the literature, that the insomnia reported by some participants may be a symptom of a deeper emotional or psychological issue that the participants were reluctant to disclose. As Ostovary and Dapprich assert, "[v]eterans may choose to ignore or minimize PTSD/TBI symptoms, given the stigma associated with mental health disorders" (p. 65).

Strangely, there was not a clear consensus among the respondents regarding whether military life was more structured or less structured than college life. For example, Tony and Kyle stated that the routines were somewhat similar, with the principal difference being that military personnel, unlike students, can be transferred to another country at a day's notice. In contrast, Juan, Mike, and Jessica reported a

significant difference between the structure of military life, in which “you don’t go anywhere without being told very formally,” and student life, in which veteran students must become “used to having to regulate [themselves].”

Moving Forward

After examining the type, context, and impact of a transition, the next step in the transition process is for the person in transition to assess his or her *situation*, analyze his or her personal assets and liabilities (*self*), identify sources of assistance (*support*), and plan action (*strategies*). I described the subjects’ responses within the context of Schlossberg’s 4S System in Chapter 4. The trends I identified within each of the themes partially reflect DiRamio and Jarvis’ (2011c) finding that veteran students’ 4S systems most often center around finances, health issues, family background, skills or abilities, and prior schooling. Although none of the participants in the present study went into a great deal of detail discussing financial matters, they did often discuss health issues such as back injuries and psychological trauma, family matters such as the challenges associated with maintaining relationships with family members, and abilities such as the global awareness the veterans gained by serving abroad.

After a transitioning individual has evaluated his or her own situation, self, support, and strategies, the transition continues. As Anderson and colleagues write, “A transition has no end point; rather, a transition is a process over time that includes phases of assimilation and continuous appraisal as people move in, through, and out of it” (p. 59). As the balance of an individual’s assets and liabilities changes over time, it may become easier to assimilate the new identity (in this case, student) that the individual has gained as a result of the transition.

Suggestions for Further Research

Although Schlossberg's Transition Theory is the primary theoretical foundation for this study, it is also worth noting that the work of Elisa S. Abes, Susan R. Jones, and Marylu K. McEwen (2007) on the role of students' meaning-making capacities in the construction of multiple identities may be useful in informing further studies on veteran-students, given veteran-students' inherent dual identities. Rumann and Hamrick (2010) do briefly apply Abes and colleagues' work on meaning-making and multiple identities to the transition experiences of student-veterans, but more research is warranted in this area.

Moreover, as already stated, there is very little research that focuses on the transitions of specific subpopulations of veteran students, such as women veterans, disabled veterans, and others. For the present study, I was able to find only one female respondent and no visibly disabled respondents—although some respondents did note stress symptoms that may be associated with PTSD. Given the strategic, cultural, and technological changes that have resulted in massive increases of these populations in recent years, further examination of these types of students would prove highly useful.

Future researchers could also conduct further qualitative and even correlational studies that investigate the ways in which soldier-to-student transitions are influenced by any of the variables in the personal background questionnaire (see Appendix C). Demographic factors like age, race, and socioeconomic status, as well as factors related to individuals' military experiences (length and locations of deployments, for example), may all influence veteran student transitions. For example, as Juan noted about his experience as a first-generation student and a veteran:

Growing up the way I grew up, no one went to college...So when I joined the military, it was everything, first time, me seeing a lot. That helped me

in college...I think my experience gave me a better perspective on life and the things we learn in the classroom.

Implications for Institutions of Higher Education

Student affairs professionals who work with veterans in transition should have three goals in mind: 1) to help the veteran students explore their transition by providing them with nonbiased relationships; 2) to help the veteran students understand their coping resources by providing them with new perspectives; and 3) to help the veteran students cope with the transition process by influencing action or inaction. The following are three recommendations based on the findings that meet those criteria.

By far, the strongest trend that emerged from the interviews was the subjects' feelings regarding—and consequent challenges connecting with—their non-veteran peers. Tinto (1993) argues that students are far more likely to achieve academic success if they are able to become involved on campus with students outside their own immediate social group. The findings in the present study suggest that the subjects had some difficulty making such connections with non-veteran students. Indeed, the greatest source of frustration reported by the subjects was not faculty or staff, but their fellow students. In order to help veteran-students move beyond these barriers that they construct for themselves (i.e., “I refuse to talk to non-veteran students because they’re immature and ignorant”) institutions of higher education must find ways to integrate veteran students into the broader campus community. DiRamio and Jarvis (2011c) suggest that institutions can achieve this integration through strategies that can be academic, such as inviting veteran-students to speak at sponsored colloquia, or social, such as by having veteran-student organizations partner with other student organizations in support of a

mutual cause. These and other opportunities for integration are crucial components of the soldier-to-student transition.

Other challenges that the subjects reported involved issues such as trouble navigating what Matt referred to as the “spiraling bureaucracy” of services provided by the college, as well as a perceived lack of accountability among university faculty and administrators. As several scholars emphasize (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011b; Rumann & Hamrick, 2009; Chitty, 2008), the comprehensiveness of services provided by campus veterans’ offices can greatly influence the transition from soldier to student. However, the institution that served as the site of the present study already has an excellent veterans’ office that has even contributed to the institution’s status as member of *G.I. Jobs’* list of the nation’s most veteran-friendly campuses. Therefore, the problem may lie not in the array of services and programs provided by the office, but in the manner in which the office communicates with veteran students regarding the existence of those programs and services. Given the fact that only one of the six respondents reported being aware of any of the institution’s many outreach and support programs for veterans, perhaps the issue is that the institution (and its veterans’ office) is not effectively communicating information regarding opportunities for transition assistance. The veteran’s office does send out a monthly e-newsletter to all of the institution’s veteran students, but there may be a limited number of recipients who actually read the newsletters before immediately deleting them from their inboxes. Posting announcements through other channels, such as popular social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, may prove more effective with today’s veteran students.

One concern voiced by Juan was that as he approaches graduation, he does not feel that potential employers understand how his military experiences translate to civilian careers. DiRamio and Jarvis (2011c) argue that that this is a common problem that institutions can approach by ensuring that veterans integrate with the broader campus community and by encouraging veteran students to seek out help at campus career services offices. The authors assert that only through proper academic, social, and career integration can veteran students reformulate their goals and commitments, a necessary step of the transition process.

The final recommendation of the present study is rooted in DiRamio and Spires' (2009) finding that online distance-learning programs are popular among veteran students, and particularly among those veteran students with disabilities that serve as obstacles to regular class attendance. For the subjects in the present study, the issue was not so much physical obstacles as it was priorities; several of the subjects had spouses, children, or full-time jobs, all of which make distance-learning all the more attractive. Thus, it would be wise for institutions of higher education that wish to become more veteran-friendly to offer more online courses and online programs.

Lessons Learned

Conducting the present study afforded me the opportunity to gain an insight into the experiences of perhaps one of the most understood student subpopulations: Veteran-students. If there is anything I learned from the interviews, it is that although today's veteran-students may feel more supported than previous generations of veteran-students did, they continue to feel misunderstood. This perception of being misunderstood by peers and university staff members alike can impose a kind of loneliness on the veteran-

students, which can inhibit their ability to successfully transition from soldier to student. Aside from that, the transitions of veteran-students vary wildly. Some veteran-students, such as Mike, require almost no role-dependent support to ease their transition from the military because, as Mike suggested, the nature of their service branch (in Mike's case, the Air Force National Guard) is such that have plenty of time to maintain the social relationships and other resources enjoyed by civilians. On the other hand, some veteran-students, such as Kyle, return from long deployments in which they become embedded in foreign cultures—so much so that they must cope with culture shock upon their return. This, of course, is to say nothing of the thousands of combat veterans who come to campus with their own special emotional and psychological concerns—and may be unwilling to discuss these concerns with anyone. Moreover, the growing number of women veterans and disabled veterans enrolling in institutions of higher education presents its own complications for those institutions. As Jessica's case demonstrated, for example, some women veterans face peculiar issues regarding social relationships and gender identity, which are likely linked to the transition out of the male-dominated culture of the military.

It has become clear to me that in order for military veterans to succeed in campus settings, it is not necessary that they all seek counseling or participate in local chapters of Student Veterans of America. Indeed, most participants in the present study showed relatively high levels of self-efficacy despite the fact that most participants did not use any of the sources of support the university made available to veterans. This fact underscores the point that college and university personnel should not automatically assume that all veteran-students are somehow “damaged.” Rather, it should serve as a

reminder that all veteran-students should be assessed as individuals with unique experiences. Though veteran-students' transition experiences share some similarities with one another, the reality is that veteran-students are an extremely heterogeneous group—and they deserve to be treated as such.

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Appendix A

Letter for Recruitment of Subjects

Dear Veteran-Student,

I am a student in [university's] Master of Education program in Higher Education. For my thesis, I am seeking out veteran-students here at [university] who would be interested in participating in a study designed to better understand veteran-students' experiences from their perspectives and the meanings they make of their transition experiences from deployment to student life, in order to gain an insight into the special needs that veteran-students have and the support that they require in order to be successful in their higher education.

The only requirements for eligibility to participate in the study are that you are currently a [university] student and are also a military veteran who has served abroad. Your participation in this research study is completely voluntary. If you want to participate, please contact me to schedule a meeting. In the meeting, I shall first determine if you are eligible for the study. Next, I shall give you a brief questionnaire consisting of open-ended questions about your personal and military background. This questionnaire should take no longer than 30 minutes for you to complete. Next, I shall interview you. The interview will be conducted face-to-face, one-on-one, and in a private office setting. The interview will last about an hour and will be digitally audio-recorded. In the interview, I shall ask you questions about your transition from deployment to student life.

Although the risks of the study are minimal, you may experience emotional distress as you recall potentially painful memories. If this happens, you may stop the interview at any time. I will refer you to the university counseling center if necessary. The findings of this study may contribute to your university's knowledge of the needs of veterans, which could benefit you personally as a veteran-student. In addition, you may experience relief as a result of having the opportunity to discuss—and possibly vent about—your experiences to an impartial observer who does not know you on a personal basis.

Please be aware that your privacy and confidentiality are of the utmost importance. To protect you, the student researcher will strip all personal identifiers and use pseudonyms in place of your real name. Only the researchers will have access to subjects' original names. No data will be discussed with non-researchers. The raw data will be secured in a locked location. All data will be destroyed and erased at the conclusion of the study.

If you are interested in participating, please respond to this email or call me at [phone number].

Thanks,

Vincent Schiavone

Appendix B

Phone Call Script for Recruitment of Subjects

Subject: Hello?

Researcher: Hi, my name's Vince Schiavone. I'm a student in the Higher Education Master's program here at [university], and I was calling to see if you would be interested in participating in a study I'm conducting for my thesis on the transitions of veterans from deployment to student life. I'm seeking out military veterans who have served abroad and are now students at [university]. Your participation would consist of a brief questionnaire and a one-hour, face-to-face, one-on-one interview in a private setting on campus. Is this something you'd be interested in?

Subject: Sure.

Researcher: Great! Let's set up a time to meet. When we meet, we can go over your consent form. At that time, I'll explain it to you and make sure you understand. I'll also offer you time to take the form home and think about it. If you choose to sign the form that day, then I'll hand you a brief questionnaire that should take about 30 minutes for you to fill out. When you're done with the questionnaire, you can give it to me and we can begin the interview. However, if you choose to take the consent form home, we will re-schedule the interview for another time.

Subject: Okay, let's meet at [date and time].

Researcher: Sounds good. See you then.

Appendix C

Personal Background Questionnaire

*Subjects receiving this questionnaire immediately after signing consent forms.

What is your age?

What is your gender?

Do you currently reside on campus or off campus?

If you live off campus, do you currently reside with your parents?

Does your immediate or extended family have a tradition of military service?

What is your immediate family's total household income?

On a scale of 1 to 10, where 1 is very poor and 10 is very wealthy, how would you characterize your family's socioeconomic status?

Was factors contributed to your decision to enlist in the military?

What is your academic major/program of study?

Did you change your major following your return from deployment?

What is your affiliation (Army Reserve, Army National Guard, Marine Corps Reserve, etc.)?

Where were you deployed?

How long was your deployment?

What was your military occupational specialty (MOS)?

Did you go from college to deployment back to college, or simply from deployment to college?

Were/are you in ROTC?

If so, for what reasons did you enroll in ROTC? In what ways has participating in ROTC helped you?

What financial challenges have you encountered as a result of your status as a student-veteran?

How have you utilized the Military Service Center on campus?

Has the Military Service Center been helpful in satisfying your needs?

If you were deployed while in college, did you receive a tuition refund for the semester in which you were deployed?

Are you aware of any outreach or support programs at UT that might be beneficial to returning veterans?

Have you utilized any of those outreach programs at UT?

Have any physical concerns (injuries, etc.) made it more difficult to make the transition to student life?

Have any mental concerns (psychological, emotional, etc.) made it more difficult to make the transition to student life?

Appendix D

In-Person Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your transition from deployment to student life. What challenges have you faced? What adjustments have you had to make?
2. Do you feel any emotional stress or tension as a result of your transition from deployment to student life? How does it affect you on campus?
3. How would you compare the routines of military and academic life?
4. What outcomes do you feel you gained from military service? How do you feel these have been assets to you as a student? (If subjects are unsure of meaning of “outcomes,” researcher will offer examples such as maturity, perspective, etc.)
5. How do you feel you have developed relative to your non-veteran peers? (If subjects are unsure of meaning of “developed” in this context, researcher will offer examples such as maturity and perspective.)
6. What challenges have you encountered with resuming or initiating social relationships since your return?
7. How would you compare the way you approach problems as a student to the way you approached problems as a soldier?
8. Has serving in a foreign land impacted your feelings about people different from yourself? Has it impacted how you think of your own identity? Has it impacted how you think of your own culture?
9. What assumptions do you think other people (friends, acquaintances, strangers, other veterans) make about you when they see you in your uniform or find out you are a veteran?
10. How do you feel other people treat you (friends, acquaintances, strangers, other veterans) based on their perception of you as a veteran?