ABSTRACT

Title of Document: PERSPECTIVES OF VETERANS IN HIGHER
                      EDUCATION: EXPLORING THE TERM
                      "STUDENT VETERAN" AND THE
                      IDENTITY SHIFTS BETWEEN MILITRAY
                      AND COLLEGE

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Given changes in the G.I Bill, warfare, and higher education, post 9/11 veterans are a unique and expanding college student population. The purpose of this narrative inquiry study was to better understand how post 9/11 student veterans perceive and identify with the term "student veteran." The findings suggest that "student veteran" is more than a label and shares some qualities of a social identity. The participants wanted to be treated as "regular students," but also valued what the term "student veteran" signifies including a unique sociohistorical, cultural, and personal context and history that framed their academic experience. Participants described the term as a way to uphold military culture amidst the more ambiguous college culture. Participants felt the term carries imposed meanings and judgments different from that which participants themselves attribute to it. Findings suggest both theoretical and applied implications for expanded cultural competency around interacting with heterogeneous student veteran populations.

PERSPECTIVES OF VETERANS IN HIGHER EDUCATION: EXPLORING THE
TERM "STUDENT VETERAN" AND THE IDENTITY SHIFTS BETWEEN
MILITRAY AND COLLEGE

By

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The United States Marine Corps adage, *Semper Fi*, *"Always Faithful,"* is just one of many military mottos soldiers have embraced. Mottos like *Semper Fi*, along with *Not Self but Country* (U.S. Navy) and *De oppresso liber*, *"To free the oppressed"* (Army Special Forces), underscore that the military emphasizes group belonging, a collective solitary purpose, and sacrifice of self for others (Winslow, 1998). For some, this group emphasis may mean that in order for the individual to fit in, other parts of their identities are either denied or suppressed. For example, military culture stigmatizes the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Queer (LGBTQ) community (Burks, 2011), which may have compelled military members to have hidden or repressed their identities. Until the removal of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy in July 2011, military personnel were dishonorably discharged because of their LGBTQ identities. Transgender individuals are still not permitted in the military.

Unlike the military environment, which emphasizes group cohesion and assimilation, academic culture often challenges and encourages students to develop their individual identities. During college, students may go through developmental processes in which they explore their identities and make sense of their environment and relationship to the surrounding communities (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). With the growing complexity and intersections of culture and identity, balancing self-awareness and self-appreciation are beneficial to psychological wellbeing (Ford & Collins, 2012; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Realizing, embracing, and articulating one's intersecting identities and self-perception in relation to society are

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essential in order to reach self-actualization, be a productive member of society, and become a balanced individual (Brown, 1994; Rogers, 1951).

The end of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and changes in legislation in the G.I. Bill and Department of Defense (DoD) Tuition Assistance (TA) programs have led to an increase in the number of individuals taking advantage of their military educational benefits and the population of student veterans in higher education (O'Herrin, 2011). Among other benefits, the Post 9/11 G.I. Bill, originally the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, provides veterans who served on active duty for more than ninety days after September 10, 2001 with educational benefits if attending academic or training programs at accredited degree or non-degree granting institutions. The Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) administers G.I. Bill funding. The DoD administers the DoD TA benefits that similarly provide educational benefits to veterans.

Post 9/11 veterans are different from other veterans because of the changes in the G.I Bill and the changes in the military and academic cultures. Scholarly literature on the experiences of veterans in higher education has grown with the increase of the student veteran population, but more research that examines identity development and its relationship to students' experiences is necessary. In 2011, more than half a million veterans enrolled in classes (Sander, 2012). According to a survey of 690 institutions, an average of about 453 active-duty military students and 370 veteran students enrolled at each campus in 2012, an increase from 201 active-duty military students and 156 veteran students in 2009 (McBain, Kim, Cook, & Snead, 2012).

Student veterans represent a growing type of diversity on our campuses, demanding unique consideration, research, and action. According to a study by DiRamio, Ackerman, and Mitchell (2008), research suggests that there is "a need for a comprehensive and holistic system for assisting veterans" (p. 92). "Student veterans must adjust not only to the civilian world, but also the very unique world of higher education" (Cook Francis & Kraus, 2012, p.14). Jackson and Sheehan (2005) document the importance of college counseling services in support of student veterans' psychological well-being. Further, student veterans often feel that they are not understood or supported in their college environment (Cook & Kim, 2009).

While research has focused on the transition of student veterans (e.g., DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011b; 2011c; Moon & Schma, 2011; Zinger & Cohen, 2010), limited work applies identity development theory to understanding the transition and overall experiences of student veterans. Higher education serves as a vessel for growth, and as such has a responsibility to develop an environment and provide the resources, including personnel, to better support students. There is a need for identity-focused research on the developmental process of veterans in higher education to better facilitate their transition and success, leading to more effective counseling services, programing, and an overall supportive and knowledgeable campus environment.

As veterans become a growing population of the college student body, there is a need to continue to better understand and serve this population. Literature states the uniqueness of this population of veterans as compared to previous generations of veterans and the need to update existing military literature (e.g., DiRamio & Jarvis,

2011a; 2011b; 2011c; 2011d; Zinger & Cohen, 2010). Post 9/11 veterans are unique given the changes in the G.I Bill, nature of warfare, changes and purpose of the workforce, changes in academia, and reasons for pursuing higher education. Thus, the purpose of this thesis is to better understand developmental process and college experience of Post 9/11 student veterans by exploring how a group of students perceives and identifies with the term "student veteran." Literature uses the term "student veteran" to label someone in higher education with current or previous military experience (O'Herrin, 2011). However, this literature does not describe whether or how this term is claimed, rejected, understood, or internalized by the individuals themselves. While saliency of the veteran and student identities seems logical, not everyone may embrace said identities. In some ways, this label is placed or ascribed onto individuals without their input or understanding of the meaning or intentionality of the term.

This constructivist narrative inquiry defines "student veteran" as any individual with current or prior active duty or reserve status in any United States military branch with access to G.I. Bill or Department of Defense Tuition Assistance benefits who is currently a student. The general, traditional, or average student population is defined as being between the ages of 18-24, living on campus, attending college full-time and likely entering college directly out of high school (e.g., Bean & Metzner, 1985; Dill & Henley, 1998). Veterans are usually nontraditional students, typically older due to their time in military service, with experiences and training beyond that of the average college student (O'Herrin, 2011). Therefore, new research

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is required to understand their unique experiences and identity development process in higher education.

Identity Development and College for Veterans

Within the student affairs literature, "*identity* is commonly understood as one's personally held beliefs about the self in relation to social groups (e.g., race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation) and the ways one expresses that relationship" (Torres, Jones, & Renn, 2009, p. 577). For some students, college is the first of many experiences where others challenge their identities and they are exposed to individuals of different races, ethnicities, religions, or sexual orientations. Furthermore, it is a time where students are exploring their own identities and learning to balance their needs with the needs of others (Evans et al., 2010). In a sense, college is an incubator in which students are faced with clashing concepts, requiring them to make sense of their environment and explore their own identities in the process.

For veterans, this process may be more difficult and two-fold. The military culture is such that it has standardized values and expectations that each member must adhere to in order to be part of the group. Academic cultures, especially large state institutions, often provide a greater array of values and expectations from which a student can select and choose to embrace. It is similar to processing the world from a dualistic to relativistic way of thinking (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011a). Perry (1981) defines dualistic thinking as seeing the world as having absolutes; things are either right or wrong and do not need evidence. Relativistic thinking takes context and varying perspectives in to account (Evans et al., 2010). This may be particularly

difficult for veterans because of the change from an environment that is comparatively hyper-structured and tightly regulated to one with multiple and often conflicting values (Durdella & Kim, 2012). Additionally personal identity may come second to that of the group or be hidden to fit the military culture, whereas academia often serves as an environment meant for identity exploration.

In addition to new experiences with exploring their identities in higher education, especially as compared to their experiences in the military, there are new expectations that come with being in higher education. Preconceived notions of what it means to be a veteran can frame interactions, aspirations, and experiences, which may influence their identity development. Students who are veterans may be subject to certain expectations within their college environment (e.g., DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011a; 2011b; 2011c; 2011d). Thus, when entering academia, veterans, may experience negotiating their identities based on external perceptions of who they are, what they are capable of, and what their life experience has been.

While it may appear similar in some ways to the experiences of others from minority groups, veterans encounter a unique process of simultaneously confronting a new environment, navigating how others see them, and learning a new institutional culture. The way in which they embark on this process may influence their academic experience and developmental process. Student veterans may find their identities challenged when what they know does not seem to fit their new college environment. "While [student veteran] leaders may have been extremely competent in their military role, they arrived to a campus very unfamiliar with the culture of higher education" (Cook Francis & Kraus, 2012). As Veterans in Higher Education (2011) explains,

"applying theories of identity development is helpful for understanding the emerging population of students with military experiences. Student veterans who have served in this most recent decade of conflict are relatively a new phenomenon on college campuses" (p. 65). Understanding how students with military experience build their identities as students and reconcile or experience a lack of alignment of their student identity with their military experience, offers an opportunity to conceive of better ways for higher education to serve this emerging population.

Problem Statement

Veterans' transitions to college is different from traditional college students (e.g., Cook Francis & Kraus, 2012; DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011b; 2011c; 2011d), due in part to the cultural differences between the military and academia. Part of the transition involves developing a new identity as a student in higher education. Identity development is complex, and the college experience often enables the process. In contrast, "the military environment expects that the individual identity becomes secondary to the identity of the group" (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011a, p. 53). College is a time during which students may explore identities and learn to navigate them in relation to other people and the environment. For veterans, this process encompasses a balance of having their preexisting military identity challenged by a new environment, as well as having the encouragement and space to explore other parts of their identities.

On average, 823 active-duty and veteran students are enrolled at a given institution (McBain, Kim, Cook, & Snead, 2012). According to what we know about veterans and their transitions to higher education, there is an interaction between

military and academic culture as it relates to the transitional process. Cook Francis and Kraus (2012) state that a veteran's status is, in a sense, demoted upon arrival to campus because she/he transitions from an intense job with major responsibilities, to being a freshman and/or work-study student and thus "[resents] being treated like any other student" (p. 12). This study therefore assumes there is an interaction between the student and veteran identities and seeks to encourage understanding of what that interaction looks like in students' lived experiences. Schlossberg's theory of transition offers insight into the actual transition process and how to support individuals in transition (Evans et al., 2010); however, this study does not focuses on the transition itself or the transition process. Rather, this work emphasizes the experiences of veterans as they transition in relation to their identity development. Specifically, this study explores how individuals understand and experience the relationship between their student and veteran identities, and how those experiences and understandings relate to their developmental process.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this research is to gain a better understanding of the experiences of students who are veterans and the values, expectations, attitudes, and behaviors related to the intersection of their student and veteran identities after leaving the military. This study provides insight into participants' student and veteran identities and how they relate to participants' development. I give voice to participants' identity development process and its relationship to their college experiences through narrative. Specifically, I use semi-structured interviews with four

participants, who are veterans enrolled as full time students, to address the following

questions:

1.) What does the term "student veteran" mean to these students?

2.) What values, roles, expectations, and attitudes do they associate with the term "student veteran"?

Significance of the Study

Literature on the identity development of veterans in college is limited.

Existing literature calls for researchers to apply identity development theory to

student veterans as a means to better understand this unique subgroup of the student

body (e.g., Cook Francis & Kraus, 2012; DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008;

DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011a). This study responds to this call, offering insight on how

student veterans perceive their college experiences and identity. Additionally

literature describes the uniqueness of post 9/11 veterans and the need for research on

this particular group (e.g., DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011a; 2011b; 2011c; 2011d; Zinger &

Cohen, 2010).

Further, this study contributes to scholarly diversity conversations in the fields

of psychology, student affairs, and higher education. Findings help extend theories

and literature in identity development, student development, and veteran affairs. In

addition, this study facilitates the direct and indirect exploration of the developmental

process of student veterans. This exploration hopefully facilitates understanding and

better support of students through programming and the therapeutic process.

The findings of this study are valuable to several communities. Institutions

need continuous education and program development to best serve student veterans

(McBain, Kim, Cook, & Snead, 2012). Given the possible lack of support in the

military around mental health and well-being, it is essential to provide this support in higher education, especially for those students that may be struggling with identity issues they were unable to explore previously, such as race, sexuality or gender. This study aimed to explore identity development in general, particularly as it relates to the college experience. This may provide information helpful to guide college counseling services to better support this growing population of students and help professionals adhere to CAS standards. Counselors can support students with military experience by helping them process their feelings; and administrators can work with the campus communities to develop a more veteran-friendly, knowledgeable, and inclusive campuses.

We must continue to gain a better understanding of the transition process of veterans, what services institutions can and need to provide, reaction to and engagement of veterans in support services, and effects of changes in policy to both institutions and students. In addition, changes in legislation are beginning to make stipulations for institutions accepting G.I. Bill and DoD TA funding. For example, President Obama issued an executive order, *Establishing Principles of Excellence for Educational Institutions Serving Service Members, Veterans, Spouses, and Other Family Members*, on April 27, 2012. This policy calls for policies to protect veterans, which includes holding institutions accountable for student success.

For these reasons and others, it is in the best interest of universities to continue to make efforts to understand the growing and intricate student veteran population, and continuously develop and improve support resources. Civilians would benefit from understanding military culture, "non-veteran students and administrators

must cultivate their understanding of the veteran community" (Cook Francis & Kraus, 2012). This study addressed that need by providing insight and suggestions through the voice of the student veterans interviewed, which institutions may then use to adjust their supportive efforts.

Finally, this study is potentially valuable to anyone in a position of working with student veterans. Information from this study may serve as groundwork for developing and improving programming and services for student veterans, as well as further evolving student development and psychological models for understanding student veterans. It provides particularly helpful insight to counselors as they help student veterans in their transitional and developmental processes. Understanding how student veterans make meaning of their identities after a shift in culture may facilitate the development of programing and counseling tools to support their transition to higher education.

Summary and Conclusion

This chapter identified the gaps in the literature and the need for further research on the experiences and developmental process of students who are veterans. As the veteran population in higher education grows, the need for institutions to better understand and serve these students is important. This research sheds light on the experiences of student veterans, particularly related to their identity development. Student veterans face unique needs as compared to the traditional student population. The shift in culture from military to academia creates challenges related to academics, translating military skills, and identity development. The majority of existing literature focuses on the transition of student veterans but not on their identity

development. This research aimed to contribute to this gap in literature. This study focused specifically on the interaction between the veteran and student identities through the lived experiences of individuals. In the following sections, Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive literature review and the conceptual framework that guides this study. Chapter 3 presents the methodology for the research. Chapter 4 will present the findings thematically providing examples from the participants. Finally, Chapter 5 will provide the discussion and implications of the findings and offer suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter provides a literature review and explanation of the study's conceptual framework. It is divided into four main sections: military and academic culture, experiences of student veterans, student veterans and identity development, and the conceptual framework. To lay the foundation, I begin by reviewing literature on military and academic environments to describe the differences between these contexts as they relate to culture and identity. I then transition into a discussion exploring existing research on the experiences of student veterans, which emphasizes topics regarding transition, barriers, and retention. In the second half of the chapter, I review the limited research on the identity development of student veterans, particularly post 9/11 veterans. Finally, I provide a foundation for understanding how the interaction of identities influences identity development and the college experience of student veterans. This chapter closes with an explanation of the conceptual framework guiding this work, including The Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (RMMDI) and an intersectionality lens.

Military Culture and Academic Culture

A foundational understanding of military culture provides a basis from which to understand differences as compared to colleges and universities. The military is known for its rigorous, structured, hierarchical, sexist, gendered, and homophobic culture (e.g., Black, et al., 2007; Burks, 2011; Durdella & Kim, 2012; Zinger & Cohen, 2010). It is an environment where the need and expectations of the group are placed before one's own (Baechtold & Sawal, 2009; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010; Winslow, 1998). This fosters a group identity and draws focus away from individual

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identities. Due to socialization within the military, not only does individual identity become less salient, but the military also influences a person's values (Gade & Wilkins, 2012). The way in which a person understands herself/himself and her/his values is highly influenced by and intertwined with the expectations and values of the military. This group identity is fostered through the everyday practices of the military that require and promote camaraderie and push emotional, psychological, and physical limits. For example, Herbert (1998) noted that "the process of basic training is one of depersonalization and deindividuation in which the military, in the form of drill sergeants, must strip the individual of all previous self-definition" (p. 9). This body of literature illustrates the way in which the military influence a person's identity, including attitudes and behaviors. However, it does not address how this may or may not translate to different contexts for individuals once they leave the military.

In contrast, scholars suggest the college experience facilitates opportunities for student self-discovery through academic, professional, and personal growth because of the unique circumstances and stressors inherent in the campus environment (Kern & Shores, 2009). For some students, college may be the first time where their preconceived notions are questioned and challenged. With higher education's goal of personal change and growth comes a need for self-awareness, self-reflection, and processing of emotions and thoughts in order to gain a better understanding of oneself and the world (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007; Brown, 1994; Marcia, 1966; Rogers, 1951).

These goals of self-awareness and critical engagement with the world are contrary to the goals of the military in many ways. Given that "academia requires self-regulation and is less prescriptive than the military, where making decisions is based on rules and defined by an external authority" (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011a, p. 56), veterans must readjust their expectations in college contexts, navigating situations with limited external guidance. Some veterans may struggle to adapt to the college environment and may have difficulty developing effective study skills, navigating resources, and taking courses which they may have not practiced in years and may require remedial assistance. This may be particularly difficult for these students because admitting the need for help is stigmatized as a sign of weakness in the military (Black, et al., 2007; Brown, Creel, Engel, Herrell, & Hoge, 2011; Warner et al., 2011).

In addition, while all students are bombarded with various external factors that further affect their well-being, student veterans may experience these factors differently. For example, societal changes and world issues such as global crises, economic changes, and natural catastrophes influence students' personal and psychological well-being (Kern & Shores, 2009). However, the possible exposure to such world issues and global crises while in the military may provide a student veteran with a perspective that is distinctive from the general student population, making relatability more difficult. This literature presents the possible challenges and interactions between student and veteran identities from an anecdotal or conceptual perspective, but there is limited empirical work which actually examines the interaction between these identities.

In the military, an individual may find it difficult to find support or opportunity for self-exploration given military laws and codes of conduct. For example, given military culture, the intersection of gender and sexual orientation may be particularly salient. Psychologists in the military must adhere to stipulations from both America Psychological Association (APA) and the Department of Defense (DOD). While APA supports helping clients through any process, the DOD prohibits counseling in the military related to LGBT issues (Jeffrey, Rankin, & Jeffrey, 1992). In contrast, according to Rentz (2011) and the CAS Standards (2009), the purpose of Counseling Services in higher education is to support personal, professional, and academic growth of students, particularly through three roles: developmental, preventative, and consultative. Therefore, once in academia, an individual is more likely not only to be in an environment that encourages identity exploration, but also an environment that supports exploration through specific resources such as counseling. Access to support may influence an individual's identity development process and college experience (Evans et al., 2010).

Experiences of Student Veterans - What We Know

The existing research on veterans who are enrolled as students at colleges and universities is valuable in that it exposes the struggles, needs, benefits, and strengths of this student population for both the student and the institution (e.g., DiRamio, Akermana, & Mitchell, 2008; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011a; 2011b; 2011c; 2011d; Jackson & Sheehan, 2005; Runmann & Harick, 2010). Literature on student veterans provides a comprehensive overview of the transitional process and the ways in which institutions can facilitate the process. However, this focus on transition has not fully

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revealed the identity development process, self-perception, or how individuals reconcile their membership in two cultures, higher education and military.

The literature suggests that transitioning from the military to academia can present many challenges and be a culture shock. Student veterans are more likely to be first-generation, lower socio-economic status, older, and have families compared to traditional aged college students (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011b; 2011c). These factors, coupled with external factors challenging student veteran identities and military experience, may create a more complex transition, developmental process, and a unique college experience. For example, a student veteran may come across students and staff/faculty that do not support the military or war and thus minimize or stigmatize the student veteran's experience because of their association to the military entity, which the student and/or staff/faculty do not support. Hence, the student may feel personally attacked and forced to question how her/his military identity will fit with a non-military-friendly environment (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011a; 2011b; 2011c; 2011d). "Student veterans may experience a dramatic shift of culture expectations for capital and social class worldviews…. [The] military values strategic thinking where academia values study skills to succeed and social capital is most valued by students" (Wurster, Rinaldi, Woods & Liu, 2013, p. 132). Therefore, students must renegotiate what they value and prioritize, which links their self-perceived identities, roles, and expectations with what the new environment seems to support and promote.

Additionally, veterans find themselves trying to negotiate a new environment that is less structured and hierarchal; they must learn to translate to academia the skills they learned in the military, such as timeliness, structure, discipline, leadership,

and even understanding of authority. Cook Francis & Kraus (2012) found that "[student veterans saw] issues in black and white in an environment of gray and sought hierarchy and clear authority structures in a collegial and collaborative setting" (p. 13). Group-work may present struggles, as students work with classmates who lack organization and have less of a sense of urgency to complete tasks. It may be difficult to relate and interact with students in an environment where structure and timeliness is not necessarily normative (e.g., Durdella & Kim, 2012).

Further, skills such as leadership and mentoring are operationalized differently in the military (Cook Francis & Kraus, 2012). Given the hierarchal structure of the military, leadership may be closely linked to power and status, or more specifically military rank (Black, et al., 2007; Cook Francis & Kraus, 2012). "While their leadership skills may have been developed on the battlefield, the campus is a place where those skills can be honed for the leadership in the civilian world" (Cook Francis & Kraus, 2012, p. 14). College offers a variety of leadership opportunities through various campus and student groups; however, understanding the different power dynamics and structures in academia may be challenging depending how differently the institution functions from having a hierarchal and highly structured command. Upon understanding this leadership structure, student veterans can learn how to adapt their leadership skills such as organization, take charge attitude, and charisma to a college context.

Student veterans also face expectations and assumptions that university communities place on them. Some colleges and universities may expect these students to be leaders in their classrooms or assume leadership roles within executive

boards of student organizations (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011a; 2011b; 2011c; 2011d).

For some student veterans, this may be far from what they want. Some may be tired

of being placed in leadership roles, or they may want to focus on finishing their

diplomas and do not have time for extracurricular activities. Other student veterans

are frustrated when faced with the assumption that all veterans suffer from Post-

Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and require counseling (Zinger & Cohen, 2010).

Other members of campus communities may perceive that student veterans are self-

reliant and thus able to ask for what they need. Therefore, needs of student veterans

may go unrecognized and unmet (DiRamio, Ackerman & Mitchell, 2008).

Student veterans may encounter a sense of classism and judgment by their

peers (Hassan, Jackson, Lindsay, McCabe & Sanders, 2010; Wurster, Rinaldi, Woods

& Liu, 2013). For example, a student veteran may be exposed to students discussing

their contempt for war and be reprimanded under the assumption that she/he killed

people. Or a student veteran may be exposed to assumptions from wealthier peers

because of the "social class stigma surrounding veterans" (Wurster,K., Rinaldi,

Woods & Liu, 2013). Subsequently, student veterans may internalize the negativity

leading to depression and anxiety (Whiteman & Wadsworth, 2013; Wurster, Rinaldi,

Woods & Liu, 2013).

Assumptions about the effects of military service—both those perceived to be

negative and those that are positive—lead to presumptive beliefs and behaviors that

can interrupt students' experiences. For example, the assumption that all veterans

want to identify with their military experience may lead an instructor to probe a

student about her/his experience during class. In turn, the student may become

uncomfortable and dread attending class (DiRamio, Ackerman &Mitchell, 2008; Zinger & Cohen, 2010).

Being in an academic context may also require, expect, and value skills and experiences individuals' gather in the military differently, if at all. Many academic institutions do not offer credit for military experience. Therefore, while veterans may have knowledge and practice in a subject area, that experience may not translate into academic credit (Cook & Kim, 2009; DiRamio, Ackerman & Mitchell, 2008). Additionally, structure, independence, organization, and resourcefulness were emphasized in the military and honed in an environment that catered to and reinforced such skills (e.g., Black, et al., 2007; Durdella & Kim, 2012). Academia does not necessarily encourage such skills in the same manner; therefore transferring these skills to academia can be challenging and require reconceptualization (Durdella & Kim, 2012). Literature suggests the effects of this on the transition process of student veterans, but not as it relates to their understanding of self in their new academic context.

In addition to the shift in culture and possible assumptions faced by student veterans in academia, scholars have documented the individual challenges veterans face as they enter college, including academic challenges, mental health issues, and disability (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008; McBain, Kim, Cook, & Snead, 2012). In terms of academic skills, individuals may need to refresh basic math and writing skills and gain a better understanding of the expectations of higher education coursework after many years out of school. Individuals may not have practiced math and writing skills while in the military, which may leave them unprepared for the

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course content. Furthermore, they may be unaware of academic resources or unable to obtain services because of other responsibilities interfering with their access to campus resources. As a result, some student veterans are overwhelmed and drop classes when they first enroll (Zinger & Cohen, 2010).

Mental health challenges may affect a student veteran's ability to handle the stress of college and lead to maladaptive behaviors. According to a study by Hoge and colleagues (2004), approximately 12.5% of soldiers deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan have PTSD and only about 26% of soldiers with acute psychological distress receive mental health care (as cited in Zinger & Cohen, 2010). Students suffering from PTSD or other mental health issues may find the college setting, particularly a classroom, challenging (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). For example, a small classroom space full of students and with limited exits may trigger a response including fear and anxiety and the student may be unable to attend class. If she/he continues unable to be in that classroom then she/he would have to withdraw from the course to avoid a situation that triggers acute anxiety. A student veteran presenting with burst of anger in a classroom can be perceived as threatening, requiring forcible removal from class and potentially campus (Pellegrin, 2013). Such experiences may further alienate a student veteran. According to a study by Zinger & Cohen (2010), some veterans turn to drugs and alcohol to cope with their military experience. For a student, such behaviors could impair their ability to success academically as well as put them at risk for expulsion.

Student veterans may also have physical disabilities including hearing and visual impairments, back injuries, brain injuries, and loss of limbs, which may

negatively affect their academic success (Zinger & Cohen, 2010). Student veterans

with disabilities have different experiences and perspectives than traditional students

including, documentation used in military versus college, disclosing disability to

others, and seeking services. Some students may not know how to navigate academia

to report and receive accommodations for disabilities (Madaus, Miller & Vance,

2009). Additionally, women's mental health concerns related to combat situations and

subsequent needed support is a relatively new phenomenon (Baechtold & Sawal,

2009; Vance & Miller, 2009).

Student Veterans and Identity

Veteran Identity

Literature has explored the existence of various challenges and changes in

behavior and attitudes of veterans upon entering college; however, it is limited in

addressing these changes in terms of the student veterans' perception of identity. The

challenges student veterans face during their college experiences may influence their

identity development (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011a; 2011d; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010);

however, there is limited literature on the concept of a "veteran identity." Harada et

al. (2002) define the veteran identity as "Veterans' self-concept that derives from

his/her military experience within a socio-historical context." (p.117). They go on to

argue that race may alter the veteran identity due to socio-historical military realities.

For example, a White student veteran may have experienced the military differently

from a Black student veteran due to a history of segregation in the military, as well as

the potential for present oppression. These realities also intersect with other identities

such as class, considering many veterans have entered the military for financial

reasons or educational opportunities. Other scholars have discussed how being a woman in the military may affect their veteran experience (Baechtold & Sawal, 2009). In the context of student veterans, the connection to the military may be gendered and associated with class status. These scholars argue that other dimensions of identity such as race, class, gender, and/or sexuality influences an individual's veteran identity.

"Student Veteran"

The label "student veteran" may indicate an assumption that there is a monolithic experience of students with military experience. The use of this label, while true in its meaning that the individual is a student in higher education and does have a military background, fails to acknowledge that an individual may not identify with the term as either a whole or by its individual parts (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). An individual may choose to leave the military behind and not want it to be associated at all with her/his identity. Further, an individual may choose to identify or label as being "prior military" or "retired" and reserve the term "veteran" for those who have served in combat. For such an individual, labeling her/him a "veteran" may attach meaning related to combat, which may not be authentic for that person (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010. Such generalized labeling may inadvertently attach inappropriate meanings or definitions to a person's understanding of her or himself. Furthermore, clumping all students with military experience into one label obscures the fact that other identities may be at play, such as sexuality, gender, race, and ethnicity, which may influence the academic experience and identity development. For example, according to the Department of Defense (2007), women are not "easily

recognized as combatants and [there is a] tendency to diagnose women's mental health problems as depression or anxiety, rather than combat related."

Given their varied military experience and association with the military, this population of students may have a different understanding of what it means to be a student or a veteran and thus, a "student veteran." An individual's perception of her/his identities within the military may be different from how they understand their sense of self within academia. A study by Rumann & Hamrick (2010), found that student veterans struggle with renegotiating their identity and that "reconciling military and academic culture [was] a key part of identity re-negotiation" (p. 448-450). A participant in Zinger and Cohen's (2010) study discussed feeling a need to integrate two identities to form a new identity upon leaving the military. Therefore, how an individual understands her/his individual identities and the relationships between these identities as it relates to their self-perception may shift due to context. For example, while in the military, women redefine their gender in order to fit the masculine dominated environment (Herbert, 1998), but once back in society they must redefine themselves again. The respected male characteristics in military are not as valued in civilian society. Baechtold and Sawal (2009) note the unique needs of women veterans in understanding their identity as not only civilians, students, and veterans, but also as women. They state that the issue of gender is different for men because in society, men are often rewarded for portraying strong masculine traits. Therefore, a woman may struggle in her identity development as is relates to her gender and the intersection of that identity with her military and student identities.

Research has explored student veterans and attributed meanings to their experiences however, it is limited in exploring how veterans perceive the student veteran label or understand their role as students on campus. Additionally, much of this literature is based on anecdotal evidence or speculation. This study provides empirical evidence about student veterans and their identity development.

Student Veterans and Identity Development in Higher Education

Various student development theories focus on identity development. Below are a few that may serve as frames for explaining identity development among student veterans. Identity is based on a personal belief structure (Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Kegan, 1994). According to Chickering (1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993), during young adulthood, individuals develop their personal identities. Addressing these theories provides a foundation from which to better understand their identity development process.

Chickering's theory consists of seven vectors of development that build upon each other and contribute to the formation of identity, although progression is not linear for students. Students may go back and re-evaluate a vector, go through more than one vector at a time, and the vectors may interact. The vectors are: Developing Competence, Managing Emotions, Moving Through Autonomy Towards Interdependence, Developing Mature Interpersonal Relationships, Establishing Identity, Developing Purpose, and Developing Integrity (Evans et al., 2010). Successful developmental processes within the first four vectors leads to the fifth vector, Establishing Identity. Establishing identity and subsequently developing their purpose and integrity may be difficult for student veterans. For example, after leaving

the military, they may struggle to develop healthy and lasting intimate relationships with partners and friends (Whiteman & Barry, 2013; Zinger & Cohen, 2010), which may present challenges as students work through the third vector, Moving Through Autonomy Towards Independence. In the Establishing Identity vector, a student must become comfortable with multiple identities, including race, gender, and sexual orientation. Furthermore, students reject identities or labels assigned to them and invest in those that have meaning to them (Evans et al., 2010). Veterans may struggle with this process because upon entering the military, a "pre-assigned identity" valued within the military is given to members (Baechtold & Sawal, 2009). After leaving the military environment and entering higher education, individuals are faced with recreating their personal identities because the military identity they had established no longer is congruent within their context.

This process of renegotiating identity can be further understood through Marcia's Ego Identity Statuses Theory (1966). Exploration, referred to as *crisis*, involves questioning values and goals externally defined, seeking and exploring other options and opinions. Commitment is taking ownership of choices, goals, and values, and taking steps to achieve them. Upon facing this shift in identity, individuals are trying to make sense of who they are, their environment, what they have experienced and learned, and who they are in the context of their environment. Marcia's theory states that when an individual realizes there is an identity crisis to resolve and commits to an identity, then there is evidence of identity development.

Marcia (1966) describes four statuses. The first is Foreclosure (No Crisis/Commitment), in which an individual accepts values of authority figures

without question, and authorities guide their path. For student veterans, this may include entering the military where their military identity is pre-determined, and the highly structured and hierarchal nature of the environment limits one's ability to question. The second state is Moratorium (Crisis/No Commitment) in which individuals question parental values, but do not commit. For student veterans, this may be upon leaving the military and entering academia where the structure encourages questioning, but the individual is unsure and grappling with the shift in context and lack of authority. The third state is Identity Achievement (Crisis/Commitment) in which individuals rely on internal rather than external processes to construct their identity, make sense of their experiences, and choose their own paths. For student veterans, this may include making meaning of their military experiences and applying them in the context of academia and the civilian world. Furthermore, in this state, she/he is integrating their military, civilian, and student identities to develop their own identity not prescribed by the military, society, or academia. The fourth state is Diffusion (No Crisis/No Commitment) in which individuals lack concern for commitments and they conform. For student veterans, this perhaps could encompass being in college and adopting a military stance without experiencing anything that challenges an aspect of their identity.

Kegan's Theory of the Evolution of Consciousness (1994) and Baxter Magolda's Theory of Self-Authorship (2001) offer insight into meaning making. Kegan's theory involves moving through five progressively complex ways of knowing, a process that can be painful, given the need to change one's functioning in the world (Evans et al., 2010). Order 0 is described as the stage individuals are as

newborn infants. If they do not see or experience something, it does not exist according to them. By age two, children develop Order 1, in which they realize they can control their reflexes. Order 2 is described as being able to have more logical and organized thinking, the ability to classify people and things, and realizing self as separate from others. Order 3 involves cross-categorical thinking and individuals' ability to understand their feelings and internal process. Perception of and acceptance by others is crucial to individuals in this order. In Order 4, individuals take responsibility for their own authority and set their own values. Finally, in Order 5, an individual can see beyond himself or herself, others, and systems to see how they are all interconnected. This stage is not typically reached before age forty.

Most college students make meaning at Order 3 (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007). In college contexts, instructors often expect students to be critical thinkers and self-reflective, characteristics of Order 4 skills (Evans et al., 2010; p. 181). Military culture many not lend itself to honing skills like self-reflection, particularly given the emphasis towards group identity. It is possible that some student veterans may enter academia being in Order 2, which emphasizes rules directions, and logic all which are reinforced in the military. Therefore being in a classroom with an order 4 lens orientation may be particularly challenging.

Baxter Magolda's Theory of Self-Authorship also can add to understandings of veterans' identity development and consists of four phases: Following Formulas, Crossroads, Becoming the Author of One's Life, and Internal Foundational (Evans et al., 2010). In Following Formulas, an individual fails to see the relationships between their identities, and self-perception is closely related to contextual influences.

Individuals follow plans laid out by authorities and do what they are supposed to in order to be successful. Additionally, gaining approval is a critical part of relationship building. For veterans in this stage, they may understand themselves solely in terms of military identity and context, and do not realize the external influences on self-perception. Furthermore, this could be understood as the stage when an individual is taking on the military group identity and her/his personal identities are left aside. In Phase 2, Crossroads, individuals recognize tension between identities and the limitation of societal labels. Individuals discover the need to make new plans and also realize they are dissatisfied with how others define them. However, they hold on to formulaic views for fear of the reaction of others. For student veterans, this could be occurring when they leave the military and begin to experience challenges to their existing identity from their new environment. Individuals recognize how society and academia treats them because of their military status, but refrain from voicing their opinions or concerns. In Phase 3, Becoming the Author of One's life, individuals realize the interactions of identities and societal versus personal perceptions. People at this phase choose and defend their beliefs and present their identities consistently, no matter the environment or opposing viewpoints. Additionally, individuals are more careful to develop relationship that will support their development. For student veterans in this stage, they may be comfortable with their veteran identity in the classroom and speak out against preconceived notions or misrepresentations of student veterans. The 4th stage, Internal Foundations, is characterized by an individual's ability to be grounded and secure in her/his identities and beliefs while

recognizing and being open to ambiguity and change. External influences do not really affect individuals in this phase and they trust their own feelings.

In order to survive in dominant culture, or among the majority of society in terms of identity, individuals with conflicting multiple identities are forced to face the intersectionality of the identities and make meaning of the possible arising challenges (Evans et al., 2010). Student veterans may have militaristic, civilian, and student aspects of their identities that may be in conflict with each other, and they may consequently struggle to understand the intersection of these identities. Having fostered a military identity largely prescribed externally by the military, individuals enter academia needing to identify through internal factors, especially given the lack of external factors from the military. Baxter Magolda (2001), states that an individual must make meaning of what she/he has experienced, in this case, the military environment and perhaps war. The identity development comes with an individual's ability to move from external authorities to self-determined understanding and belief, from which she/he develops internal foundations (Evans, et al., 2010). Additionally, foundations may be revaluated and adjusted; the ability to integrate internal foundations with the external environment allows for a "sense of freedom to live their lives authentically" (Evans, 2010, p.187). Therefore, the ability for military, civilian, and student identities to coexist without dissonance implies the individual is progressing in their identity development process.

Conceptual Framework

Various articles state the usefulness in applying the Multiple Dimensions of Identity model (Jones & McEwen, 2000) or the Reconceptualized Model of Multiple

Dimensions of Identity (RMMDI) to understand the experiences of and better support

student veterans (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007), but have not yet used it in their

research (e.g., Baechtold, M., Sawal, D., 2009; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011a; Rumann &

Hamrick, 2010). The RMMDI takes a holistic approach to illustrating the complexity

through which identities are intertwined, describing individuals as a collection of

identities that cannot be viewed or understood in isolation (Abes, Jones, & McEwen,

2007). Intersectionality is a tool that comes out of Black and Chicana feminist

theories, which explore how the intersections of identity (race, class, gender,

sexuality, etc.), and forms of marginalization (racism, sexism, classism, homophobia,

etc.) shape people's experiences (e.g., Bowleg, 2008; Collins, 2000; Crenshaw,

1991). In this study, I used the RMMDI and intersectionality in order to conceptualize

and frame the research questions as well as the collection and analysis of data for this

study.

The RMMDI viewpoint is important because student veterans, or any

individuals for that matter, are never individuals of only one identity at a given time.

Identities consistently overlap whether we are aware of it or not (Abes, Jones, &

McEwen, 2007). A student veteran may have a variety of identities at play. For the

purposes of this study, at least three identities were viewed simultaneously: veteran,

civilian, and student. The RMMDI provides a visual representation of the ways in

which an individual's identities relate to each other and the saliency of her/his

identities to the individual's core (Appendix A). The core is found at the center of the

orbital diagram, and is defined as someone's personal identity that is made up of

attributes and characteristics and is less susceptible to external influence. It is the

center of who a person believes themselves to be. Other identities such as race,

gender, sexual orientation, and religion, revolve around the core on various orbitals.

The closer an identity is placed to the core, then the more significant or salient that

identity is to that individual. Additionally, the closer and identity is to another

identity, or the orbitals of identities intersect then the more those identities influence

each other.

This model assumes identity is fluid throughout space and time. Building on

the original MMDI designed by Jones and McEwen (2000), the RMMDI incorporates

the complexity by which an individual makes meaning of the contextual influences

and the negotiation of personally and societally constructed identities. In the

RMMDI, the shifting nature of identity is portrayed as a series of arrows, which

represent contextual influences. These influences pass through a filter, which lets out

to an orbital model of an individual's identities with the personal identity at the core.

The thickness of the filter implies the complexity of the meaning making in

relation to contextual influences experienced by the individual. Contextual influences

may include family background, cultures, and experiences. Complexity of meaning

making is the extent to which or level of cognitive processing in which an individual

analyzes external influences and makes decisions regarding the extent to which they

influence her/him. A thicker filter with smaller openings would imply a higher, more

complex meaning-making capacity, less influenced by external factors; whereas a

thinner filter with bigger holes represents less complexity or more susceptible to

external influences. Once an individual can visualize the contextual influences, they

can understand the levels at which they may affect each other or the individual and

can accept what she/he has control over, then the individual is ready to make meaning of her/his influence on her/his self-perception.

This model highlights the role that context plays in shaping identity, but the way in which identity is shaped depends on whether an individual has primarily external or internal meaning-making capacity. The context directly shapes the identity perception of an individual with external meaning-making capacity, whereas an individual with internal meaning- making capacity reshapes the context and decides what and how it will influence their identity and the relationships among their identities. However, it is not necessarily standard filter permeability; some contextual influences may pass through unchanged while others are shaped. What this model does not take into account is the extent to which identity may shape context and thus reshape identity, the relationship between inequality and identity development, and the interaction between self-perception and how the expectations of others are based on identity (Jones & Abes, 2013). Someone such as a faculty or staff member may presume that because the military is rigorous and structured, a veteran would therefore be a more productive and organized student. This perception then taints how that individual expects a student veteran to behave. Therefore, the student may feel pressure to behave the way they are expected, and/or the faculty/staff member is disappointed in the student for not demonstrating the expected characteristics. Due to the preconceived notions about military behavior, the staff/faculty member may fail to realize the unfairly assumed and expected characteristics of the student.

While this study focused specifically on the student and veteran identities of this population, drawing on concepts related to intersectionality allowed me to attend

to other intersections that may influence the individual's perception of her/his student and or veteran identity such as race, social class, and gender. Consistent with intersectional perspectives, I believe that identities are not additive, and that combinations of various identities are in and of themselves an experience (Bowleg, 2008) - that experiencing the world as a "student veteran" is a unique experience.

The intersectionality framework is explicit in how history and experience of oppression influences how someone views herself/himself or others and the complexities of intersecting identities and marginalization influencing or framing students' experiences. Intersectionality conceptually acknowledges group histories and the way in which they lead people to view themselves and others. Intersectionality "helps us understand the multidimensional ways people experience life-how people see themselves and how they are treated by others" (Dill, McLaughlin, & Nieves, 2007).

The individualistic approach of the RMMDI complements the shared experience lens of intersectionality. This combination of frameworks lends itself to framing and giving voice to the individual experiences of student veterans, but also questioning the existence on a collective identity experience. In this study, the RMMDI influences the research questions which aimed to gauge how student veterans identify and what that means for them. Additionally, interview questions facilitated understandings of the contextual influences student veterans face and how they are navigated. Participants were also asked to map out their identities on a RMMDI diagram during the interview, and were engaged in a conversation related to how and why they mapped their identities as they did. While analyzing the data, I

used the concepts of RMMDI to understand how student veterans are making meaning of their identities and experiences.

Summary and Conclusion

Existing literature suggests student veterans struggle in their transition to academia in ways different from other students. Most literature analyzed and discussed the struggles of veterans transitioning in terms of barriers, lack of support, environmental shifts, finances, and academics. Limited research analyzed and addressed the challenges veterans face in terms of identity when in their new academic context; yet, there have been multiple calls for research with this focus. The term "student veteran" has been readily used to define college students with previous or current military experience. However, little is understood about the ways in which individuals perceive, contextualize, and internalize the term.

Literature states that veterans struggle to negotiate their military identity with their academic identity, and their transition is different from other students (e.g., DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011a; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). Veterans may experience a sense of culture shock upon entering college. Academia encourages students to explore their identities and fosters an environment that stimulates ambiguity (e.g., Evans et al., 2010; Kern & Shores, 2009). On the contrary, military culture promotes group identity coupled with a hierarchal and structured environment (e.g., Baechtold & Sawal, 2009; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010; Wurster, Rinaldi, Woods & Liu ; Zinger & Cohen, 2010). This shift in thinking and how identities are understood in different contexts may be challenging for students to navigate.

Previous work also suggests student veterans struggle with not only the realization to or demand to explore their identities, but also challenges from the institution or others regarding their military identity and attitudes. They may struggle with varying and clashing values and anti-war perspectives, which may further influence the way in which veterans understand who they are post military, their role as students, and their psychological well-being. They may find it difficult to translate military skills to academia. Additionally, student veterans may struggle with academic challenges, mental health issues, and disabilities (e.g., Baechtold & Sawal, 2009; DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008; Madaus, Miller & Vance, 2009; Zinger & Cohen, 2010). These various aspects play a role in the way student veterans experience college and their identity development.

The Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (RMMDI) (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007), frames the research questions, data collection, and analysis of this study. The RMMDI illustrates that identities do not exist not in isolation but rather that individuals are a collection of identities that are intertwined and influenced by context. Additionally this three-dimensional model demonstrates how an individual's cognitive complexity and response to external influences affects how they understand themselves. Using this framework creates opportunities to visualize and contextualize how student veterans perceive their military and student identities and the ways in which they may or may not interact and influence college experiences. The intersectionality framework reminded me to keep in mind that the history of groups and the intersections of their identities can influence how individuals perceive themselves and others.

Understanding identity development, the college experience, and the role of identity in the college experience may better facilitate the support of the student veteran population through support services, counseling, and training of staff and faculty personnel. This study addresses some of the limitations of past research and bridges gaps by exploring the experiences and identity development of student veterans through narrative inquiry.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

This study aims to increase understandings the college experience and identity development of student veterans. Applying the Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (RMMDI) (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007), this study addressed the following questions of a group of students who are veterans: (1) What does the term "student veteran" mean to these students? (2) What values, roles, expectations, and attitudes do they associate with the term "student veteran"?

Through this chapter, I will describe the approach guiding this study. This chapter includes: (1) an overview and explanation of narrative inquiry, including concepts central to understanding this methodology; (2) who I am as a researcher, including a description of my background in relation to the topic of interest; (3) a discussion of data collection, data analysis, and data interpretation methods; (4) approaches to ensure credibility; (5) and the limitations of this work.

Characteristics of Qualitative Research

Qualitative work is guided by a constructivist worldview. A social constructivist worldview aims to comprehend multiple dimensions of identity by understanding the varying perspective of the participants. This epistemology recognizes that "knowledge is found within the individual" (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006, p. 18). In social constructivism, researchers understand that meaning is developed through people's interactions and is specific to individual context (Creswell, 2013). Constructivist epistemology recognizes social and historical backgrounds and aims to understand experiences directly from the perspective of the individual who had the experience.

This worldview in practice requires broad and open-ending questions to allow participants to construct their own meanings. Qualitative research utilizes methods that allow for open exploration of the experiences and backgrounds of individuals. As an exploratory study, qualitative methods were selected as a means to gather rich, detailed data to produce holistic and interpretive information based on each participant's experiences (Creswell, 2013) rather than quantitative methods. Qualitative methods are also appropriate given this study's focus on individual's perspectives, feelings, thoughts and experiences, and allows for modifying design and focus during research to understand new discoveries (Maxwell, 2005). In social constructivism, researchers recognize and acknowledge that they shape their interpretations of the research and the need to be transparent (Creswell, 2013). According to Denzin & Lincoln (1998), qualitative methods allow the researcher to position herself/himself in the research through notes, interviews, recordings, and conversations. In addition, qualitative methods facilitate and support the subjective, multidimensional, and multicultural aspects of the researcher, participants, and overall process (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). The research questions of this study aimed to understand the perspectives of individuals through their narrative. It explored their understanding of themselves and those around them allowing room for exploration.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative method, specifically focusing on gathering the stories of individuals, while researchers attempt to make meaning of the experiences shared. While the term student veteran is used throughout literature to define students with current or previous active military experience (O'Herrin, 2011),

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understandings of what the term means for students—the struggles, costs, strengths, and possibilities associated with the label—is limited. Narrative inquiry is an appropriate methodology to explore the multiple dimensions of identity of student veterans and intersection of student and veteran identities because it provides an opportunity for these students to share their experiences and perspectives. This form of inquiry focuses on the individual participants, and the researcher aims to make meaning of the stories and experiences shared.

Narrative inquiry is both the phenomenon being studied, in this case, student veterans making meaning of their identities; and it is a method of analyzing stories told (Creswell, 2013; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Researchers collect stories from individuals about their lived experiences and identities. Participants tell researchers their stories or co-construct the stories with the researcher (Creswell, 2013). Therefore, there can be a strong collaboration between the researcher and participant through their dialogue (Creswell, 2013).

The general procedure for using narrative inquiry consists of a study focused on a small selected group of individuals, concentrating on a specific topic, and gathering data through collecting their stories and the context of the stories (e.g. culture and history). Researchers then report individual experiences or a group of related experiences, organizing the stories thematically and ordering the meaning of those experiences. Additionally, the researcher actively involves the participants in the research through methods such as member checks (Creswell, 2013). In this study, for example, I followed up with participants after transcribing their interviews and a

preliminary analysis of the data to ensure that I have interpreted their comments correctly.

Because of its flexible nature, narrative inquiry can be done and analyzed in various ways based on the needs of the researcher. Researchers may shape the stories into chronological order, even though they may not have been told in such a way. These stories can then be analyzed in various ways including thematically, structurally, or dialogically (Creswell, 2013). Narrative stories occur within specific places or situations and often contain specific tensions or interruptions highlighted by the researcher. It is necessary to look at history and other factors when making an interpretation or meaning (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). According to Clandinin & Connelly (2000), in narrative inquiry the researcher is expected to do "one's best," given the circumstances, and realize and accept that other interpretations are also possible. Given the subjectivity and various interpretations of a narrative, it is important that a researcher reconstructs her/his own narrative and recognizes how it may influence the research conducted.

While narrative inquiry lends its self to facilitating the researcher to follow the stories or data, there are some limitations. Researchers need to have a clear understanding of the context of the participant's life and therefore must collect extensive information (Creswell, 2013). In addition, it is important to be able to recognize the stories that capture the individual's experience (Creswell, 2013). This was accomplished in this study through the interview questions and dialogue with the participants about their experiences. There are also ethical issues that arise from the dual role of the researcher (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Josselson, 2007). Since

narrative inquiry is a collaborative process between participants and researcher, it is important to be careful and aware of which story is being told: the participants', the researcher's, or the combined. I aimed to develop this collaborative process through dialogue between the participants in relation to their responses throughout the interview.

Procedures

Consistent with a narrative inquiry approach, I collected data through individual, in-depth semi-structured interviews with four participants. The sample was recruited and selected from Starlight University (*pseudonym) a suburban, mid-Atlantic, four-year, public, research-intensive institution with over 25,000 undergraduate students. There are approximate 1000 veterans enrolled, including undergraduate and graduate students. The institution also has a structured support and institutional resources for student veterans including a central office and student services officer serving as director, student group, and allocated space exclusively for student veterans to convene.

Participant Recruitment and Selection

The population of the four participants for study was drawn from students between 20-30 years old enrolled in Starlight University. This age range is chosen because individuals are more likely to be still be engaged in an identity developmental process, as compared to older veterans who may have more established identities. Participants in the study were current students that are discharged from the military and enrolled at Starlight University. They were undergraduate students or graduate students that discussed their undergraduate

experiences. Some participants attended another institution after discharging or took classes while in the military. Participants were self-identified veterans and associated with the institution's veteran services office.

I used both purposeful and snowball sampling. Through purposeful sampling particular people are deliberately selected from a group for the purpose of generating a small sample of self-identified student veterans with various identities including but not limited to gender, race, sexual orientation, and military experience (Maxwell, 2005). I used snowball sampling, in which researchers rely on participants to recruit other participants through the people they may know, to inform potential participants about the study (Maxwell, 2005).

In collaboration with the veteran student services, participants were identified, contacted, and invited to participate via email. Given the confidentiality around student veteran data, the researcher relied on the Veteran Student Services Coordinator and participants for assistance in student recruitment. The researcher contacted the coordinator of the veteran program at Starlight to discuss the purposes of this study and their potential role. The researcher asked the coordinator to forward the contact email to potential participants via listserves, individual emails, and social media. The email described the purpose of the study, the length of the interview, eligibility requirements, and a statement regarding consent and confidentiality (Appendix B). Students were invited to email the researcher directly if they wished to participate. In addition, the contact email sent to participants included a message asking them to forward the invitation to those they may know. The researcher also directly asked participants interviewed to please forward the opportunity, consistent

with the snowball sampling strategy. All participants and the institution were given

pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality.

Participant Descriptions

The researcher interviewed four individuals varying in military branch

association, military status (active, reserve), age, race/ethnicity and academic year

(freshman, sophomore, junior, senior, and graduate student). All participants were

males, three of which were Caucasian and one Latino. The mean age is about 27 and

the mean time served in the military is 5.63 years. All four participants enrolled in

college less than six months after being discharged from the military. Three of the

respondents attended another institution before Starlight, and three of them took

college courses while in the military. Two participants are currently undergraduate

students and two graduate students at Starlight.

Table 1

Participant Characteristics

Name	Age	Academic Year	Military Branch	Time Served
Ace	26	Graduate	Marine Corps	8
Jake	26	Sophomore	Air Force	4
Jim	28	Graduate	Coast Guard	4
John	27	Senior	Army	6.5

Data Collection and Instruments

Data was collected using in-depth semi-structured interviews. This interview

method allowed for flexibility, which facilitated gathering more in-depth personalized

responses from participants and allowing emergence of ideas and themes. The

questions for the instrument were originally developed based on a review of the

veteran student literature and developmental theory for a pilot study during a course

on College Student Development. These questions were then edited based on

feedback from faculty members and adapted for this study (Appendix C Interview

Protocol). To assess validity of the instrument and clarity of the protocol, I piloted it

with one person. I discussed the purpose of the protocol and research with the

individual. I asked if the questions were clear and understandable, to which he said

they were. I asked him to explain what he understood each question on the protocol to

mean. His perspective matched my intent. The instrument indeed had internal validity

because it collected the information that was intended.

Creating trust between researcher and participant is important to ensuring the

validity of data collected in qualitative research (Huberman & Miles, 2005).

Therefore, interviews took place in a quiet, confidential area on campus, to ensure

confidentially and comfortableness of the participants. The participants was first

asked to complete a consent form (Appendix D) followed by a demographic

questionnaire (Appendix E), then each participated in a two-part interview lasting

approximately30- 60 minutes. The first part of the interview consisted of completing

the orbital of the RMMDI (Appendix F), depicting their most salient identities and

their relationship to each other and the core followed by engaging with me in a

conversation about how they went about completing that activity. The second part of

the interview consisted of nine questions relating to their military and campus

experiences as well as their thoughts on their identity (Appendix C). The interview

questions related to the research questions and included: what does the term "student veteran mean to you?; and when do you refer to yourself as a "student veteran"?

Data Analysis and Ensuring Trustworthiness

The interview protocol was piloted with one person to ensure validity. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim for analyses. Deductive and inductive coding was used to analyze data (Maxwell, 2005). To address the research question, the deductive codes used were: Definition, Meaning, Use, Student Association, and Faculty & Staff Association. **Definition** signifies the definition of the term student veteran from the perspective of how the participant defines it. **Meaning** stands for the values, roles, behaviors and attitudes the participants believe are part of being a student veteran. **Use** is the way or reason the term is used by student veterans and by others. The **Student Association** and **Faculty/Staff Association** codes describe the values, roles, attitudes, and expectations of students, faculty, and staff, respectively, about students who are veterans.

Interviews were coded for emerging themes (Esterber, 2002), using a systematic coding process consistent with constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This process allows for taking similar data and separating it into chucks, thus facilitating the management of the analysis process. After analyzing the data against these codes, I identified themes that emerged from the data under each of the deductive codes which will be explored in chapter four. For example, within Meaning, the data suggested themes of history, upholding military culture, and fitting the student role (Appendix G Codebook).

The RMMDI was also important in the analysis of data. The data from the RMMDI allowed me to determine the identities that are most salient for participants, how they interact, and how they may influence the student and veteran identities, if at all.

In addition to the data collected from the interviews, I wrote memos after each interview. Memoing is a process in which researchers make note of things such as their own down ideas, feelings, and questions about interviews or the study (Creswell, 2013). Memos are used to aid in analysis and reflection of methods, theory, and purpose, therefore stimulating insight (Maxwell, 2005). I wrote memos during each interview to highlight what stood out to me. In addition, I memoed about the connections I saw between the interviews and themes that seemed to emerge. After transcribing, I wrote memos for each interview to make sense of how the data fit into the deductive codes, if at all. I then compared my memos for each interview and memoed about the themes that emerged within each deductive code. Memoing was crucial in facilitating my ability to find and label common themes among the participants' data. It allowed me to look at the data in parts then again as a whole. Additionally memoing provided me a way to process what I was thinking when looking at the data which afforded my ability to see themes.

Several steps were taken to ensure the trustworthiness of the data and the conclusions drawn from the analyses. For example, I used memoing to make note of my possible biases or assumptions about individuals in order to address them in the study. In addition, I used memos and initial analyses to guide the member checking process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Respondents were contacted through email with

initial findings and a request to offer comments. Comments were taken into consideration, and findings reflected the contributions. Additionally, I used peer debriefing (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) in which I worked with one impartial colleague to review all of my data including transcripts, methodology, and final report in order to detect problems such as over or under emphasized points, data errors, or the emergence of my own biases. Finally, I looked for disconfirming evidence in my own data.

Positionality: Who I am as a Researcher

In conducting research, scholars have documented the importance of transparency and declarations of positionality (e.g., Allen, 2005; Banister, et al., 2011). Further, in narrative inquiry the researcher must be careful in how her/his own narrative influences how the participants' stories are retold (Creswell, 2013). This is particularly important when studying marginalized populations. In this section, I describe my positionality in relationship to student veterans.

My own experience struggling to transition from the military into higher education was the start of my interest in this area of study. While I do not self-identify as a veteran out of respect for those who have served beyond being in a military academy, the military culture is imbedded in me. After an abrupt knee injury, I transitioned from my path to the Naval Academy to a four-year, public, state university. My transition was a crucial culture shock that caused me to reevaluate my viewpoints and explore my identities. I struggled to adapt to an environment that required me to self-structure and seek resources on my own. I found that process challenging and often became frustrated. In the military, I had been accustomed to

knowing where I needed to be almost every moment of everyday as well as knowing where to find readily available and easily accessible resources. When I arrived at the university, I felt like no one understood me nor was anyone invested in my success. It took a couple semesters and invested mentors for me to find my place at school, learn to navigate the environment, and tailor my military skills to academia.

Personal experience coupled with first-hand professional experience working with student veterans pushed me to learn more about the college experience of student veterans and make meaning of my own process. I found an increasing amount of literature focusing on the transitional process of this population, but not as much on understanding identity development. In interactions with student veterans on campus, I noticed a variety of attitudes and behaviors. There are some who do not identify as veterans yet carry that experience, others who do identify, and those who choose to leave that "military life" behind. Some students did not want to associate or be identified in a similar category as other students. Other did not want their classmates and faculty to know of their military experience for fear of or desire to avoid reactions. Furthermore, I realized that for some students, there was a significant *us-vs.-them* attitude in relation to the general population students. I also recognized that many students were struggling with not only military and academic culture but also other parts of their identities including age, gender, and sexuality. Because of their existing views on self-awareness, requesting support, and some identities, these challenges to adjust and make meaning of their identities and experiences were particularly complicated.

My initial work on this topic in a course aimed to develop a student development theory helped me realize the intersection of student and veteran identities and the need to research and apply the Multiple Dimensions of Identity theory to this population. I noticed that military experience influenced college experiences and self-perceptions, and that individuals often struggled with redefining and understanding themselves in the face of a new institutional context. Through this study, I hoped to shed light on the identity development of student veterans and highlight their experiences. Understanding, articulating, and negotiating identities and responsibilities is vital to personal, academic, and professional development (Evans et al., 2010; Ford & Collins, 2012; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Individuals conceptualize what they know, believe, and appreciate about the world and themselves from their defining experiences. As our society continues to grow ever more diverse and multifaceted, negotiating identities, cultures, and families becomes more complicated yet crucial to the emotional and psychological health of well-adjusted individuals (Ford & Collins, 2012; Ryff & Keyes, 1995).

I am an aspiring counseling psychologist, student affairs professional, and educator recognizing the importance of understanding multiple dimensions of identity, intersectionality, and the role of multicultural practice. I hope that this study facilities the voice of students who are veterans and provides a better understanding of the identity development of these individuals as it related to their college experience. Furthermore, I hope it is a step towards developing more inclusive, holistic, and sensitive interventions and resources.

Limitations

While there are various strengths in the design of this study, there are limitations to consider. One restriction is the limited sample including size and diversity. This may make it challenging to demonstrate differences among various identities including race, gender, and sexuality. Therefore being able to determine if a particular identity may be more influential than other identities on how individuals make meaning of their veteran and student identities may be difficult.

My experiences in the military, as a student, as a staff member working with student veterans, and my own transitional struggles can serve as assets and limitations to this study. While my experiences may allow me to build trust with participants and better understand their perspectives without as much probing, it may also bias my analysis. For example, a participant may share an experience similar to my own and instead of me understanding and accepting their perspective, I may be influenced by my own experience. I may also look for particular responses or themes in the data that support my own understanding of the college experience and development of student veterans. Memoing my thoughts coupled with member checking and peer debriefing helped mitigate these issues.

Conclusion

This narrative inquiry used the Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (RMMDI) (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007), to guide the design and analyses of a the study and explore and understand the college experiences and identity development of student veterans. The study sampled a group of 4 participants who are student veterans, between the ages of 20-30 years old, discharged from the military and currently enrolled at Starlight University.

Participants participated in a semi-structured interview and activity lasting

approximately 30-60 minutes in which they were asked questions related to their

identities and college experience. Data were analyzed to determine the complexity of

meaning making of individuals as it related to their identities and context.

Additionally, the researcher looked for indicators of how identities influence each

other and how participants balance their veteran and student identities, if at all. The

researcher used member checking, peer debriefing, and memoing as means to

facilitate analyses and ensure trustworthiness. While not generalizable, findings from

this study may be transferable and aid in better understanding the needs of student

veterans in order to improve services and training of staff and faculty in academia.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

In this chapter, I present the findings of this study, addressing the questions guiding this project: What does the term "student veteran" mean to a four students who have transitioned from the military to higher education? What values, roles, expectations, and attitudes do they associate with the term "student veteran"?

The chapter begins with brief descriptions of each of the four participants. I then provide an overview and descriptions using participants' examples of the ways in which they understood and defined the term "student veteran," including the ways it represented a sense of personal history. I will also discuss how the participants use and view others' use of the term "student veteran," which includes creating solidarity and developing community. Finally, I use participants' narratives to explain the assumptions and expectations they perceived from peers and faculty/staff associated with the term "student veteran." Finally, in addition to participating in interviews, students documented the way in which they understood their identities on a map of The Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (RMMDI). I will briefly discuss my observations of the diagrams and the identity shifts between the military and academia that are and are not present throughout this chapter.

Participant Descriptions

The participants were three Caucasian males and one Latino male between 26-28 years old, all attending Starlight University. All four males enlisted in different branches of the military, spending at least four years on active duty. All four participants enrolled in college less than six months after being discharged from the military. Three of the respondents attended another institution before Starlight, and

three of them took college courses while in the military. Two of the participants are undergraduate students, and two are currently graduate students; however, they all focused on their undergraduate experiences during their interviews.

Ace enlisted in the Marine Corps directly after high school and spent four years on active duty and four years inactive. He is a combat veteran and has been deployed. Ace is currently a graduate student, took college courses while he was in the military, and had experienced both community college and four-year institutions as an undergraduate. **John** enlisted in the Army for six and a half years. He took courses while in the military, and attended Starlight after discharging. He is currently a senior. **Jake** enlisted for four years in the Air Force. Jake attended an institution prior to Starlight, and is currently a sophomore. **Jim** is Latino and enlisted for four years in the Coast Guard after completing one year of college. He did not take courses while in the military, but after discharging attended community college and a 4-year institution as an undergraduate. He is currently a graduate student at Starlight.

Emerging Themes

When participants discussed the term "student veteran," it seemed to take on a multidimensional definition. Its meaning to them, its use, and the expectations associated with it at times were contradictory. There were commonalities among the participants in their perspectives of the term "student veteran." Their discussions regarding how they define it were similar; although the ways in which they embodied, or identified with the term, if at all, varied. There was a mix in responses about the meaning it held for them, including what it meant to be or behave like a student veteran. Additionally, the participants talked about the ways in which they use the

term and how they perceive others use it. Finally, the participants shared common perceptions of the expectations and assumptions faculty, staff and students associate with the term "student veteran."

Definition of the Term "Student Veteran"

The participants defined "student veteran" in various ways; yet, as they talked, similar ideas emerged across their interviews. All the participants described "student veteran" as a means to identify people who have military experience and are now in school. Ace and Jim specifically included the use of military funds in college as part of their definitions. For example, Ace had a very comprehensive educational definition of student veteran, but it did not include participating in veteran-focused activities. It focused instead on attending some form of higher education:

> In my mind, a student veteran is someone who was on active duty previously
> and [is] currently taking classes, whether that's community college-based,
> online, or taking full advantage of the G.I Bill and going full-time.
> Necessarily, I don't believe that to be a student veteran, you have to be
> involved in veteran activities.

Jim and John specifically described the term as a label that did not necessarily represent a common military experience, attitude, or behavior. Jim described "student veteran" as a representative label that indicated military service alone. He shared, "So as an undergrad, a veteran was someone who served in the military and was able to come out, and to me … honorably… discharged. And they were available to receive the Montgomery G.I Bill." Jake seemed to agree in his interview,

explaining that the term "student veteran," "More than anything else, it's an identifier." For Jake, it is a way to put a name to a group of people.

Additionally, participants stated that the term was vague, but that there was no other way to identify students with a military background. They said that the term provided a name to reference these students. For example, Jim called it an "umbrella term," and while John did not particularly like associating with it, he admitted, "There's no real way to refer to them other than student veterans, which is, I mean, that's just the bottom line."

Meaning of the Term "Student Veteran"

While they may have defined "student veteran" as just a label, there were other ways in which they viewed it. All four respondents continued to explore their understanding of the term "student veteran" throughout their interviews, which provided a clearer understanding of the meaning and usage they attach to the term, beyond definitions. They commented on the roles, behaviors and attitudes they personally associated with being a student veteran and the significance they placed on the term. Specifically, they described it as a term that provides history, a means to uphold the military culture, and a way of fitting into college.

    History.

The participants had a common understanding that the term provided a unique and special explanation of their history, the things they have accomplished, and the experiences they carry. It was not only a reminder to the veteran of his personal history as it relates to the military, but it also informed others of his military background. The term served to represent that some of the history is shared. "It means

that we've done something else, that college isn't the first real-life experience we're getting. It means that we were part of something that had, for whatever reason, we had a different calling than college," Jake shared. For him, having entered the military was neither better nor worse than attending college. Being a student veteran meant that he had special and practical experience beyond what a typical student would have in college. Therefore, the term served as a reminder of that difference. Jake further described how he sees individual personal histories and a collective student veteran military connection, and how they differentiate students who are veterans from other students on campus. He said that the uniqueness and vast difference of their military experiences needs to be recognized, particularly by instructors. He stated:

> Somebody that worked in construction for four years comes back to college: The TA's like, "Well, you worked construction. Okay." I've deployed. I've been shot at. I didn't work construction for four years. I was in the military for four years. . . it's not that those experiences are marginalized or looked down upon or anything like that – and it shouldn't, we're all equal in the classroom. We shouldn't be recognized for joining the military. But at the same time, I think that people do need to recognize that there's an uniqueness to this.

Jake expressed that a teaching assistant (TA) might understand what it is like to have worked construction and now be in college. In his mind, construction work is an experience to which a TA can relate. However, he does not think a TA could comprehend what it means to have served in the military. For Jake, the military is a unique work environment, culture, and set of experiences that would not be found working in the construction field. Jake does not necessarily want to be recognized for

his service, but rather noted for its distinction from other experiences students may be bringing in to the classroom.

Ace's comments added to this statement as he described the label "student veteran." He explained that providing this history does not take into account the various experiences among the veterans on campus, and that veterans may find it difficult to identify with the term:

> So, there's a wide range of different experiences that come with it, and I feel like the label of student veteran is just kind of vague for the different experiences that come with that... I feel, and just my opinion, that might not break down the label enough for someone to where a person would be satisfied with like, "Okay, that identifies me."

Ace went on to discuss how his personal history is not entirely reflected by the term "student veteran," because his experiences in the military and post military are different from the collective group labeled by the term. He stated, "When I really think about how I would label myself, it wouldn't be a student veteran; it wouldn't be a veteran. It would be a combat veteran because there's a very distinctive difference between support and direct action." For Ace, it is important to be distinguished for his combat experience because it is so different from a non-combat veteran, and the term simply clumps him in a group with everyone, despite distinctions in their experiences.

Upholding military culture.

Beyond providing a sense of history, the participants discussed being a "student veteran" in terms of upholding the military and its culture. Participants

explained that the term carries values, attitudes and behaviors the individuals embody, which influence their college experience. Jake said:

> So, being a vet with different life experiences and also just being significantly older than everybody else was – had a huge influence on my experience so far in college… So, having those experiences has changed how I'm viewed and how I view others.

For Jake, his military experiences, coupled with his age, made his life experiences and therefore his academic experiences vastly different from that of other students. Jake claimed that his military background shaped his values and attitudes and the ways in which he understood others. It is clear to Jake that being a veteran shaped his behavior as a student.

The other participants also described that the values, attitudes, and behaviors that were instilled during their military experience. John explained that was instilled with the expectation to uphold and reflect a positive image of the military to others and maintain military values upon leaving, regardless of their actual experience. Meanwhile, Jake explained the values that the military instilled within him in terms of leadership, but that his priorities have changed in college. "I was a leader when I was in the military…Being a leader isn't important to me anymore." On the other hand, John wants to set an example for other veterans to achieve their goals. He also demonstrated a value for leadership in that vein. "And I hope some students see veterans as playing an informal leadership role." Thus, John also associates being a veteran with leadership and hard work. He claimed that as students, these are values and skills veterans bring to the classroom. He later added, "I want to be able to

associate the term student veteran with someone who works hard…" John wants to continue to embody the values he carried in the military in ways that are noticeable to his peers in academia.

Ace described upholding the military and its culture in terms of his specific military branch. "I think upholding the name, and the title and the respect that comes with being known as being a Marine… it is my own self-respect for that to what it means to me, so to always try to keep my own high regard of what that title means." Ace further explained that being a Marine meant, "…honor, hardworking, honest, just authentic, respectable, but still kind and caring." Like John, he aims to continue to embody these values and characteristics of being a Marine in college. He wants to continue to uphold those same values of a Marine in the classroom, just as he would in the military. In addition to preserving the military and what it stands for, John explained his role as a student on campus as a duty and gift:

> I'm here on the dime of the public of the United States. And I really believe that they gave us something – the G.I. Bill – which is just absolutely incredible. I am so grateful for that kind of help that I feel like I have a duty to carry on, like the same way you do in the military.

For John, being a student is a duty he must accomplish well, much like his duties while in the military. It was evident that the military experiences shaped the participants' work ethic and influenced how they approached attending college.

Fitting the student role.

Participants' comments also suggested that being a student veteran meant struggling to fit into college in terms of academic expectations and their roles as

students. Jim described his struggle to adapt to the schedule of classes and flexibility of the college environment, which he perceived student veterans more generally experience. For Jim, this struggle was something inherent to the way in which he was trained and describes a sense of confusion while trying to navigate college:

> Coming from a very structured environment to a more relaxed
> environment…Having that experience about needing to be there on time and
> not being there having consequences that were going to be doled out without
> questions, that was what I was very used to. And having that ability to get
> there when I choose to, was initially in school a bit of a shock to me… I think
> that lack of structure was difficult.

Jim had little autonomy over his time and kept a highly structured routine while in the military, which instilled the need for and value of time management and structure. In his new academic context, it was hard for him to adjust to a flexible and independent environment, which made it challenging to relate to other students. Jake agreed with Jim, and added that it was difficult to do homework because taking work home was a foreign concept. He went on to discuss how going home used to be an opportunity decompress, but that in college he did not have that opportunity:

> It's difficult to come back to school after a lot of time off... I absolutely could
> not bring work home. The idea of homework is very foreign… The work that
> we do here is not nearly as difficult. But what is extremely difficult, I know
> for myself and I know from experience talking to others [*Starlight veterans],
> for them, is bringing that work home, and instead of having decompression

time, we gotta keep on working. We gotta do homework now. And that's a really tough transition to make.

In conjunction with his earlier comment about the military shaping how he views himself and others, Jake went on to describe how he found it challenging to do group projects because of the way he was accustomed to doing work in the military. Jake shared his perception of himself and other students:

I prefer not to work in groups, not because of negative experiences with groups, but because I never want to feel like I'm holding the group back because I'm sidetracked. Because in the military, you spend half your time smokin' and jokin'. But you also get the job done in a professional manner. You can switch gears. Here, it's a lot harder for someone who doesn't have the training to switch gears. So, for me, it's difficult to focus on a group project for a long amount of time. But for them, it's also really difficult for them to switch from joking around to studying. So, I prefer not to work in groups.

Jake perceives that students in college complete group projects by staying on task and being continuously focused. The military influenced his way of completing tasks, and he feels he cannot contribute to groups well because he cannot meet the student standard. Additionally, his classmates are unable to adapt to his military style of working.

Jim agreed that relating to peers is difficult because, for him, being a student veteran includes being on time and meeting deadlines. Additionally, Jim points out

that his age and experience make it harder to relate because of his peers' experiences, or lack thereof:

> My age …maybe for the first couple semesters, was an issue because I had trouble relating to the rest of the students just in terms of, maybe not evening big things, but small things… And I remember one time specifically, that a student was going to turn their work in late and they said that it wasn't important because they were going to talk to the professor and have it kind of taken care of. And that was frustrating to me because I am very much a deadline person, and that was something that I gained from being in the military.

Jim explains that his age and military experiences make it difficult for him to relate to other students. He cannot understand their perspectives or the reasons why they value or care about certain things because he does not have the same priorities or values. Similarly, Jake also commented on how meeting deadlines and completing tasks according to expectations are crucial. He mentioned that when a classmate lacked that value or self-discipline around deadlines, Jake found it difficult to relate his peer's perspective. Both Jim and Jake found a barrier in being able to relate to their classmate as fellow students because of the distinguishing values the military instilled in them that many other students do not possess when they arrive to college.

Making meaning of veteran identity through the RMMDI.

The data from the RMMDI activity and the interview questions suggest that the meaning of military experience for some participants shifted when entering academia. Participants explained that in the military, they described themselves in

terms of their career fields or jobs. However, once they started college, they identify

with just being prior military, rather than by a specific military field. Their

identification was connected to a job or career they held, which came with its own set

of experiences that they now bring to being a student. Looking over Ace's RMMDI

diagram (Appendix H), he listed his military identities as: Marine, Infantry,

White/Caucasian, Male, Friend, Son, and Brother. His academia identities included:

Marine, Combat Vet, Friend, Boyfriend, Student, White, Son, Brother, and Male. He

went from using the term "Infantry" to "Combat Veteran" when describing himself.

Additionally, even though Ace took classes while still in the military, he did not

identify as a "Student"; however, "Student" became a salient identity once he

enrolled in college.

There were similar changes in Jake's RMMDI diagram (Appendix I). He

wrote Airmen, Intel/EOD, Male, Brother, White, and Leader for his military

identities. He also stated during his interview: "…when I was in the military,

everybody's the same. You're defined by your career field and where you're from."

However, his academia identities did not include mention of this career field. His

academia identities included: Vet, Boyfriend, Male, Student, Brother, and White.

Therefore, "Veteran" could be understood as replacing his field specific identities

once in academia. Also, similar to Ace, even though Jake took classes while still in

the military, he did not identify as a "Student" until enrolling full time in college. For

Ace and Jake, the shift in context influenced a change in their perceptions of their

military identity and their student identity. Their military identity is less specific to a

job and more understood as a collective experience. Their student identity was not

present while they were enlisted, despite taking college courses. The military perceived them and they perceived themselves as soldiers, not students. However, once they shifted into academia where this setting perceived them as students, the student identity seemed to be more relevant.

Use of the Term "Student Veteran"

Participants had mixed responses about how they use the term "student veteran" and how they perceive others use it. Most responses focused on who and how the term is used. First, focusing on how the participants used the term themselves, John said, "I use it because it's convenient to speak that way." For John, using the term was an easy way to inform others that he is a student that has a military background.

Ace agreed that he sees "student veteran" used, "if people as a whole are referring to the veteran community within a school." Similar to John, Ace sees the term as a way to inform others of the distinction of this group of students from other students.

Jake explained that based on his perspective, student veterans primarily use the term, referring to themselves by that title, but similar to Ace, he added that others use the term to introduce or refer to the population. However, Jake was the only participant to note that the term went beyond convenience and labeling. He stated that others use the term as a label, but veterans use the term as more of an identifier of who they are:

> Student veterans refer to themselves as student vets. I don't refer to myself as
> "Jake, guy that was in the military." I'm Jake, I'm a student vet. . . .I've never

heard anyone refer to anyone as a student vet unless they were a student

vet…It's an addendum on the back of how they introduce us or how they

know about us or talk about us, rather than an identifier to who we are.

Whereas, when we use the term student vet, that combines the fact that we are

a student and a vet. We are not a student that happens to be a vet.

Jake used the term "student veteran" to imply that he embraces his military and

student identities because they interact. For Jake, others use it to identify and address

the group as a whole and look to each veteran solely by that shared "student veteran"

identity. This relates to Jake's perspective that when others use the term, they think

less of a "student veteran" as someone who shares interacting identities as a student

and a veteran; instead, they latch on to the veteran identity and assume a blanket

experience over the entire group. This neither accounts for the differences among the

individuals in the group or the ways in which each person embraces being a student

and a veteran.

Anchoring effect and connections to others.

Regardless of whether or not they use the term, participants explained that

identifying themselves by the term "student veteran" situated them within a larger

network of individuals that identified similarly and gave them a sense of community

and social stability. For example, Jake described how challenging it is to leave the

military and make friends and how important it was for him to have a sense of

belonging, which was hard to replace after leaving the military.

Socially, it's the hardest thing in the world to get out of the military. It's

harder than moving schools or anything like that as a kid. Like, when you get

out of the military, you're fine for the first few months. Your friends are all there on base. The nature of the military, though, is they start deploying. They start getting based other places. Next thing you know, a year later, you have no friends left in the area. And suddenly, you haven't had to make friends in a long time; you have nothing in common with the people you're in class with; and you're trying to make friends at 25 and 26 or 23. Anywhere in your mid-20s, it is terrifying to have to make new friends because you don't have any. I know people that have pushed off weddings because they're like, "I don't have any friends to be there." It sounds funny, and it is kind of funny, but socially, the hardest thing in the world is to get out of the military and maintain a good social group.

Jake also pointed out that this may be a similar experience for other older, nontraditional students, but that the experience of veterans on campus is unique and therefore not comparable to other non-traditional students. Student veterans were seen as being uniquely able to provide the sense of support and community veterans on campus need:

But even someone who's coming back at 26 that didn't serve in the military generally lacks a lot of life experience than we do, just by the nature of serving. So, for our age, we're the only people here who can identify with each other a lot of the times.

Given this isolation, Jake discussed how using or recognizing the term allowed individuals to know who was like them. It was a means of retaining shelter or a safe haven among like-minded people with a shared experience. He went on to explain

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how the term allows someone to know who has the shared understanding because those who do not, cannot really understand what he is going through. Jake points out the uniqueness of being a student who is a veteran.

> I think [the term student veteran] speaks to how important it is to us that we are student-vets, that we were in the military and how people that weren't just really don't get it. I don't mean that to be blasé or flippant. It's just something that you don't really understand unless you've experienced it.

There is a common belief that student veterans have a shared experience, which Jake pointed out. However, he explained each individual's experience is unique. Jake demonstrated this belief when he stated, "When we go to the bar here for happy hour or something like that and we swap stories, everybody has their own unique experiences; and no two are the same. But we share that uniqueness though with each other …" Jake expressed being able to engage in what he perceived as a common experience with others.

Some participants also discussed being able to rely on other student veterans for support, regardless of the reason or time of day. It seems, using the term "student veteran" implies a certain set of behaviors and relationships with other veterans because they share a common military culture that instilled particular values. John and Jake both mentioned that using the term gave them a support network. This was something they had in the military, and associating with student veterans in college gave them that sense of community again. Jake demonstrated how using the term student veteran and associating with it filled a void left by the loss of his military sense of community:

These are people that, maybe we never knew each other when we were in the military, but I know that if I called on them at 3 in the morning, they would come pick me up. And so, there's a sense of belonging that when you leave the military, it's hard to replace, and it fills that void. . . .It's nice knowing that if I need a ride to the airport at 5 in the morning, my buddy's got me. If I need somebody to take me to the hospital because I broke my foot, my buddy's got me. I don't have to worry about anything like that. And they're all veterans. And everyone just looks out for each other. And I think being in that community's been so awesome, better than being in the military.

Both Jake and John expressed that among student veterans on campus it was not necessary to have known someone while in the military. There is an understanding and expectation among veterans that they will support each other. Despite not having shared a history together in the military student veterans will treat each other similarly, as if a relationship always existed among them because of their shared military background. The other student veterans provide a sense of belonging, much like what they were accustomed to in the military. Additionally for John, it seems that the sense of community he feels on campus among student veterans is stronger than what he experienced in the military.

Attention.

The participants also discussed how the term "student veteran" might be used or viewed as a means for obtaining personal attention, getting attention focused on the population, or to get respect, varying based on the context and goal of the individual. Ace said that there is an underlying belief that sharing his military background may

earn him respect, but he is clear to point out that he does not share for the purpose of gaining respect from others.

> This isn't something that I'm always – I rarely come out like, "Hi. I'm [Ace].
> I'm in the Marines." It usually comes out in context of something that is
> regarded to that. It's not like I'm just talking about just to earn that respect.

While Ace explained that he only used it in context, John expressed that there are those who use the term for the purpose of gaining respect or to make a statement that they are better than other students. The muscles in his face tensed and he shook his head, as John said, "I feel like sometimes, student veterans will kind of draw too much attention to themselves from the aspect: 'And so, because I'm a veteran, I therefore have more valid opinion than you because you're young.'" He mocked what he sees to be the mentality of student veterans who want others to know immediately of their military status as if to prove something. He said bluntly that is upset him that people claimed the term "student veteran" for this reason. While John admitted that there was no other way to identify these students than by using the term, he went on to say, "I don't want to use the term student veteran to differentiate myself from another student."

Two other participants described the use of the term for attention in terms of credibility when speaking about veterans issues on campus. John stated that the term gave him and others that used it the credibility to speak about matters related to veterans on campus:

> … if there was a policy that we were trying to address that affected veterans, I
> would say, "As a student veteran," because that's what gives me my

credibility. Like, I'm a student veteran; so I would like to address this policy

that doesn't affect other students who are not veterans.

However, he also mentioned that because the term is a title for a group, others could

speak on his behalf, and he did not like that. "I don't like it when other people

[veterans] speak on my behalf just because I am a veteran." This aligns with Jake's

earlier statements that although there is a shared experience in the sense of being a

part of military culture, that each person has a unique experience within and out of

that culture which must be recognized.

Jim agreed with Ace and John's perspectives around the respect attributed to

the term "student veteran." Jim implies that using the term student veteran, gave the

user credibility and support from the student body:

So if I wanted to elicit a very positive response, I am going to say "Yea,

student veterans think this" or you know, if we can get student veterans on

board then that said that my organization or what I am trying to do is friendly

with [these] people and we would like your support . . . To me, college

veterans are an easy community that everyone rallies behind. And if I have

something, if I have a program that I want to put out, and if I say yes this is

for the veterans, then whether or not there is an actual substance behind that,

people will rally behind that…

For Jim, the larger campus community supports the student veteran population.

Therefore, he perceives that others will support efforts claimed to be on behalf of

student veterans. Jim claimed that people will support these programs, despite the

extent to which they actually are for the benefit of the student veteran population.

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Hesitancy.

The responses were mixed about when individuals felt comfortable using the term, "student veteran," if even used at all.   Depending on the context or purpose of using the term, participants discussed when and why they would embrace identifying with "student veteran" and the reasons for feeling uncomfortable to use it. There were times when participants felt uncomfortable using the term or just did not want to use it depending on the context. Jim discussed how the use of the term could get the student body to rally behind a cause for student veterans; however, he later hesitated about the term being used in this way. For Jim, others could use the term if their purpose was to benefit the student veteran community; however, he also mentioned that those who use it simply as a means to get publicity or for their own selfish interests should not use the term.

> . . . I don't know, sometimes I have some negative thought about who is using that term and why they are using it...just in my own thoughts, when I see someone is using a group for their benefit that is not benefiting the specific group that they are trying to represent or trying to help, but really it's not serving that purpose, it's self-serving, that's what I think is negative about it.

For Jim, there is benefit in others using the term "student veteran." It carries weight and seems to elicit support. However, he does not appreciate the abuse of the term.

Similar to Jim's understanding of the term, Jake's view of weight and solidarity that it carries as well is important. He added, "I have never hesitated to use the term student vet." For Jake, the term signified sticking together, and he sees value in being able to tie together a unified term to a sense of comradery.

While Ace also did not feel as though he hesitated to use the term, he did not use it as easily as Jake did. Ace explained not using it because it was not accurate. Ace prefers to identify as a Marine:

> I don't know that I hesitate. I think they're almost two different identities. I'm a veteran who is now a student…I just think because they are two different realms, a veteran is … I guess in my mind, on a … different level than someone who said that they are a student. If you are a student, okay, then people will kind of know and understand that… It's just not something that I would come out and say like, "Oh, I'm a student veteran." I would say, "I was in the Marines," or something along those lines.

In Ace's narrative, the student and military identities are separate. Although he discussed the term "student veteran" as a label for current students with military backgrounds and as a means to recognize others who had a similar experience and can understand him, he does not embody or embrace the term as an identity or a reflection of who he is. In addition, he sees being a student and being a Marine not only as separate but on completely different levels. For him, someone may understand being a student and the roles and expectations with that but they cannot understand being a veteran. They cannot really understand the term "student veteran." Jim agreed with Ace's comments that only another other veteran can understand him, and he only uses the term student veteran with other people who identify as veterans.

Participants were hesitant to use term under particular circumstances, partially because of the uncertainty of how others might respond. There was an assumption

that others had particular expectations, leading participants to choose not to use the term "student veteran." John illustrated this feeling, saying,

> I don't want to always want to openly identify as veteran, and I think a lot of veterans feel that way… During an introduction in class… the last thing I'm going to say is student veteran because… there's just something about raising that flag that I don't really like.

Jim's comments were similar to John's point about raising a flag or drawing attention to his military background. He does not want to have to explain his experience, justify his choices, or clarify why he is not the same as other veterans.

> I am hesitant to use the term around, really around people who have very strong views about the war, negatively... We are not a war fighting service. So I don't want to have to justify being a veteran and having to explain why my experience is different from someone else's.

Jim's comments suggest he is most concerned about people that already have negative view on the wars and fears they will impose their beliefs on him. Hence he avoids the term.

Saliency.

It seems that whether someone used the term student veteran depended on each individual and the way they want to be perceived or relate to others, by either the general campus or veteran communities. John explained this further by stating that the term was used by veterans depending on how they understood their own fit or belonging to the rest of the student body. "And so, you'll kind of see a separation [between who and how the term is used] within the veteran community based on how

they really see themselves, like fitting into [Starlight's] student body." Some individuals, like John, wanted to be seen as similar to their peers. John mentioned not wanting to identify as a student veteran because there were expectations of student veterans to act or be a certain way. He felt others perceived these expectations negatively. He went on to state he just does not want to be different from his peers.

> I don't want to be special. I want to be like everyone else. I have just as much to contribute to society as that 20-year-old kid that I'm sitting next to in class. I don't consider myself superior, inferior, just a peer. And I never want to lose that distinction of being a peer…

While his military background is important to him, John wants others to view him as a student and not have his military experience completely define him.

Ace agreed with John and perceived difficulty in being part of the student body with an additional student veteran label. Ace also wants to be seen as a student. This identity is more important in terms of how others perceive him.

> I considered a true college experience going full-time to a 4-year institution, I wanted to embody the identity as a student who was just maybe a little bit older. I still wanted to really experience college in its own terms without readily identifying myself as a veteran of the military…

He later added that he did not want to be treated differently and outcast himself because he disclosed being a student veteran. Jim echoed Ace and John's feelings. He points out that being perceived as a student and identifying as a student was more salient at that stage in his life. Additionally, like John, Jim does not want to be recognized as a veteran and wants to be treated and perceived as the rest of his peers:

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[In community college] I didn't care to be recognized as a veteran. I wanted to be recognized as a regular student . . . To me, that was drawing attention to that, and that's not what I wanted at that point… What I talked about before, about… feeling already separated from the students because of my age and because of my experience, I didn't want to have that additional layer or that…sign: "Look at me; I'm different," when I already felt that. To me, it was more important to … be more intermixed with the students without needing to draw that attention. Because I didn't want to have every class to be, "Well, what does the veteran student think?" "You are older. What's your experience?"…I didn't want to have the eyes on me to have, to produce some sort of answer, and to speak for a community.

Upon entering college, Jim was aware he was older than other students and felt disconnected from his peers because of his age and life experiences. Jim wanted to be seen as and treated like any other student on campus therefore, he choose not to disclose his veteran identity. For Jim, disclosing as a student veteran would make him stand out in front of his peers. He claimed that in the classroom, others would expect him to speak on behalf of the student veteran community and have valuable opinions about topics because of his age and military experience. Jim is uncomfortable with being in such a position or the pressure to offer insight about the student veteran community as a whole.

Ace went on to point out that identifying as a student veteran or being involved in activities depended on how well the institution promoted veteran program and the institutional expectations to be involved in those activities. He stated, "…the

saliency and just the amount of time at that [involved in veteran activities] depended on the institution that I was at and their kind of outreach and what they deemed important as being a student veteran." So for Ace, the saliency of the student and veteran identities depending on the environment, context, and people around him which relates to the reason why or when the participants chose to use the term "student veteran." Jim added to these perceptions by pointing out that for him, there was a difference between in and outside of the classroom. Jim wanted to avoid being identified as a veteran in class; however, outside the classroom whether surrounded by other student veterans or simply people he felt comfortable with, his military identity was something he embraced:

> [At my previous undergraduate institution] I think I tried to do as much as I could to not be identified in class. Outside of class, maybe... outside of the classroom, I was around people who I was very comfortable with in that they knew my background. So, I was more willing to embrace that because in class, you're surrounded with whoever.

The term "student veteran" could be understood as a way to choose one's position within the student body, and also within the veteran community which contributes to when and how it is used.

Term Associations

Participants also talked about the perceptions they thought that others had of veterans. John and Jim offered general comments about overall expectations others had about the military experience. John described how the term student veteran was synonymous with having PTSD: "And so, when I think of the term student veteran,

it's like we have to deal with employers who think that we all have PTSD or maybe professors that think we all have PTSD or students that think we have PTSD." Jim similarly described that there was a belief that all student veterans had experienced combat, and that this seemed to be a negative perception individuals had of students veterans. While there were these overarching beliefs, participants' responses suggest faculty and staff generally had more positive perceptions of veterans than students.

Faculty and staff.

Overall, it seemed that the participants felt that staff and faculty had a more positive image of student veterans and were more informed about the population. Ace states:

I've never run into a teacher or a professor who has outwardly just disagreed with me on principle of I'm a veteran, and I am the symbol of a war that they don't agree with. Where I feel like students will do that if it's something that they disagree with.

John adds to Ace's perception by pointing out that there is an added layer for faculty and staff who are veterans, "there are some professors who are veterans. So, they hold veterans to high esteem. So, they treat them well."

While positive overall, this image came with expectations that veterans are older and more mature than the traditional college student, have more or specific kinds of experiences, and will work hard and stay out of trouble. The participants expressed the ways in which they perceived faculty and staff expected student veteran to behave and the attitudes they would exemplify. Jake and Ace describe faculty and staff as expecting something different from student veterans because of their

experiences, age, and military background. Ace stated, "They would expect maturity, just being a little bit older, having more experiences, being able to critically think about topics but still decisive and confident, determined." Jake added that he sees differences in how student veterans and other students are treated,

> Faculty and administrators have a certain expectation that we're gonna stay out of trouble and that we're gonna work hard…They expect more from us. I don't even wanna say more. They expect something different from us. I don't want to say that it's more, but they expect us to take the experience seriously, which we do, even if we don't act seriously.

For Jake, there is something that faculty look for in his and other student veterans' classroom participation that they do not look for in the participation of other students. While John agreed there is a difference in expectations, he pointed out: "[I don't] think anyone expects me to have a more valid opinion than any other student, which is good." John sees his opinions as just as valuable as those of his peers. Unlike Jake, John perceives that the opinions are simply different perspectives, not a difference in quality.

Some veterans did see differences in terms of the expectations of faculty members, however. Jim stated that there is a difference in quality of contribution between student veterans and other students:

> . . . I don't know if they [faculty] expect a higher or a lower quality level of work. But I think there are different expectations than that of a regular student…I think that faculty expect that veterans are gonna have, like I said before, this knowledge to be able to pull from. In my paper, if I were to write

the same paper that someone else does and I was identified as a veteran . . .

my professor would be expecting something deeper and something richer than

a student who didn't go through – just came straight from high school.

Similar to Jim, John also perceived that veterans were treated differently in these

ways, and added that staff and faculty have expectations of how student veterans will

interact with their peers. According to John, "[other professors] looks to us as far as

helping other student[s]…if we could get things done, maybe we could influence

other students to get things done." Therefore, John saw himself as being expected to

role model behavior and encourage others.

Jim agreed that student veterans are expected to not only behave a certain

way, but also be a role model. He stated:

I think veterans are expected to take leadership positions. I think they're

expected to have a welcome knowledge that should be able to be tapped in

and they should be expected to do that… I was expected to be able to lead

different groups… So I think there was an expectation there because of my

age and my experience again.

Jim suggested there is an expectation that his military experience translates to his

abilities to lead others. Additionally, in Jim's comments it seems that there may be

some associations to the maturity expected of him because of not only his military

experience, but also his age and life experiences.

Students.

It was evident that some of the characteristics participants ascribed to the term

"student veteran" were negative, and it was mostly presumed other students had these

negative views. In some cases, students assumed veterans enlisted because they were not smart enough to go to college directly out of high school. In various ways, Ace, Jim, and John suggested that students believe student veterans are not as smart as other college students. Ace shook his head as he stated:

I've heard multiple times like, "You couldn't get into college your first through?" Even like the ROTC program is looked upon differently because they are putting their education first, instead of, "I couldn't do anything else" and then go into the military.

Jim added, "I think that there is an expectation that they are not as smart as regular students, for lack of a better term." John agreed and reiterated the perception of student veterans having PTSD: "They have the assumption that we have PTSD, or we may have been just total morons and weren't able to get into college right away. So that's why we joined the military."

Participants also thought students saw veterans as mean, focused, not able to have fun, and homophobic. Jake provided a comprehensive view on his beliefs about student assumptions, and went on to assert that the assumptions are not true of him or many student veterans.

I ran into a lot of misconceptions when I came here. And they weren't mean-spirited or negative necessarily. But a lot of people thought that I would be more serious than I am… people thought I'd be really homophobic… The biggest conceptions is that we're all serious and focused and we don't have much fun. But that couldn't be further from the truth…

Jim agreed with John's perceptions. Part of Jim's hesitancy around using the term "student veteran" was because of the expectations others would have of him and fear of being labeled in as someone who was angry or violent. Jim added, "I didn't want that [student veteran] to be what I was known as and then have some sort of bias against me or expectation that I would get pissed off any minute and start yelling at the class or whatever." Jim agreed with Jake's depiction that students believe student veterans are mean and went on to explain that perhaps social media influences that perceptions students have. "I think that, for students, there's an expectation for veterans to be mean…Maybe what's portrayed on TV, that they're stoic, that I stand a certain way, that I look a certain way – I think that's an expectation of students."

Participants perceived students' assumptions as being related to their opinions about the war, and the military in general, about which they were often not well informed. Ace claimed students believe he supports the war and judge him negatively because they do not agree with the invasions of Iraq and Afghanistan. Ace added, "I feel like, they kind of put their feelings towards the conflict – which, sometimes, they seem very uninformed about – unto a person who has served there." John agreed that students are uninformed about the wars and additionally do not understand what it means to be a veteran:

> I think that [students are] out of touch with the affect that the wars had on people that went to war and that kind of thing. And I think they see us as a segment of the population that – they're just veterans. I think they're kind of disconnected from what that is.

Jake agreed with this notion that students' context including upbringing influences the students' perceptions of warfare and military service, as can be seen through this narrative:

> …for students, a lot of their views are shaped by where they're from. People from the South generally treat vets with a little bit of reverence. Whereas a lot of people from the Northwest or California, at first – I don't want to say they rag on us or they make fun of us – but there's definitely more of a sense of, 'What are you guys going here?' Whereas somebody from the South is like, "Oh, that's so cool! I wanna know about it"… they definitely view us through different colored glasses.

Summary and Conclusion

This chapter discussed the findings in terms of the research questions and presenting the themes that emerged among the respondents. The term "student veteran" was used amongst the participants as a group identifier, carrying expectations and assumptions that did not represent all student veterans or their experiences. Some of the participants mentioned that only veterans would refer to themselves as student veterans and perhaps use it to identify who they are, while other participants mentioned that the term was used by others as a way to introduce or discuss the population. Regardless, narratives suggest that the term served as a means to develop a sense of belonging, yet also to create divide between student veterans and other students. Participants expressed how the term represented their personal histories, allowing them to point out the military experience and or how significant the student veteran identity was to an individual. For some participants using the term

or embracing the identity was not an issue; yet, it presented a dilemma for others. Some participants wanted to only embrace their student identity and hide their veteran one because they wanted to be treated as a regular student and not have their military identity overwhelm the perception of who they are. Additionally, participants agreed that faculty and staff generally have a more positive image of student veterans as compared to fellow students.

These findings show that participants want to be treated as "regular students" in most cases, but they also appreciate and value what the term "student veteran" signifies to them and others. There is some evidence that suggests other do not see veterans as "regular students" in both positive and negative ways. In some ways, this validates the participants' perceptions that they are judge and labeled with the term "student veteran" that carries meaning different from that which participants understand and attribute to the term. Therefore, in addition to not necessarily being seen as "regular students" as they may want to, they are also ascribed to "student veteran". Being a part of the student veteran group influenced an individual's attitudes, behaviors, and values as a student. Participants discussed how their values, behaviors, and attitudes were influenced by the military and were different from their peers. They discussed how they perceived being a student, which sometimes was different from that of their perceptions of traditional students. Future research can continue to explore what are the perspectives of the campus community member, how these perspectives are developed, and how they influence the treatment and views of student veterans. The term "student veteran" is more than a label and shares qualities of a social identity. Additional research can further explore this and how it affects the

identity development of veterans on campus. "Student veteran" evidently holds

various meanings not only between veterans and the campus community, but also

between the student veterans. Being a student veteran despite how the term is

perceived or understood seems to influence the college experience of these

participants and how they understand themselves in their new academic context as

compared to their military context.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Literature uses the term "student veteran" to label someone in higher education with current or previous military experience (O'Herrin, 2011). However, literature lacks in its discussion of what the term means to these "student veterans," the ways in which the term is used, the significance of the term to these individuals, or the expectations and attitudes associated with the term. Additionally, literature has focused on the transition of student veterans (e.g., DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011b; 2011c; Moon & Schma, 2011; Zinger & Cohen, 2010), but there is limited research which draws from identity development theories to frame and understand the transition and success of veteran in college.

The purpose of this study was to gain a better understanding of the experiences of students who are veterans and the values, expectations, attitudes, and behaviors related to the intersection of their student and veteran identities after having left the military. This study addressed the following guiding research question: What does the term "student veteran" mean to these students; and what values, roles, expectations, and attitudes do they associate with the term "student veteran"? This chapter begins with an overview of the existing literature, as well as the problem, the purpose, and significance of this study, and the methodology used. I will then discuss how the findings relate to previous literature and provide theoretical and practical implications. I will conclude this chapter offering recommendations for future research.

Overview of Study

Veterans are a growing population of students in higher education, and are distinctive from the traditional student body. They are typically older and have experiences beyond that of the average college student (O'Herrin, 2011). The population of veterans has seen significant growth because of the end of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and changes in legislation in the G.I. Bill and Department of Defense (DoD) Tuition Assistance (TA) programs (O'Herrin, 2011). Post 9/11 veterans are different from previous generations of veterans entering higher education, which has created a need for further research on this population (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011a; 2011b; 2011c; 2011d; Zinger & Cohen, 2010).

Notably, scholarly literature and legislation call institutions to provide better support and services for these students. Adjusting to the academic culture, which is different from military culture, is among the various challenges veterans face entering academia. Military culture has standards, values, and expectations that each member must adhere to in a hyper-structured environment (e.g., Baechtold & Sawal, 2009; Black, et al., 2007; Burks, 2011; Durdella & Kim, 2012; Rumann, & Hamrick, 2010; Winslow, 1998); whereas colleges and universities tend to have more options and greater flexibility. Additionally, the military creates an environment where an individual's personal identity is second to that of the group (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011a). By contrast, academia often supports an individual's exploration of her or his identities (Kern & Shores, 2009). Thus, when entering academia, veterans have to re-negotiate their identities, based on external perceptions of who they are, what they are capable of, and what their life experience has been. That in mind, it may be helpful to

recognize how this transition and managing cultural differences affects student development and how the experiences of student veterans relate to their development.

According to what we know about veterans and their transitions to higher education, there is an interaction between military and academic culture as it relates to the transitional process. I entered this study assuming that there is an interaction between the student and veteran identities and sought explore it through the lived experiences of student veterans. This study explored the participants' student and veteran identities aimed to give voice to participants' identity development and its relationship to their college experiences through narrative. Schlossberg's Theory of Transition offers insight into the actual transition process and how to support individuals in transition (Evans et al., 2010); however, this study does not focus on the transition itself or the transition process. Rather, this work emphasizes the experiences of veterans as they transition, in relation to their identity development. Specifically, this study explores how individuals understand and experience the relationship between their student and veteran identities and how those experiences and understandings relate to their developmental process.

Various articles state the usefulness in the Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (RMMDI) (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007) to better support and understand the experiences of student veterans (e.g., Baechtold & Sawal, 2009; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011a; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). But it has not yet used it to frame research on this population. This narrative inquiry used the RMMDI to conceptualize and frame the research question as well as the collection and analysis of data. Data were collected through individual, in-depth, semi-structured interviews

with four student veterans from Starlight University (pseudonym). Participants completed the orbital portion of the RMMDI, where they depicted their most salient identities while they were in the military and while they were undergraduate students. After completing the diagram, participants engaged in conversation about the diagram and answered questions related to their military and campus experiences as well as their thoughts on their multiple identities.

The findings suggest participants believe that the term "student veteran" is used to define, label, or recognize individuals who served in the military and are currently students. For the participants, "student veteran" was an imperfect label for various reasons. While participants agreed there was no other concise way to recognize these individuals, they also expressed that the term was vague and used as an umbrella term to encompass any and all students with military backgrounds, regardless of service branch, history in combat, or actual experiences. They agreed that these students had a common experience because they share a military background and culture but that each individual's experience was unique and could not be clumped into or defined by someone else's experience.

Participants ascribed various meanings to the term "student veteran." The respondents saw the term as a means to provide history, informing others about their military background and representing their uniqueness as compared to other students. It also represented a shared background or culture stemming from military experiences but left room for understanding that people have individualized military experiences. Beyond representing history, the term also signified for the respondents the importance of upholding the military and its culture. The term carries investment

in values, attitudes, and behaviors the participants embodied in the military that have influenced their college experience such as being honest and hardworking. They also expressed that these values affected the way they interacted with peers. The participants discussed how values such as leadership, time management, structure, and work ethic affected not only the way they interacted with peers, but their ability to relate to them.

The participants claimed to use the term with specific intent, such as to build comradery with like-minded individuals, to obtain personal attention, or bring focus to the group. Additionally, the saliency of the student and veteran identities in a particular context influenced if and when the term was used. Despite taking college courses during their military service, two of the participants did not identify as students until they were discharged and enrolled in college. All but one of the participants stated they hesitated to use the term "student veteran," but they all shared expectations and assumptions they perceived others as having about student veterans. Some participants only identified as students because they wanted to experience college as a student without the expectations from others. Others discussed in a sense the pressure of being a student veteran because of expectations to give more or behave in certain ways as compared to their peers.

The participants are proud and committed to being veterans, but they also shared concerns about the stereotypes associated with being a student veteran. They believe that overall, these assumptions and expectations were positive from the faculty and staff, but mostly negative from other students. Respondents believed faculty and staff expected more from them because of their experiences, which put

pressure on them to perform. They believed students' negative assumptions were due to social media, their personal views on the wars and military, their lack of knowledge of the military and veterans' roles, or their social upbringing.

Discussion

Not Just a Label

While literature uses term to label students with military backgrounds and participants seem to agree that is the case, the findings show that the term is more than just a label. Students identified themselves and their military experiences differently, depending on their environment and context. Participants explained that while in the military, a person's career field and where she/he is from was the way she/he was identified. However, once enrolled in college, more importance was placed on having military experiences rather than the specific military jobs and roles. The participants' identification of "student veteran" was as a label or way to recognize people with military backgrounds, which masked individual experiences, and carried assumptions, expectations, values, attitudes, and beliefs held by veteran on campus and others.

Embracing or communicating the military identity seemed to take on a different meaning in academia than in the military. Participants identified as veterans or by their military branches with other veterans and with their peers. Discussing their specific military career field or job once they were in college was not as relevant or important to them as it was while they were in the military. Participants seemed more likely to discuss their military career or job with other veterans. Perhaps this is because other veterans have a basic understanding of military culture could better

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relate. Whereas, civilian students may not understand military culture therefore what is significant is just the fact that the military experience existed as opposed to the specific career field or job held by the veterans on campus. This makes sense considering that people tend to be more specific with those that can understand and relate to the context about which they are speaking.

While the participants in my study described the term as a convenient label, their broader narratives suggested that "student veteran" represented more than a way to identify a group of people, and perhaps more closely resembled a social identity than a label. A social identity is role or membership within a group that is socially constructed such as gender, race, ethnicity, religion, and sexual orientation (Hogg, Terry, &White, 1995; Jones & Abes, 2013, p 62-63). A label is a role or self-descriptive characteristic such as teacher, athlete, or gardener (Jones & Abes, 2013). The veteran identity is considered a "self-concept derived from a person's military experience within a sociohistorical context" (Harada, 2002, p.117). Whether a person chooses to embrace this identity does not remove the fact that a person had military experience and is currently enrolled as a student. The extent to which these experiences shape who she/he is, or the divergence between her/his student and veteran identities varies by individual. Yet, this study shows that their military backgrounds influenced the participants' college experiences.

This study demonstrates that the term "student veteran" has similarities with the characteristics of a label and a social identity, leaving those who are both students and veterans somewhere in between. Similar to a label, the term identifies a particular role in these individuals' lives. They are veterans currently enrolled in college. Being

a student is a role that exists for a period of time in a person's life, neither permanent nor static. Therefore, the combination of being a veteran in college is specific "chapter" in someone's life

However, being a student and a veteran also has sociohistorical context; therefore, the term seems to also be similar to a social identity. The participants agreed the term "student veteran" recognized a specific group of people with a common military background and external expectations but individually unique experiences. Similar arguments have been made about other social identity groups, highlighting the importance of understanding the differences in the experiences of those within the group (Crenshaw, 1991). For example, women share some experiences, and there are expectations that women will react in particular ways to situations. This is often the basis of stereotypes. While social identities have a shared understanding and history, there too is an understanding that each person experiences that social identity in her/his own way (Crenshaw, 1991).

Literature examines role of social identities such as gender, race, and sexual orientation in relation to student development. Research is limited in viewing military status and being a veteran as a social identity, specifically in the context of academia. When an individual becomes a member of a campus community and is taking classes, she/he often takes on the identity of "student." According to the participants in this study, being a student comes with specific assumptions and expectations related to study habits, classroom behaviors, doing homework, and completing group projects. Similarly, there are expectations and assumptions associated with being a veteran. Participants discussed how their military background influenced their attitudes,

behaviors, and values as a student. They discussed the need for structure and time management and their struggle to adapt to a more flexible academic environment. They also shared how leaving the military made it difficult to develop friendships and how they sometimes struggled to relate to other students. One participant discussed how he hoped all veterans were perceived as leaders and hardworking, both of which are values he carried from the military. Another participant discussed values and characteristics associated with being a Marine, which he continues to embody. The extent to which participants identified as veterans influenced their college experiences and roles as students. Some participants discussed choosing not to disclose their military background because they did not want to be singled out and treated differently than students. They did not want their veteran identity to influence how the campus community perceived them as individuals or students.

While the term may provide a sense of history to others, it seems the personal history as it relates to military experience shifts between military and academia. The way in which veterans understand their military identity while actually enlisted may differ from when their service is complete. Some respondents discussed identifying with their military career field or job while in the military, but then identifying with the military as a whole once they left. Additionally, being a veteran on a college campus may differ from their concept of being a veteran outside of the academic context. Although some participants choose not to disclose in the classroom, they disclose outside of the class and with other veterans or those they trust. These findings perhaps point to a need for further research on the importance of context in students' decisions to identify, the ways in which these individuals understand their

roles on campus, and the ways in which they may or may not want to be perceived or treated.

Differences emerged in how participants in the study, as well as members of the larger campus community, understand what it means to be a student veteran. Student veterans do not experience their identities in silos; understanding how the campus community perceives veterans may offer suggestions for developing ways to inform faculty, staff and students about interacting with student veterans. One participant discussed the extent to which students' social contexts influenced the ways in which they viewed student veterans. For example, students from the South held high regard for student veterans because it appeared that in that context, military service is more respected. Therefore, it is likely that students' own identities influence their understanding and perceptions of student veterans, which in turn influences the environment created on campuses. Understanding the ways in which the identities of other students interact with those of student veterans can potentially shed light on the complexity of the lived experience of those associated with the term "student veteran."

Group Identity

Literature discusses various struggles veterans entering college face, such as adjusting to a lack of structure and conflicting ideas, unfamiliarity with the academic culture, negative assumptions, and difficulty relating to other students (e.g. Cook Francis & Kraus, 2012; Durdella & Kim, 2012). Participants in this study also described their struggles adapting to the campus community. One participant discussed how his military experience changed the depth of his life experience, which

made it difficult to relate to other students. Another participant discussed finding it challenging to adjust to the class schedule on campus because in the military, he was accustomed to arriving early. However, he found that in college, arriving early was not held in the same regard; classes usually start right on time or later, and few other students arrived early.

Participants shared other challenges relating to making meaning of identity in a new context, which they had not done before. Individuals make sense of their identities and understand the way in which they interact in various ways. Military culture promotes a deep sense of group cohesiveness and group identity (e.g. Baechtold & Sawal, 2009; Dioramic, & Jarvis, 2011a; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010; Winslow, 1998). While college may create an environment for self-exploration and encourage self-awareness of identities (Kern & Shores, 2009), military culture does not (e.g. DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011a). This study's findings show how the participants continued to identify with a group of other veterans and also struggled to discuss their own identities or development of identities.

Some participants shared not exploring their identities while in the military, but found themselves examining their identities upon entering college. Analyses of the RMMDI diagrams and the interview data suggest that some of the participants discussed other identities beyond that of being a veteran and student. Specifically, two participants seemed to have spent more time exploring their identities; they have also been in college the longest. Perhaps, this is related to their length in time in college this would be consistent with student development. Perhaps shifting from an environment that discouraged this exploration to one that encourages it contributed to

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the challenge some participants had in self-exploration. However, further research is needed to determine this.

Previous research has found that veterans need spaces to connect with each other and build a sense of community e.g. (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011d), encouraging the need for veteran support services and the ways in which veterans seek other veterans for support (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011b). Veterans often leave the military with a sense of longing for comradery (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011d) and struggling to reconnect with friends and develop relationships (Whiteman & Barry, 2013; Zinger & Cohen, 2010). Leaving the military, they may be forced to figure out how they fit into academia and the world around them (Cook Francis, & Kraus, 2012; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011a; 2011b; 2011c; 2011d). The participants in this study expressed such feelings as they entered college. While it was clear that not all the participants identified as "student veterans" or that they disclosed their military background, it was evident that they interacted with other veterans on campus. There is a perception that only other veterans can truly understand and relate to their experience. Some participants claimed that they wanted their peers to only see them as students; however, they still identify with being a veteran to socialize and depend on other veterans for support. Additionally, participants did not feel fully comfortable on campus without associating with other student veterans. Findings suggest that having this group and shared military understanding gave participants a sense of community.

The findings show that there were clear expectations of fellow veterans on campus, which perhaps came from instilled military values. Two participants discussed how they expected and relied on the support of other on-campus veterans,

no matter the reason. They further explained how they did not need to have known the other veterans while in the military because there was an understanding that veterans look out for each other, which was reason enough to disclose themselves as student veterans.

Perhaps there is a difference in the meaning of adopting the student veteran label between academic and social settings. Perhaps ascribing to an identity is different than perceiving oneself as a member of a group. Some participants did not want to be associated with the term student veteran in the context of academia because of the assumptions related to their role as a student. However, these same participants chose to adopt the term "student veteran" when socializing with other veterans on campus because of the benefits and the custom to associate with like-minded people to develop comradery. Perhaps choosing to identify with "student veteran" serves as a new group identity replacing the one established while in the military. Further research is needed to better understand how veterans internalize the term "student veteran" and if and how they perceive it as an identity.

Implications for Practice

Understanding identity development, the college experience, and the role of identity in the college experience for students with military experience may better facilitate the support of the student veteran population. It seems the military's emphasis on comradery, value of inter-group reliance, and structure in creating community influences veterans' desires to relate to and develop friendships with other student veterans. The perceived assumptions and expectations of the campus community, coupled with a struggle to relate to other students, may make it difficult

for veterans to develop friendships on campus with non-veteran peers or disclose their military background. Thus, practitioners should be mindful of the possibility of social anxiety or struggle in developing relationships among veterans entering college. Practitioners should be mindful of creating a safe space for veterans to feel comfortable disclosing their experience and not feel judged. This sample included only males and therefore cannot offer suggestions based on gender. However, practitioners should be mindful of the possible different experiences female student veterans may face.

The findings show that the student veteran identity may allow students to develop a sense of community and facilitate their process developing friendships by connecting them to other veterans on campus. Therefore, it may be beneficial to ensure that institutions have a structured veteran program to facilitate social stability. If working with a veteran, it may be helpful to determine her/his comfort developing relationships, acknowledging that the individual may need support. Practitioners can work toward being aware of who the veterans on campus are and finding ways to connect them. One such way is to develop a space where student veterans can interact with each other. It may also be helpful to reach out to and receive input from faculty and staff who are veterans and find ways to connect student veterans to these individuals. Based on this sample, a collective space is acceptable; however, for example, female student veterans may prefer to have an additional space. Further research is needed to determine if and what may be the differences and similarities between veterans based on gender, sex, race and other dimensions of difference.

Veterans may feel vulnerable, isolated, and frustrated. Practitioners, particularly counselors, should be aware of these possible feelings and can help alleviate students' discomfort and find a sense of belonging on campus. Student affairs practitioners and staff should remember to be aware of their biases and the ways in which they interact with student veterans. Particularly, practitioners should be careful not to impose expectations solely based on the military experience of student veterans. It may be helpful for practitioners to self-reflect on their preconceived notions of student veterans and how these perceptions developed. This could be accomplished through diversity workshops and training opportunities. If a student veteran organization exists, it may be beneficial to invite them to facilitate such workshops to the campus community.

Additionally faculty and staff should be aware of any inappropriate remarks or questions addressed to student veterans, such as "how many people did you kill?" "did you join the military because you couldn't get into college?". It may be helpful to educate the campus community and try to address the preconceived notions student veterans face about who they are. According to the participants, they want to feel as though their military experience is acknowledged and valued. They do not necessarily want to be treated differently than their peers. Practitioners should create opportunities for veterans to apply the skills they learned in the military without creating the expectations that these students should contribute in different ways than other students. It may be beneficial to offer veterans workshops on how to translate their leadership skills, time management skills, and structured discipline to academia. Perhaps better understanding how and what leadership looks like on campus may help

a student veteran understand how to influence her/his student role with her/his military experience. Additionally, practitioners should be careful not to assume that all student veterans want to continue to carry on values traditionally associated with the military, such as leadership skills, meeting each student's individual needs.

Research Implications and Recommendations for Future Research

This study contributes to the literature by exploring the experiences and identity development of student veterans through narrative inquiry. This exploratory study applied the Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (RMMDI), which demonstrated that there are shifts in identity between the military and academia. The RMMDI was helpful in providing the participants with a visual depiction of their identities in relation to each other and their own core, or center of who they are. Further studies employing this framework which focus on the reason for identity shifts, contextual influences, and how individuals make meaning, might provide a deeper understanding from which we can better support veterans on campus. This study had a sample of four males, which provided a limited scope on the student veteran population. It would be beneficial to aim to recruit a diverse sample particularly around gender, sex, race, sexual identity, and other identity differences.

While it was not presented in the findings since it was out of the scope of this study, I did find that for at least two participants there seemed to be a relationship between their other identities, such as race and gender, in relationship to their veteran and student identities. One participant discussed how his Latino identity was more influential than his military identity. Yet, his military identity was the one on which

the campus community focused. He discussed going to college and wanting to explore his Latino ethnicity but finding that others on campus focused on his military identity instead. Better understanding how other identities interact with a veteran identity across multiple contexts may provide insight on how to best approach and offer resources to student veterans.

Beyond applying the RMMDI, it may also be helpful to use an ecological model such as Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Framework (Evans et al., 2010, p. 166). Given the extent to which participants discussed contextual influences and the assumptions and expectations they perceived faculty, staff, and student to have, it may be beneficial to take a step back and explore these external influences specifically. Bronfenbrenner focuses on the contextual influences and thus may be beneficial to use as a framework for exploring the student veteran identity. Bronfenbrenner's model offers a visual layout of the various systems and interactions of systems that influence how we experience the world and develop. The model is comprised of four main components: process, person, context, and time. The context component incorporates four levels or systems: the microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, and macrosystems. Bronfenbrenner states that microsystems are those activities and relationships experienced most closely and regularly by the person and the individual effect of each system on the person. For a student veteran, this microsystem may consist of her/his family, friends (including other veterans), colleagues, mentors, faculty, and supervisors. Mesosystems are the interactions of the various microsystems that may be supportive or incongruent. For example, the interaction between student veteran friends and other non-veteran peers may be

incongruent, which affects their sense of self. An individual may interact differently with student veterans than non-veteran peers, which make affect the way they think of themselves. The perceptions of negative expectations their peers have of them may influence the ways in which student veterans interact with their peers or understand who they are when they are in the classroom with peers or out of the classroom with other student veterans. The exosystem has an indirect influence on students' development. While students may not have a direct role in certain settings or events, as members of the campus community, the campus environment influences students. Finally, macrosystems are the overarching themes, ideals, and expectations of culture and society. The distinct difference and interactions between academic and military cultures are likely to influence a student veteran's understanding of self and her/his college experience.

The findings demonstrate that some veterans feel pressure to achieve well as students, given the campus expectations and assumptions of their abilities, combined with their instilled military values to work hard and succeed. One participant described being a student as a "duty." Perhaps using and adapting a frame similar to the idea of the "model minority myth" may provide further understanding to the misconceptions of veterans on campus, their performance as students, and success. The "model minority myth" is a stereotype associated with Asian Americans that depicts them as the minority group to be most academically and economically successful comparative to their White counterparts (Suzuki, 1989). This stereotype assumes that Asian American students should be successful in school and that they have particular valued work ethics and skills necessary for that success. However, it

fails to identify the various differences among the minority group (Li, 2005). Ng, Lee, and Pak (2007) stated that it was damaging to have a monolithic view of Asian American students and cluster them all under one label. Exploring research discussing the downfalls of the myth including its effect on the performance of Asian American students may provide insight on the perceptions of student veterans. In similar ways, student veterans are expected to perform in particular ways because of their military experience and expected maturity. They could, in a sense, be perceived as a "model" for non-traditional students. They are forced under one label, "student veteran," without consideration for what that means to the veterans themselves. Using a similar framework to "model minority" may shed light on how others perceive student veterans, the extent to which that influences the ways in which they understand themselves, and their effect on their academic experiences.

Participants struggled to self-disclose their military backgrounds, which is consistent with the larger literature about veterans in college not disclosing (e.g. Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). It seems it was a process that depended on context, implications, and reason. For example, some participants chose not to disclose because they wanted to be treated like other students. They stated there were various negative assumptions and expectations associated with being a student veteran, and they did not want to be seen as outcasts. Participants perceived negative consequences associated with disclosing their backgrounds. Context seems to be an indicator of when or why a veteran discloses military background, as well as when they are best able to use military experience and skills in the classroom or campus environment. Better awareness of their process of deciding whether to disclose, when

to disclose, or to who, may provide insight to develop or improve support groups and resources that may be available to students. Additionally, understanding their process may provide information for training counselors to work with student veterans as they transition to campus, specifically offering support from an identity perspective. Student veteran is a hidden identity, much like one's sexual orientation or religion. It is difficult to know if someone is a student veteran unless she/he discloses. Perhaps adapting concepts from the "coming out" process in LGBT literature may guide the ways in which to understand the process of disclosing for student veterans.

The participants in this study discussed the need for having like-minded individuals to understand them. The anticipated expectations and assumptions of community members influenced student veteran attitudes and behaviors. Relationships between student veterans and their peers, faculty, and staff seemed to influence not only their college experience, but also their identity development. At times, it could determine the extent to which they would openly identify as veterans. Literature discusses the extent to which the relationship and support from other veterans influences the transition process of veterans to campus (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011a). Better understanding these relationships may offer suggestions for educational and supportive programming.

This study's participants upheld concepts, values, behaviors from the military, which influenced their college experiences. Understanding the ways in which military values influence behavior and attitudes in students may offer insight into their student development. Therefore, understanding how military culture relates to academic culture may offer insight on the experiences of student veterans. As a growing

population with what seems as their own culture, it may be necessary to explore the student veteran culture and how others understand it. It would be beneficial to develop a study to explore the perceptions of faculty, staff, and students regarding student veterans. This additional research can shed light on what the perceptions are and how they are developed.

The small sample in this study with limited diversity made it challenging to explore the perceptions of minority populations such as female student veterans. Similarly, this sample contained only one male combat veteran, whose responses at times seemed to be related to his combat experience. Future research may want to include a larger sample of combat veterans to determine if and what differences may exist among the student veteran perceptions based on type of military experience.

Conclusion

Campus communities have limited understanding of military culture and student veterans. While the term "student veteran" is used by literature and practitioners as a label to recognize students with military experience, the findings of this study suggest that the term is used as more than just a label. It also carries meaning and value, criteria for when it should be used, and assumptions and expectations, much like a social identity. Also similar to patterns observed within social identity groups, veterans appear to seek support from other veterans because of an expectation that these individuals are the only ones who can understand their experience.

There were mixed responses from study participants, which suggests that a blanketed understanding and use of the term may be inaccurate. Thinking of student

veterans as members of a group with its own culture calls institutions to think about how this relates to their ideas around multicultural competence and sensitivity. This may allow practitioners to facilitate the development of better training programs and informational workshops for faculty, staff, and students. This may, for example, help lead to developing a student body that is more consciousness of the comments and questions other students make to student veterans, therefore enabling the inclusion of student veterans.

Appendices

Appendix A

The Reconceptualized Model of Multiple Dimensions of Identity (RMMDI), (Abes, Jones, & McEwen, 2007),

Self-Perceptions of Multiple Identity Dimensions,
such as race, social class, sexual orientation, gender, religion, ability

Meaning-Making Filter
Depending on complexity of development, contextual influences are filtered to a greater or lesser extent.

Contextual Influences, such as peers, family, norms, stereotypes sociopolitical conditions
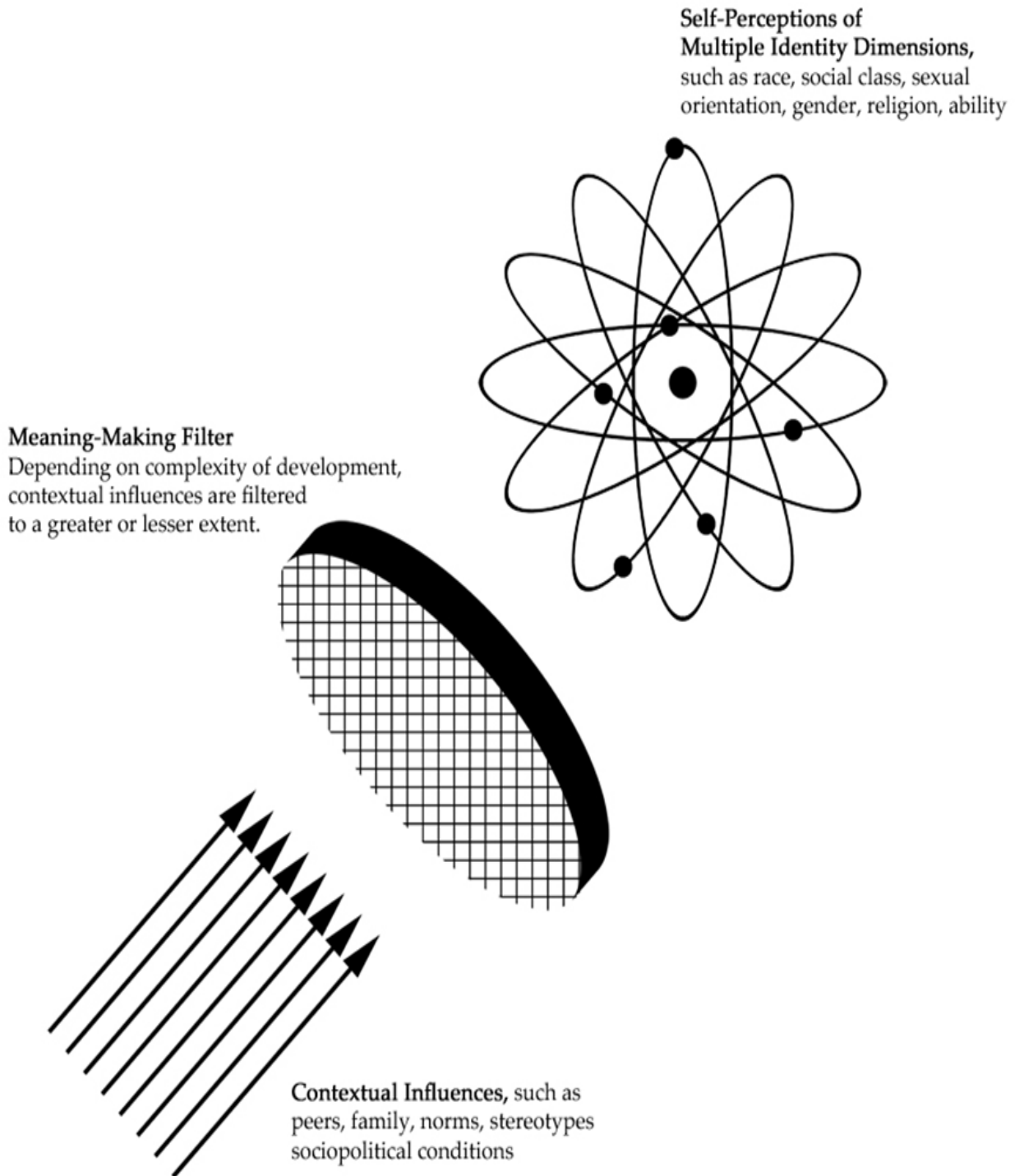
Appendix B

Email Blurb

Title: Invitation to Participate in a study on College Experience of Student Veterans

Content:
You are invited to participate in this research study, which aims to understand and give voice to the experiences and development of student veterans after transitioning from the military to academia. We estimate that the interview takes approximately 30-60 minutes of your time.
Eligible participants are University of Maryland undergrads between 20-30 years old and discharged from the military.

We aim to sample as diverse a population as possible (with respect to race, gender, academic experience, and military experience), and ask that you please forward this invitation to other eligible participants. Participation in this study is <u>completely voluntary</u>. The study has been approved by The University of Maryland Research Compliance Office for the review of human participant research (IRB 570802-1). The data collected will only be utilized for research purposes and <u>no identifiable information will be disclosed</u>. The research program is under the direction of Paola M Hernandez B., Master of Arts candidate at The University of Maryland, College Park under the supervision of Dr. Kimberly Griffin, Associate Professor of Education at The University of Maryland, College Park. Please contact Paola M Hernandez B. at pmaria@umd.edu; 301-314-7699 with questions or concerns about this research.

If you are interested and willing to participate, please contact pmaria@umd.edu or more information or to schedule a time for the interview.

Thank you,

Paola M Hernandez B.
Coordinator, Peer Programs
Learning Assistance Services
University of Maryland, College Park

Kimberly A. Griffin, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, College of Education
University of Maryland, College Park

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Interviewee: Interviewer:
Date/Time: Location:

Script & instructions:
Thank you for participating in this interview. The purpose of this study is to learn more about your experiences in the military and here on campus, as well as explore your thoughts on your identity

The interview is in two parts and I anticipate that it will take approximately 30-60 minutes. You may choose to talk as little or as much as you want. If any question makes you uncomfortable, please let me know and we will move on. Please know that all data will be kept confidential, and you will be referred to by a pseudonym in the research. Which pseudonym would you like to use*? (allow student to respond and use this name to address student throughout interview and this research)*
(give participant the consent form) Please review and sign this consent form. This consent form is to make sure you understand that this conversation will be used for research and to inform you of your rights as a participant in this study.
Do you have any questions?
Before we begin, please complete this demographic questionnaire. (*give participant questionnaire*)
Thank you for completing the questionnaire. Now we will get started with the interview.
(Interviewer Turns on recorder)
First, before we begin, do you confirm that you consent to participating in this interview?
Can I also confirm that you consent to having this interview reordered?
(If they say no, turn off recorder and start typing VERY detailed notes. Do your best

to transcribe as much of what they say as possible directly into a digital version of the

a protocol if possible.)

PART A
I would like you to please think about the identities that are most salient or important to you. This may include your military status, student status, gender, race, sexuality, religion, role in your family, academic role – anything.
(*Remind participants about confidentiality)*
(Use example diagram to explain) On this diagram *(show them diagram)* I would like you to draw and label the identities that are most important or relevant.
The center of this diagram *(point to the core)* is the core, which represents the center of who you are. The core is the essence of whom you believe to be that is the traits or parts of your personality for example: being smart, kind, outgoing, or fair.
These orbitals *(point to the various orbitals on the diagram)* represent different identities. These identities are the characteristics, ways, or perhaps even labels, in

which you would describe yourself to others. This may include your military status, gender, religion, race, sexuality, etc. For example, I would describe myself as a woman, Latina, and a researcher. The closer you place an identity to the core, the more significant that identity. In other words, the more that identity influences or is at the center of who you are.

This diagrams shows that our identities are always circling our core and can change throughout time and space. That is, some identities may be more salient than others depending on our circumstances therefore the diagram can look different at different points in our life. The diagram also shows how identities relate or influence each other. For example, *(show example diagram)*, my woman identity is near my Latina identity because my culture influences the way I understand being a woman.

Before we begin, do you have any questions?

First I want you think about you experience while you were **IN** the military. *(Hand them diagram and blue marker)*. Please mark on the diagram those identities that were most salient for you using the blue marker

(Once they are done, give them a red marker and have them repeat the activity on the same diagram.) Now I want you think about your experience here in college. Please mark on the diagram with the red marker those identities that are most salient or significant for you **NOW**. Remember the closer an identity is to the core, the more significant it is for you.

(After they are done, look over the diagram, engage the participant in a conversation. Inquire about any differences or similarities seen, particularly any that may relate to the veteran and student identities, and clarify the reason for differences such as change over time, or culture of either institution- military and academic, etc. Use the questions below to guide the conversation.)

PART B

Look at your diagram- remember blue was while you were in the military and red here in college.

1. What aspects of your identity have had the most influence on your college experiences?

     Follow up if needed: How has your military experience influenced you in college?

2. What does the term "student veteran" mean to you? In your mind, what do "student veterans" do?

     a. Who do you hear use the term? When do they use it the most?

3. When do you refer to yourself as a student veteran? When do you hesitate to use that term?

4. What do you think are some of the expectations people have about student who are veterans?

   Follow up if needed: Do you think different people have different expectations- faculty, administrators, and students? How can you tell what these people's expectations are?

5. Look at your diagram, what do you see has changed from while in the military to now and what cause the change? Remember blue is military, red is in academia.

6. Is there anything we have missed or that you would like to talk about in regards to your college experience?

May I contact you if I have further questions or for clarification?
Thank you for your time.

Project Title	The Student and Veteran Experience
Purpose of the Study	This is a research project being conducted by Paola M. Hernandez Baron (Principal Investigator) under the guidance of Dr. Kimberly Griffin at the University of Maryland, College Park. We are inviting you to participate in this research because you are a student and a veteran. The purpose of this study is to hear about your college experience and how the university you attend could support you better.
Procedures	The procedures involve a one-on-one interview about your college experience as a student and veteran. The interview will last approximately 60-90 minutes. Questions will be related to your experience as a college student who is a veteran.
Potential Risks and Discomforts	There is minimal risk associated with participation in this study. While discussion of experiences may have some discomfort, we do not anticipate it will be more uncomfortable than what you will experience in your daily life.
Potential Benefits	There are no direct benefits to participants, but some possible benefits include this study's potential to benefit the student veteran population, society, higher education, expanding research and improving the support program and counseling strategies for college students who are veterans.
Confidentiality	Participants in interviews will be assigned pseudonyms in order to establish anonymity. Any potential loss of confidentiality will be minimized by keeping all data on a password protected computer. Unique numerical identification numbers will replace names collected in this study. The numbers will be linked to the names on one password protected document. Participants' comments will be digitally recorded during interviews. Only the investigators on the study and the transcriber will have access to the digital files, which will be housed in password protected space on the investigators' computers. If we write a report or article about this research project, your identity will be protected to the maximum extent possible. No identifying information beyond basic demographics will be included in data reports. Transcriptions of the conversations will be kept for a period of ten years in accordance with University of Maryland requirements. Your information may be shared with representatives of the University of Maryland, College Park or governmental authorities if you or someone else is in danger or if we are required to do so by law.

Right to Withdraw and Questions	Your participation in this research is **voluntary**. You may choose to end your participation at any time or not to take part at all. If you decide not to participate or stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify. *If you decide to stop taking part in the study, if you have questions, concerns, or complaints, or if you need to report an injury related to the research, please contact the investigator:* **Paola M Hernandez B.** **pmaria@umd.edu** 2202 Shoemaker Building Dr. Kimberly Griffin Kgriff29@umd.edu
Participant Rights	*If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or wish to report a research-related injury, please contact:* **University of Maryland College Park Institutional Review Board Office 1204 Marie Mount Hall College Park, Maryland, 20742 E-mail:** **irb@umd.edu Telephone: 301-405-0678**
Statement of Consent	*Your signature indicates that you are at least 18 years of age; you have read this consent form or have had it read to you; your questions have been answered to your satisfaction and you voluntarily agree to participate in this research study. You will receive a copy of this signed consent form.* *If you agree to participate, please sign your name below.*
Signature and Date	**PRINT YOUR NAME**
	YOUR SIGNATURE
	Date

Appendix E

Demographics

1. **What is your age?** _____

2. **What is your gender?**

   ○ Male (0)

   ○ Female (1)

3. **How would you classify yourself? (Mark all that apply)**

   ○ Arab (1)

   ○ American Indian (2)

   ○ Asian-American and/or Pacific Islander (3)

   ○ African American and/or Black (4)

   ○ Caucasian and/or White (5)

   ○ Hispanic and/or Latino (6)

   ○ Indigenous and/or Aboriginal (7)

   ○ Multiracial: (please specify)_____ (8)

   ○ Other: (please specify)_____ (9)

<u>Military Information</u>

4. **How would you classify yourself? (Mark all that apply)**

   ○ Active Duty (1)

   ○ Reserve (2)

   ○ Retired (3)

   ○ Veteran(4)

   ○ Enlisted (5)

   ○ Officer (6)

   ○ Other: (please specify)_____ (7)

5. **In which military branch did you serve? (Mark all that apply)**

   ○ Air force (1)

   ○ Army (2)

   ○ Coast Guard (3)

   ○ Marines (4)

   ○ Navy (5)

   ○ Other: (please specify)_____ (6)

6. **How long did you serve in the military?** _____

<u>College Information</u>

7. What is your academic year?

○ Freshman (1)

○ Sophomore (2)

○ Junior (3)

○ Senior (4)

○ Graduate student (5)

8. What is your anticipated graduation date (month and year)?
_____

9. Did you take college courses while in the military?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

10. <u>After</u> being discharged from the military, were you ever enrolled in a college or university other than University of Maryland?

○ Yes (1)

○ No (2)

If yes, for how long?

○ <1 semester (1)

○ 1 semester (2)

○ 2 semesters (3)

○ 3 semesters (4)

○ 4 semesters (5)

○ More than 4 semester (6)

11. <u>After</u> being discharged from the military, how long was it before you enrolled in college?

○ <6months (1)

○ 6 months (2)

○ 6 months < 1year (3)

○ 1 year < 2 years (4)

○ 2 years < 3 Years (5)

○ > 3 years (6)

Appendix F

Example Diagram
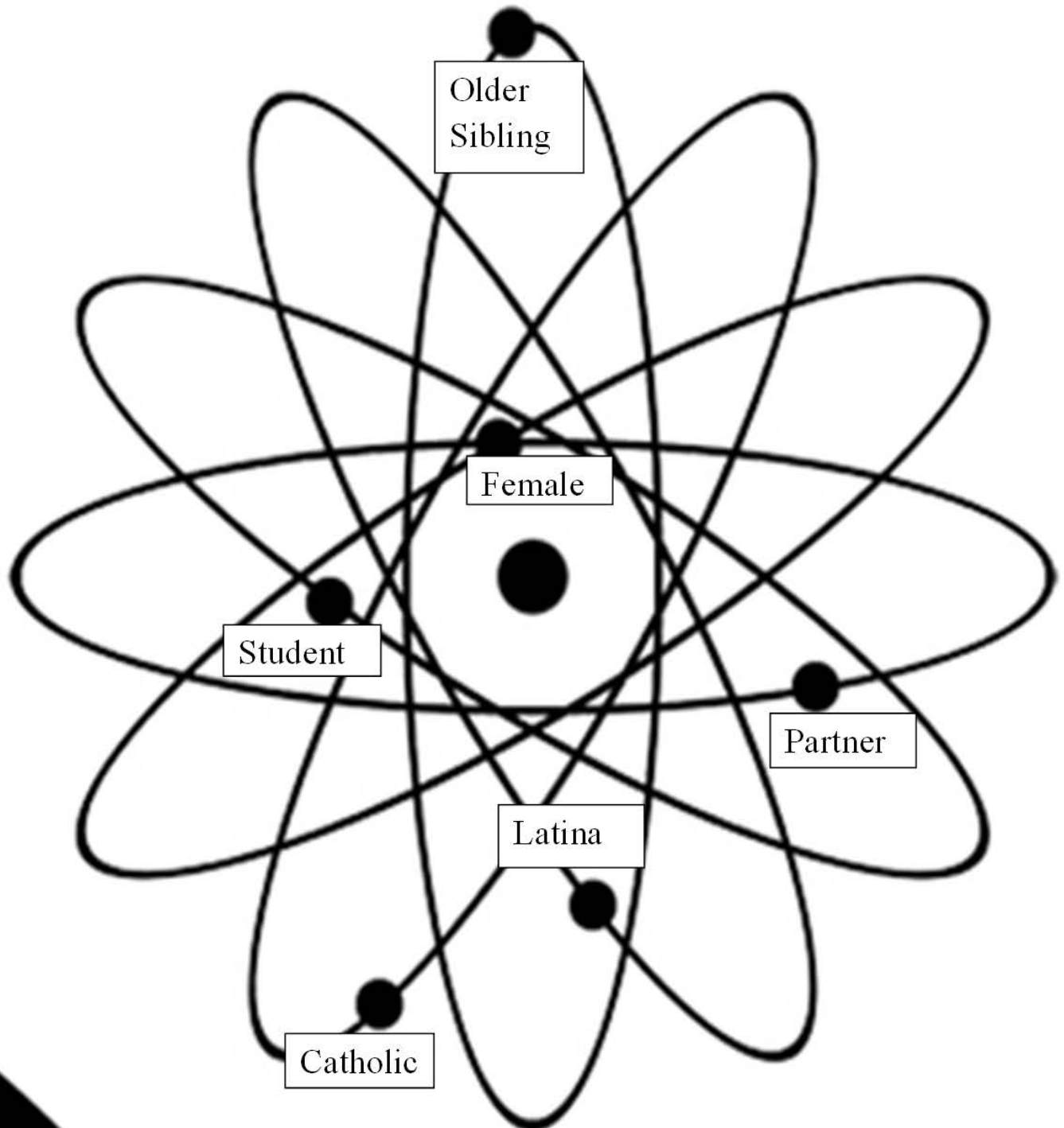
Please label on the diagram below the identities that were most salient to you while you were in the military (blue marker). This may include your military status, student status, gender, race, sexuality, religion, role in your family, academic role – anything. The closer you place the identity to the core, the more significant that identity is to you. In addition, think about how your identities relate to each other and place them according on the diagram. Please label on the diagram below the identities that are most salient to you now, here in college (red marker)
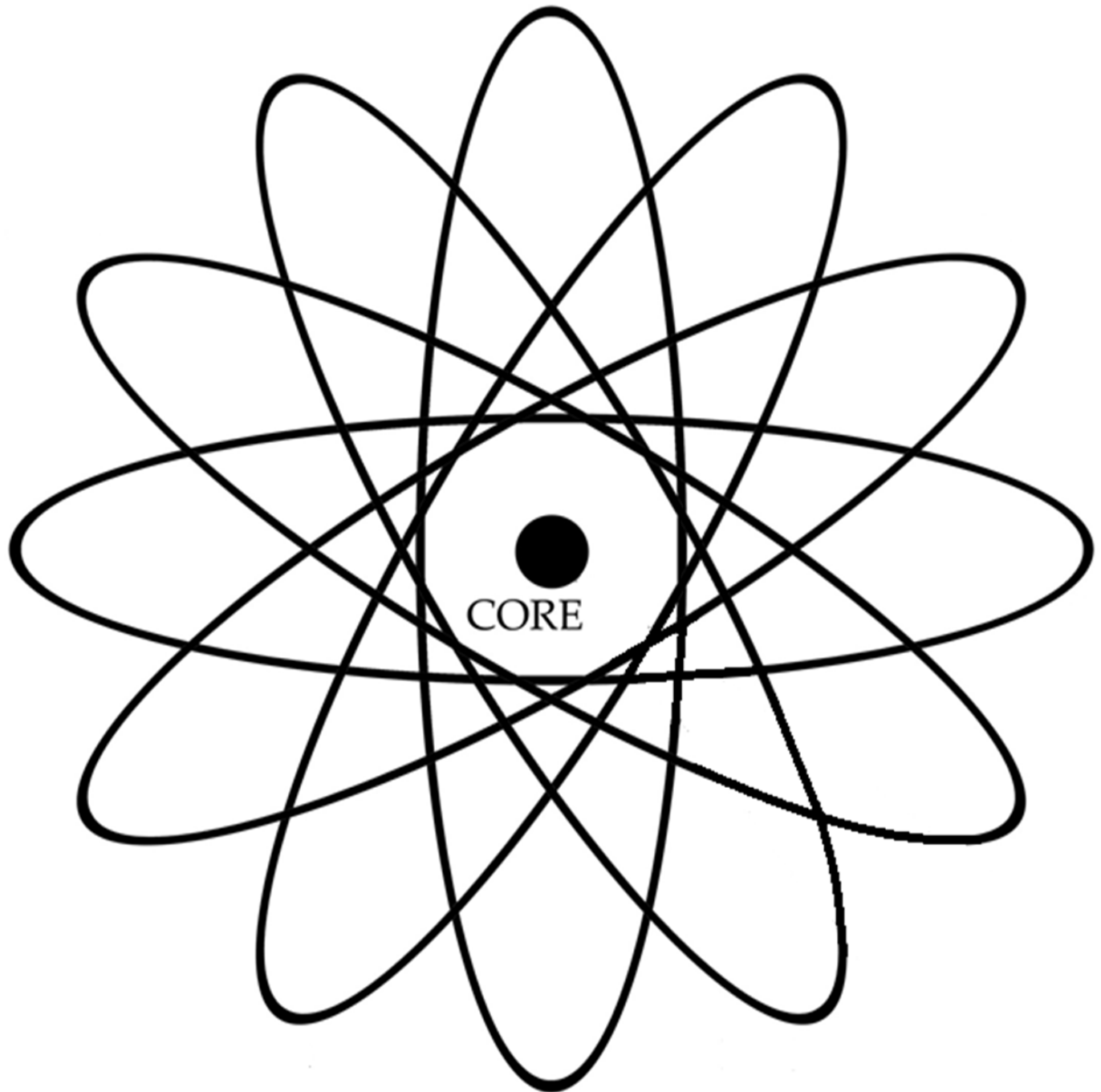
Appendix G

Code Book

DEDUCTIVE CODES

Definition: the definition of the term student veteran from the perspective of how the participant defines it

Meaning: the values, roles, behaviors and attitudes the participants believe are part of being a student veteran

Use: the way or reason the term is used by student veterans and by others

Faculty and Staff Association: values, roles, attitudes, and expectations of faculty and staff about students who are veterans.

Student Association: values, roles, attitudes, and expectations of students bout students who are veterans.

INDUCTIVE CODES

History: responses about the meaning of "student veteran" as:
- representative of personal history or story

- informative of a shared history or background

Uphold Military Culture: responses about the meaning of "student veteran" as:
- representative of upholding military culture and tradition

- carrying military values, attitudes, and behaviors in college

Fitting the Student role: responses about the meaning of "student veteran":
- in relation to struggles to adapt to college

- challenge of being a student

Anchoring effect and connections to others: responses about the *use* of "student veteran":
- in terms of building community and developing sense of belonging on campus

- using term to socialize with others on campus

Attention: responses about the *use* of "student veteran" for:

- gaining personal attention or for the group

- getting respect

- credibility on the topic of student veterans

Hesitancy: responses about the *use* of "student veteran":

- fear of being outcast

- worried about assumptions and expectations

- uncomfortableness to use term

Saliency: responses about the *use* of "student veteran" :

- related to identifying as a student and/or veteran

- importance of military and/or student identities

- how people view self and/or want to be perceived as member s of larger campus

Misconceptions: assumptions and expectations of faculty, staff, and students about student veterans that participants disagreed with

Opinions: participants perceptions of development of assumption of faulty, staff, and students

ACE

Please label on the diagram below the identities that were most salient to you **while you were in the military (blue marker)**. This may include your military status, student status, gender, race, sexuality, religion, role in your family, academic role – anything. The closer you place the identity to the core, the more significant that identity is to you. In addition, think about how your identities relate to each other and place them according on the diagram. Please label on the diagram below the identities that are most salient to you **now, here in college (red marker)**

White/Caucasian

Marine

Boyfriend

Infantry

Male

Friend

Friend

CORE Student

White

Combat Vet

Son

Marine

Brother

JAKE

Please label on the diagram below the identities that were most salient to you **while you were in the military (blue marker)**. This may include your military status, student status, gender, race, sexuality, religion, role in your family, academic role – anything. The closer you place the identity to the core, the more significant that identity is to you. In addition, think about how your identities relate to each other and place them according on the diagram. Please label on the diagram below the identities that are most salient to you **now, here in college (red marker)**
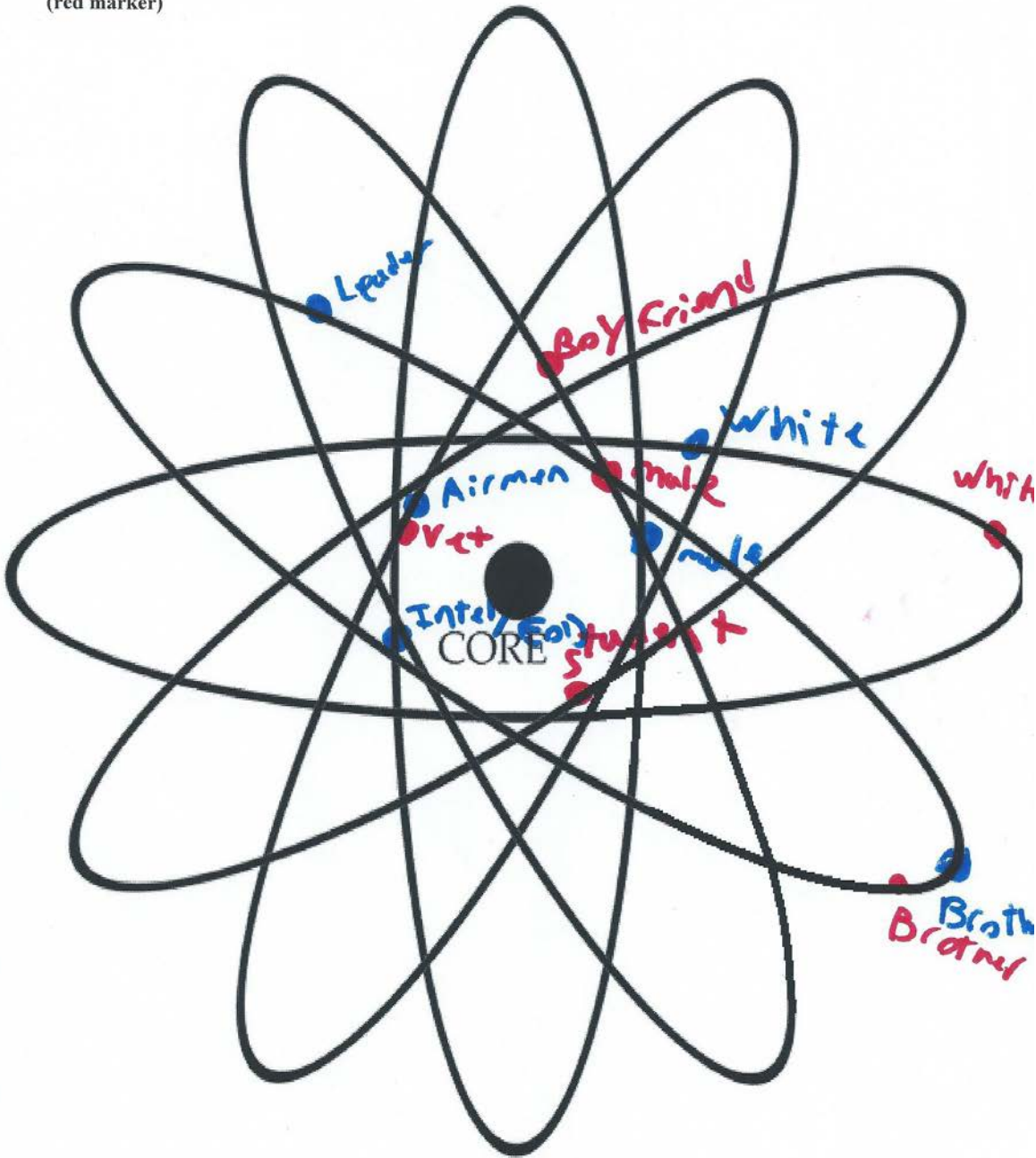
(JIM

Please label on the diagram below the identities that were most salient to you **while you were in the military (blue marker)**. This may include your military status, student status, gender, race, sexuality, religion, role in your family, academic role – anything. The closer you place the identity to the core, the more significant that identity is to you. In addition, think about how your identities relate to each other and place them according on the diagram. Please label on the diagram below the identities that are most salient to you **now, here in college (red marker)**

Latino

President

Latino

Rate/ Rank   Supervisor

Fraternity

Friend

Friend

male
male

Boyfriend

Brother

CORE

Culture
Not of
Those
living
in L.A.

John

Please label on the diagram below the identities that were most salient to you **while you were in the military (blue marker)**. This may include your military status, student status, gender, race, sexuality, religion, role in your family, academic role – anything. The closer you place the identity to the core, the more significant that identity is to you. In addition, think about how your identities relate to each other and place them according on the diagram. Please label on the diagram below the identities that are most salient to you **now, here in college (red marker)**
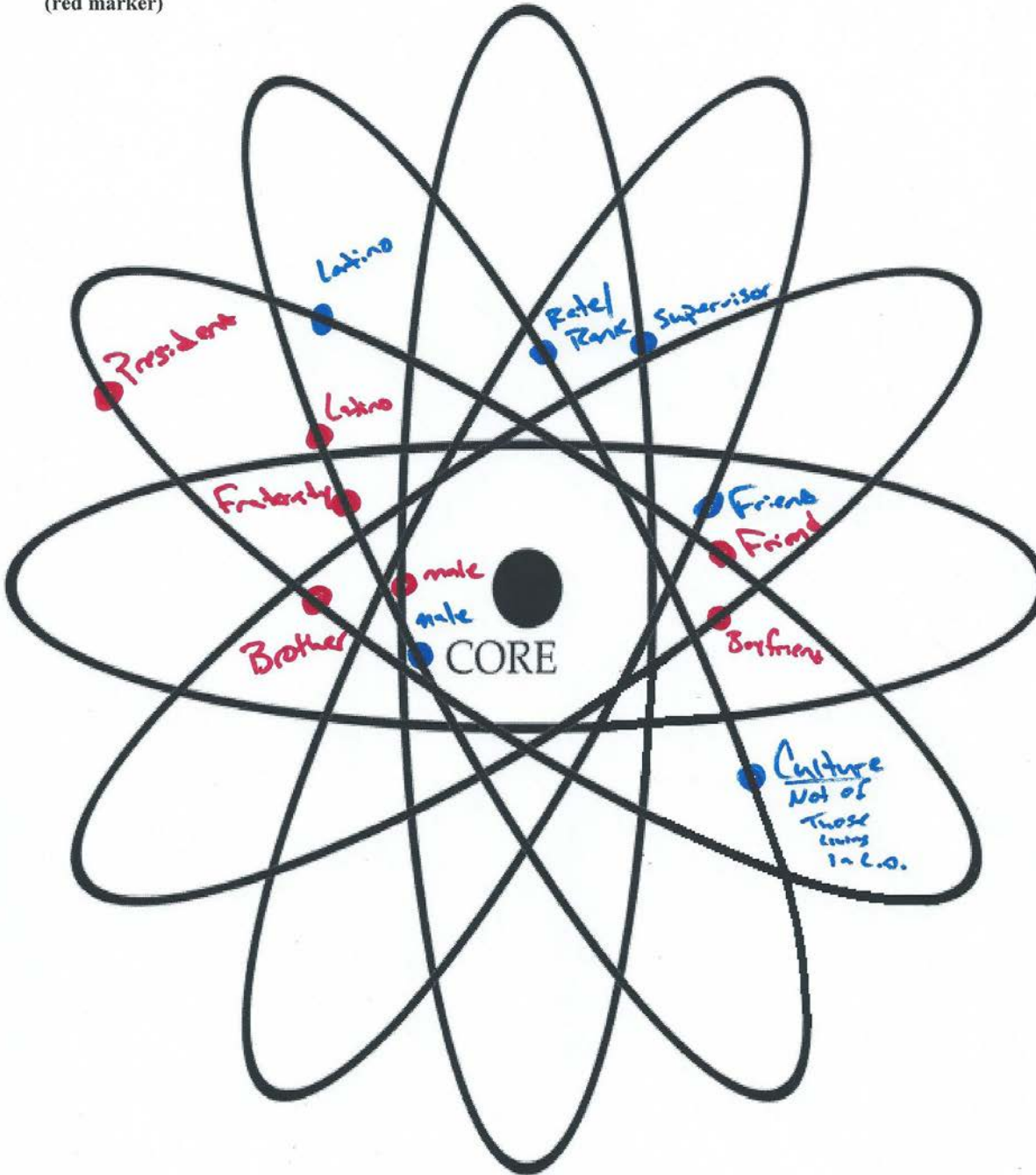

self-improve

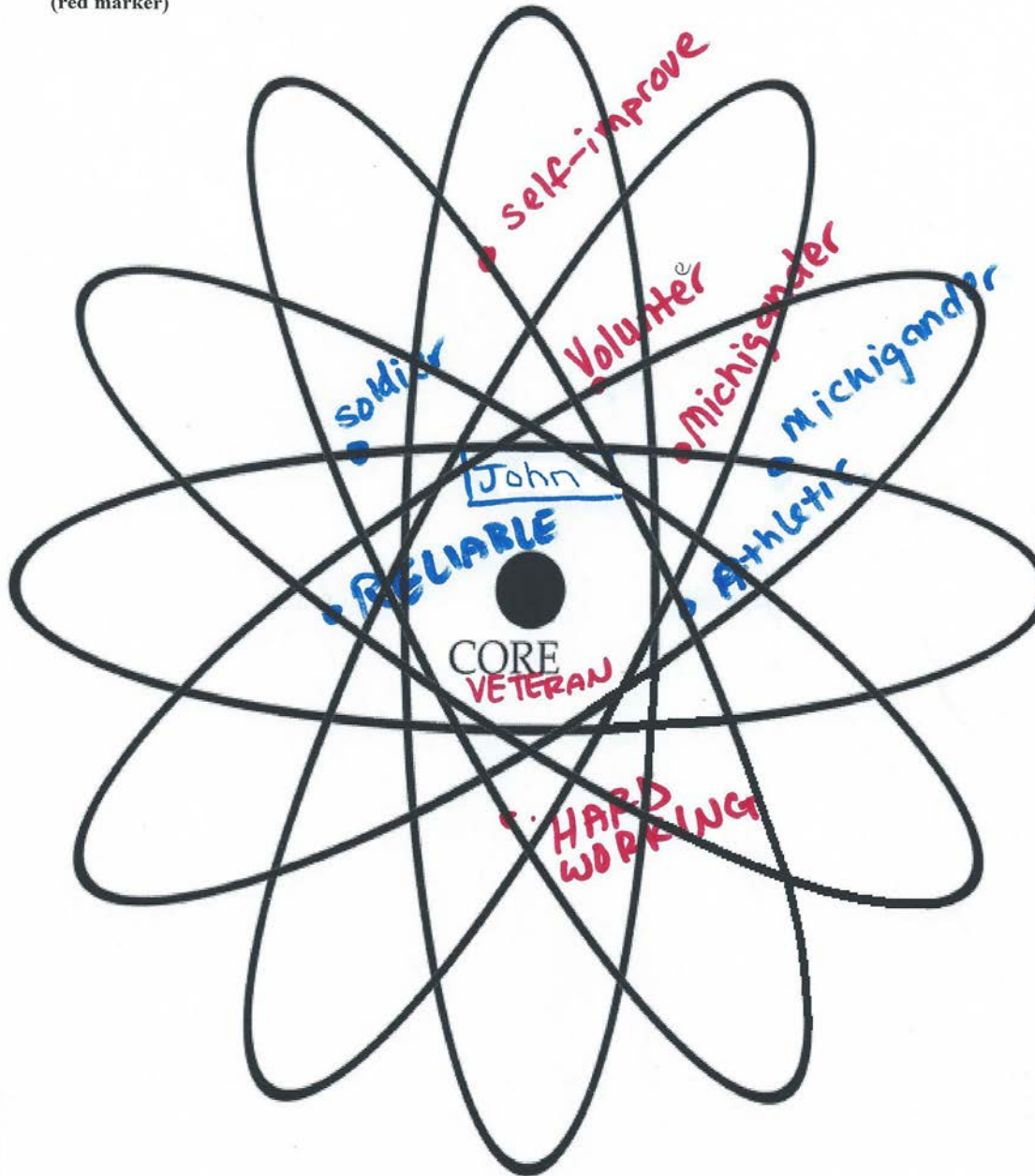Volunteer

Michigander

Michigander

soldier

John

Athletic

RELIABLE

CORE

VETERAN

HARD WORKING

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