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College Persistence: Young Military Veterans with PTSD

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Abstract

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College Persistence: Young Military Veterans with PTSD

By

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Dr. C. Michael Robinson

Committee Member

Dr. Ellen Wayne

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Dedication

I would like to acknowledge the support and guidance received by the incredible man, Dr. C. Michael Robinson. He is the most gracious and genuine leader. I could not ask for a better dissertation chair. I would like to thank Dr. Wayne, my dissertation member, for her feedback and time. I would also like to thank Dr. Pulos, my advisor, and all of the staff at St. John Fisher that have guided our cohort on our journey.

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Cohort One doctoral candidates were the first on the Syracuse campus to take on this challenge. We did it, and I am most proud of each of you. My team, the Mavericks, were the best table mates. We laughed together, worked together, and supported each other through this journey. I am so very glad we got to sit with each other every other weekend because I could not have chosen a better team.

Biographical Sketch

Rhonda M. Butler is currently the Manager of Volunteer Services at SUNY
Upstate Medical University in Syracuse, NY. After completing her Masters in
Management from Keuka College, she attended St. John Fisher College in the fall of
2013 and began doctoral studies in the Ed.D Program in Executive Leadership. Ms.
Butler pursued her research focusing on Young Military Veterans with PTSD under the
direction of Dr. C. Michael Robinson and Dr. Ellen Wayne and received the Ed.D degree
in 2016.

Abstract

Military veterans, ranging in age from 22 to 27, have been returning home in large numbers to enter college, but few are graduating. The phenomenological research study consisted of 10 telephone interviews with young military veterans who ranged in age from 23 to 31 (1 European American female, 4 European American males, 2 Hispanic males, 2 African American males, and 1 Asian male) who attended college for two or more semesters. The interviews were recorded and coded in a search for common themes that would uncover potential issues to persisting in college.

Through content analysis, three themes were derived: communication, trust, and support. The three themes were viewed through three lenses: their personal lives, the college experience, and the Veterans Administration. Results showed participants struggled with relationships with family and friends. Policy development should include Post 9/11 GI Bill to extend coverage beyond 36 months. More colleges should provide veteran catered services that assist with paperwork and class structure. The VA should increase efficiency for veterans to receive uninterrupted funding for college expenses that include housing. Once the student receives acceptance to a college, the VA should provide immediate and long term healthcare services that cover the initial physical to enter college and mental health services throughout a college degree.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction

For more than 10 years, over 200,000 young military veterans diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) have transitioned into civilian life. During their transition, many have decided to pursue higher education, but they are having problems staying in college. What barriers prevent them from persisting in college and from becoming college graduates? Many have speculated on the barriers, but this research study utilized a phenomenological study to uncover, from the veterans' perspective, the potential barriers and how future veterans can utilize specific tools to become college graduates.

Problem Statement

There are possible barriers caused by PTSD in young military veterans, ages 22 to 27, which prevent them from persisting in post-secondary educational institutions. Persistence in college is defined as completing a minimum of two semesters in college and continuing to be enrolled in a higher educational institution to work toward a baccalaureate degree.

Student veterans with PTSD are having problems on college campuses. They feel uncomfortable with people walking in close proximity, they have negative feelings that prevent them from trusting others, and, often times, they have quick tempers (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). Therefore, the research sought to identify the issues to persistence for this specific population and how those issues negatively affect persistence (Appendix A).

Since 2001, the number of US military personnel who have served in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars is estimated to be 2.6 million, with 85% in direct combat zones (Scurfield & Platoni, 2013). The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are also known as Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom (OIF/OEF). Scurfield and Platoni (2013) stated "more than 45,000 have been wounded; more than 108,000 battlefield casualties; and more than 940,000 have experienced multiple deployments" in these two wars (p. 31). The needs of those returning from combat deployment since 2002 are even more complex than previous wars.

Post-traumatic stress disorder, or other related mental health trauma, has been reported in as many as 20% of the veteran population returning from OIF/OEF (Hoge, Auchterlonie, & Milien, 2006). PTSD affects military veterans in many ways including nightmares reliving the trauma, survivor's guilt, sleep disturbance, negative views of self and the world, and hyper vigilance (Gates et al., 2012; Scurfield, 2004). PTSD has been shown to create a barrier to transitioning back into civilian life. DiRamio (2011) identified PTSD as a barrier for veterans and suggested pre-establishing therapy prior to entering college. Megivern, Pellerito, and Mowbray (2003) mentioned the negative impact PTSD had on educational aptitude in veterans. Similarly, Langer Ellison et al. (2009) correlated PTSD in young veterans, ages 18 to 29, with having a difficult time succeeding in college. DiRamio (2011) found veterans were using less than one fourth of their military-supported financial benefits to attend a post-secondary institution, with only 6% graduating with a 4 year college degree. How can we encourage student veterans with PTSD to stay in college and fully utilize their financial benefits?

There seems to be a lack of support for veterans on college campuses. Only 25% of 4 year higher education institutions offer veteran-focused services, and only 21% of those institutions offer veteran-dedicated services on campus (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). Ackerman, DiRamio, and Garza Mitchell (2009) reported that veterans generally require additional assistance with completing college admissions paperwork.

Government officials have been unable to collect data from private colleges showing persistence and graduation rates of veterans (Dao, 2013). The need to collect proper data is beneficial to government spending on veteran higher-education benefits. Collecting rigorous data is also important in order to validate the resources that are available to veterans and how to increase graduation rates of veterans from post-secondary institutions.

This research study answers the questions:

1. What are the issues to persisting in higher education for young military veterans, ages 22-27?

2. In what way are the named issues keeping the study participants from persisting in higher education?

Theoretical Rationale

Entering college as a military veteran with PTSD presents a greater challenge to a person than someone who has not participated in military service and does not have PTSD. Student development theory is a valid theoretical framework to guide the research in identifying issues to persistence in college. The theory is complex and provides various lenses upon which to study the phenomena.

The five areas of student development theory are: "psychosocial theories, cognitive development theories, maturity models, typology models, person-environment interaction models" (Baxter Magdola, 2009, p. 621) (Appendix B). The five areas offer in-depth insight into why someone would or would not succeed in college. Many theories offer a piece of a complex solution as to why someone might persist in college; however, student development theory shows the many levels that are a part of the complex resolution of persistence. The levels briefly described above offer not only the personal reasons, but also the environmental reasons for why someone persists in college. Porter (2008) reported that student veterans feel they have to adjust to a new culture when they are on a college campus. Part of that culture includes having one's own ideas and beliefs, which is different from the military where one is always reminded of what to believe and what one's mission is for the day. Furthermore, adjusting to a focus on only homework and class assignments is hard for a new student veteran (Porter, 2008). Students' degree of involvement in their college studies, campus life, and interactions with faculty are lenses through which students support their persistence in college (Astin, 1999). Based on this theory, if a student lacks maturity, does not interact well within his or her campus environment, and has low cognitive ability, he or she will not persist in college.

As each student has different life experiences and learning styles, it is important to utilize a complex theory that can encompass various aspects of a student veteran's life. Uncovering a veteran's perspective of potential issues to persisting in college provides further understanding into how student development theory provides a valuable framework for this research. Student development theory offers many models within its framework to support persistence.

Statement of Purpose

The research identifies issues that exist for young military veterans to persist in college. If the issues can be identified and addressed, then veterans have a way of increasing their chances of graduating with a college degree and finding employment with a salary that can sustain their lifestyle. Revealing and addressing the issues to college persistence can increase the number of veterans with a college degree and higher paying jobs. Currently, there are limited research articles that discuss the issues young military veterans face with regard to persistence in college.

Research Questions

The study seeks to answer the following questions from the perspective of military veterans, ages 22-27, self-diagnosed with or without PTSD, who were previously, or at the time of the study, enrolled in a minimum of two semesters of college:

1. What issues in veterans' personal lives affect persistence in college?

2. How do the named issues in veterans' personal lives affect persistence in college?

3. What issues within the college affect persistence?

4. How do the named issues within the college affect persistence?

5. What issues within the Veterans Administration affect persistence in college?

6. How do the named issues within the Veterans Administration affect persistence in college?

Potential Significance of the Study

DiRamio (2011) found that less than one-fourth of veterans use their military-supported financial benefits to attend a post-secondary institution, with only 6% graduating with a 4 year college degree. In 2012, a total of 25,000 veterans in New York State, as opposed to 100,000 qualifying veterans, utilized their government-funded education benefits to attend post-secondary education (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2013). The significance of this study is to find out why young military veterans, ages 22 to 27 with and without PTSD, have not persisted in college, and to provide tools for young veterans to use to persist in college and complete their goal to achieve a 4 year degree.

With what little is known about the success of military personnel graduating from college after their time in the military, further research is warranted. The research has the potential to uncover identifiable obstacles, from the veteran's perspective, that could be addressed in order for the veterans to be successful in higher education. Attaining a college education increases one's chances of being hired for a job in a higher wage range. Those who will benefit from this research are military personnel and veterans, higher education campuses, and policy makers who oversee Post-9/11 GI Bill funding.

In 2007, the financial recession hit America. The veteran unemployment rate in 2007 was 3.8% and rose to 8.7% in 2010. This compares to unemployment of non-veterans in 2007 at 4.4% and 9.4% in 2010 (US Department of Labor, 2011). As military personnel transitioned back into civilian life after their deployments from 2002 through 2013, they have found difficulty with a bleak job market; therefore, pursuing higher education was an option to make the veterans more marketable for higher paying jobs

(Congressional Digest, 2012). Another reason veterans have been unsuccessful with civilian employment is their lack of job experience in the civilian job market combined with their inability to transfer military skills to civilian work experience (Congressional Digest, 2012).

In addition to the civilian job skills young veterans were lacking upon returning home from military service, there was an economic crisis that hit the US from 2007 to 2009 causing further decline in available jobs. During the crisis, unemployment rates rose to 10% (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). With less jobs available in the job market, veterans attended college. Combining the military experience with a higher education degree allows veterans to increase their chances of being hired for a job with a higher salary (Giordani, 2012). To prove this point, Giordani (2012) reported participating employers in March 2008 found 1,074 veterans with a high school diploma, or equivalent certification, working in full-time jobs with a mean salary of $44,722. Compared to 14,234 non-veterans with a high school diploma, or equivalent, working full time with a mean salary of $36,222 (Giordani, 2012). In a study done by Kogut, Short, & Wall (2011), a veteran graduating with a college degree in the United States had a mean salary of $70,482, and a non-veteran with a college degree had a mean salary of $63,704 (Kogut et al., 2011). These numbers provide a clear view of how military service and graduating with a college degree are beneficial to higher pay (Kogut, Short, & Wall, 2011).

Definitions of Terms

Within the context of this research, the definition of terms follow.

Persistence – equivalent to completing at least two semesters of college.

Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) – a self-reported mental health condition that is triggered by a terrifying event—either experiencing it or witnessing it. Symptoms may include flashbacks, nightmares, and severe anxiety as well as uncontrollable thoughts about events (Mayo Clinic, 2014).

Chapter Summary

Over the past 10 years, PTSD has been reported in as many as 20% of young military veterans returning home from military theater. There are issues to persisting in college that are caused by PTSD. Veterans are attending college with multi-layered life situations; therefore, student development theory best supports why they are not persisting in college. The research study identifies issues, from the veteran's perspective, to overcome in order to successfully graduate from college.

The studies that support this topic and have laid the foundation for the research are reviewed in Chapter 2. The literature review includes research focused on PTSD in the general public and PTSD in veterans. Additionally, the literature review describes any person attending college with PTSD, and are compared to veterans attending college and the possible issues to their success.

Chapter 3 will explain the research methodology. Chapter 4 will display the results of the research. Chapter 5 will review the most compelling results of the research, conclude the research, and suggest future research.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction and Purpose

Since 2001, over two million military veterans, ages 22-27, have been returning home from wars in which the United States has participated in (Rudd, Goulding, & Bryan, 2011; Sayer et al., 2010). Upon their return home, some veterans choose to enroll in higher education to increase their knowledge and to potentially increase their pay rate (Ackerman et al., 2009; Rudd et al., 2011). However, studies have proven that a significant number of veterans are not staying in college. Gates et al. (2012) claimed that PTSD is prevalent in as many as 16% of the young men and women returning home from military service. Do young veterans have issues to persist in higher education due to their PTSD? To support such a claim, the following is presented: PTSD in society, PTSD in veterans, state of affairs for young veterans, average student entering college, average veteran with PTSD entering college, post-secondary point of view, and student development theory.

Reviews of Literature

PTSD in society. PTSD has existed since the beginning of time for military veterans, and it has been called by other names, such as: soldier's heart, shell shock, and war neurosis. The definitive source for PTSD diagnosis is the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (5th ed.; DSM-5; American Psychiatric Association [APA], 2013). The DSM-5 classifies symptoms of PTSD into four categories: re-experiencing, avoidance, negative cognitions and mood, and arousal characterized by symptoms

including nightmares reliving the trauma, survivor's guilt, sleep disturbance, a negative perspective with bursts of anger, and hyper vigilance (DSM-5, 2013; Gates et al., 2012; Scurfield, 2004).

PTSD is a form of an anxiety disorder that anyone can have based on the level of trauma in which they are exposed. Types of episodes that can cause PTSD are sexual or physical assault, natural disasters, wars, or a catastrophic event that is re-experienced by a trigger later in life (Piotrowski & Range, 2014). A person may have a percentage of PTSD (i.e. 20% or 30%), which depends on the person's resilience and not on the trauma that caused the PTSD. Two people may be witness to the same trauma, but may not have the same degree of PTSD (Andreasen, 2010). A person could have a very mild reaction or a strong reaction when something triggers their PTSD, and they relive the trauma (Andreasen, 2010). There is no way a healthcare practitioner can predict the degree of PTSD someone will have. Only after the triggering event can PTSD be diagnosed and a treatment plan be implemented (DSM-5, 2013; Piotrowski & Range, 2014).

PTSD in veterans. PTSD can happen to anyone; however, recent studies have shown that PTSD in veterans ranges from 7-25% of those returning from OIF/OEF (Rudd et al., 2011; Scurfield & Platoni, 2013). These veterans have been visiting the Veterans Administration (VA) facilities seeking support (Ackerman et al., 2009). In response, the VA has been trying to adequately use resources to support veterans through their transition back into civilian life so they can be more productive and the transition can be more streamlined (National Center for PTSD, n.d.).

Further assessment and evaluation of studies that have identified the cause and effect of PTSD on young veterans can help uncover how to better support these young

men and women. Once the formal classification of PTSD, as a disorder, was developed, service members felt validated that their symptoms were legitimate (Andreasen, 2010; Scurfield, 2004). This was important to the service members because prior to the official diagnosis, they felt their symptoms were not important or of value (Scurfield, 2004). The classification of PTSD paved the way for future veterans to have a diagnosis for the symptoms they were experiencing after being in combat and experiencing the tragedy associated with military service. The VA has assisted veterans with PTSD symptoms by implementing programs and services designed to support them with returning to work or school (Gates et al., 2012; Scurfield, 2004). The Veterans Administration and the Department of Defense (DoD) has established systems to support veterans after service, which have evolved over time to better accommodate their ever-changing needs.

Gates et al. (2012) reviewed empirical literature searching for rates of PTSD in veterans who had been in combat during the Vietnam War, Gulf War, and OIF/OEF. Of the 330 articles they found, 177 articles were written between 1990 and 2010, and claimed a high rate of PTSD among veterans and military personnel who served in the Vietnam War, Gulf War, and Iraq/Afghanistan wars. The Gates et al. study noted that in 2003, the DoD mandated service members within 2 weeks of returning home to be screened for physical and mental assessment. As a result, Army soldiers (9.8%) and Marines (4.7%) returning from OIF/OEF screened positive for PTSD. In 2005, the DoD reassessed service members within 6 months of returning home only to find greater rates (16.7%) of military personnel screening positive for mental health problems including PTSD (Gates et al., 2012). Gates et al. (2012) further explained that in 2010, the VA began requiring mandatory physical and mental analysis of all returning OIF/OEF

veterans every 90 days to diagnose any immediate or prolonged problems after returning home. The early assessment and diagnosis of PTSD leads to earlier treatment and support, so the veteran can transition quicker into civilian life (Gates et al.). Not seeking VA-supported treatment and coping mechanisms may result in a lapse of care for those with PTSD.

While Gates et al. (2012) discussed the prevalence of PTSD in veterans, Hoge et al. (2006) studied the relationship concerning mental health problems, the use of mental health services, and combat exposure. They used a pre- and post-deployment mental health assessment tools for OIF/OEF combat military personnel between May 2003 and April 2004. The standardized post-deployment assessment tool was mandated to be completed by all service members upon returning from active duty, and it indicated that 19.1% ($n = 222,620$) service members, recently home from Iraq, and 11.3% ($n = 16,318$) home from Afghanistan, reported mental health problems. The authors associated the mental health problems with combat exposure, mental health referrals, and decreased interest in returning to military service (Hoge et al., 2006). Mental health services were obtained within 1 year by 35% of the returning service members from Iraq. As a result of the study, Hoge et al. (2006) concluded the pre- and post-deployment mental health assessment tools were a good indicator of the mental impact deployment had on service members deployed to the OIF/OEF theaters. The authors also reported that the assessment tools could not predict the amount of mental health services needed after deployment. Finally, Hoge et al. (2006) stated the greater number of OIF veterans utilizing mental health care brings to light the additional challenges in the amount of mental health resources available for veterans returning after war.

Continuing with attention on OIF/OEF veterans, Outcalt et al. (2014) studied whether symptoms of PTSD and chronic pain were both common conditions in OIF/OEF veterans who were vulnerable to it, and if the pain felt was higher for those with both conditions versus chronic pain alone. The participants ranged in age from 21 to 73, and were predominantly male (*n* = 185). OIF/OEF veterans who participated in an initial trial study named Evaluations for Stepped Care of Chronic Pain (ESCAPE), who had either chronic pain (*n* = 173) or who had both PTSD and chronic pain (*n* = 68) were asked to participate in the study by Outcalt et al. (2014). Using baseline data from the ESCAPE program, additional standardized tests were conducted to further assess the participants' levels of PTSD and chronic pain. Results confirmed that participants with PTSD and chronic pain felt higher pain levels (72.30% of 68 participants) than those with just chronic pain alone (63.83% of 173) (Outcalt et al, 2014).

Based on the articles reviewed, common themes were uncovered that include: the problems facing young veterans build exponentially with physical and emotional pain, there is a correlation between combat exposure and increased diagnoses of PTSD, and VA mental health services are needed by veterans returning home from OIF/OEF theater. Further understanding of the veterans' situation is explored next.

State of affairs for young vets. Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom are the wars the US military has been fighting since 2002 in and around Iraq and Afghanistan (Smith-Osborne, 2009). The needs of those returning from combat deployment since 2002 are even more complex than previous wars (Gates et al., 2012). The complexity of their situation includes numerous deployments, greater exposure to combat, and a weak economic market (Gates et al., 2012; Hoge et al., 2006). To address

some of their needs upon returning home, the government and non-profit agencies have been establishing programs to assist veterans in their transition back to civilian life. However, based on the review of current research studies, it has been suggested that OIF/OEF veterans with PTSD symptoms may find it harder to successfully transition to employment or complete a college degree after completing their service in the military (Hoge et al., 2006; Larson & Norman, 2014; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010).

After serving in a branch of the military, service men and women return to the US to begin the process of transitioning into civilian life. This transition can be harder for veterans with PTSD as they have to develop coping mechanisms for their PTSD as well as settle into their new civilian life (Larson & Norman, 2014). Military personnel who have recently changed status to a civilian is changed in many ways once they return home. For instance, the veterans are older, have military experience, and have knowledge about other countries that they cannot relate to anything back home (Ackerman et al., 2009; Cigrang et al., 2014; Demers, 2011; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). The veterans developed new friendships with other military members that most often began during combat training (Mittal et al., 2013). Those friendships offer someone they can relate to and speak with about their experiences in the military (Mittal et al., 2013). It is plausible that sometimes family members cannot relate to the veteran's experience, so sharing their experiences that were lived while in the military could be difficult for a veteran to express (Demers, 2011).

Demers (2011) studied veterans' reintegration into civilian life. Conducted between 2006 and 2008, this mixed methods study included surveys and focus groups made up of military veterans, National Guard, Reserves, and active-duty soldiers. A total

of 45 males and three females participated, ranging in age from 19 to 51, and they were deployed from one to four times (M = 2). The six focus groups asked participants for their narrative on what would be beneficial for transition, and the responses were recorded and transcribed. The data was analyzed, uncovering two major themes "deploying to war" and "coming home" (Demers, 2011, p. 167). The first theme, deploying to war meant the feelings service members had as they went to war, while they were in war, and how they felt once they returned from war. The focus groups uncovered three subthemes for the first theme, which were *we are warriors*, *no fear*, and *feeling high*. While the second theme, "coming home," meant the feelings of disconnection upon returning home and difficulty with coping in civilian life. The focus groups uncovered three subthemes for the second theme, which were *time travelers*, *no one understands us*, and *crisis of identity*.

The authors realized this posed problems for the participants transitioning back into civilian life, and the authors proposed education regarding military culture be provided to social workers, health care practitioners, and higher education counselors in order to assist the veterans with feeling more comfortable in the civilian culture. Veterans leaving the military culture have a hard time transitioning into their civilian lives, which creates a transition period that is not always easy to adapt to (Demers, 2011). Demers also reported participants wanted more social support during their transition period, which would help them readapt to the civilian culture.

Brancu et al. (2014) further supported the idea that social support of OIF/OEF veterans is critical to their transition. Their study considered OIF/OEF veterans with and without PTSD and whether there was a relationship between mental distress and social

support. The Brancu et al. (2014) multiple-site mixed-methods research study consisted of a self-assessment questionnaire and symptomatic interview given to 1,825 veterans to assess their post-deployment mental health. The authors reported from the self-assessment that 172 (9%) veterans had PTSD only, 397 (21.7%) had PTSD and comorbidity, while 389 (21.3%) did not have a PTSD mental health diagnosis, and the 867 (47.5%) additional veterans did not meet the criteria for a mental health diagnosis.

Brancu et al. (2014) found social support for veterans with PTSD was 3 times lower than for veterans who did not meet mental health diagnosis criteria. Brancu et al. (2014) reported veterans with PTSD had a reduced ability to problem solve and reduced functional ability due to their PTSD. Additionally, the researchers could not assume that increasing social support would positively affect veterans with PTSD.

Further reporting of the impact of mental health services was completed by Hoge et al. (2006), which sought to test if there was a relationship between combat experience and the use of mental health services within the first year of returning home from military service. They used the Post-Deployment Health Assessment (PDHA), a screening tool for assessment of veterans' health, psychological problems, and post-deployment problems.

In addition to the PDHA, the Defense Medical Surveillance System (DMSS) was also used for this study. The DMSS is a public health database that encompasses military personnel's medical visit history, demographic information, and military service data. The researchers used the DMSS database to retrieve data for a total of 303,905 veterans.

The data was collected for Army and Marine personnel between May 1, 2003 and April 30, 2004. The sample included personnel returning from deployment to Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan ($n = 16,318$), Operation Iraqi Freedom ($n = 222,620$),

and other locations (n = 64,967) (Hoge et al., 2006, p. 1023). A copy of the completed PDHA assessment is kept in the Defense Medical Surveillance System (DMSS).

Hoge et al. (2006) determined that 19.1% of veterans returning from a tour in Iraq, 11.3% of the military personnel returning from Afghanistan, and 8.5% of returning from other locations had increased rates of mental health problems associated with their combat time in war. The deployment location also had an effect on the number of veterans referred for mental health problems. For example, the study reported that "out of the 222,620 Operation Iraqi Freedom veterans, 22,324 (10%) reported PTSD symptoms, 2,411 (1%) reported suicidal ideation, 4,695 (2%) reported interpersonal aggressive ideation, and 14,777 (6.6%) were hospitalized during deployment" (Hoge et al., 2005, p. 1027). This contrasts with the OEF veterans (n = 16,318) and other site (n = 64,967) veterans in that they had less-positive responses to PTSD symptoms (845, or 5%, and 1,374, or 2%, respectively); suicidal ideation was 107 (.06%) and 410 (.06%), respectively; interpersonal aggressive ideation was 189 (1%) and 713 (1%), respectively; and 593 (3.6%) of the OEF and 2,684 (4%) of the other site veterans were hospitalized during deployment (Hoge et al., 2006). Additionally, Hoge et al. (2006) reported that 35% of Iraq war service members sought psychological care at a VA healthcare system facility within the first year of returning home. Seeking mental health support within 1 year of ending military service suggests a strategy that could assist with the transition to civilian life (Hoge et al., 2006).

Continuing on the focus of OIF/OEF veterans, Cigrang et al. (2014) focused on the impact of extended combat deployment on airmen's mental health, alcohol consumption, and long-term relationships. The study was based on preliminary data

collected on US Air Force security forces (USAF) in OIF/OEF. The preliminary data, based on self-reported data from surveys, reported that the USAF in the unit studied had higher rates of psychological and relationship problems within 1 year of returning home. The researchers implemented a longitudinal study to examine the unit's psychological well-being, alcohol consumption, and personal relationships as a follow up to the preliminary data collection. Their focus was two consecutive groups of USAF personnel who were sent to Iraq in 2009 and 2010, each, for 1 year. The researchers requested that the participants complete the survey anonymously prior to deploying to Iraq, during deployment, and after returning home. A total of 318 surveys were sent to participants, with 286 responded to the survey while deployed. Between 6 to 9 months after returning home, each group was requested to attend a focus group discussion on a single Air Force base. A total of 204 participated in person, while 35 participated via a web-based survey (Cigrang et al., 2014). Of the 204, 164 (80%) were matched to their pre-deployment survey. Of the 164, a total of 142 (86.5%) completed an additional set of assessment measures while deployed. The participants ranged in age from 19 to 46 ($M = 25.36$, $SD = 5.74$), and 92.6% of the participants were male (Cigrang, et al., 2014).

Cigrang et al. (2014) used a 22-item measure, with items taken from the Peacekeeping Experiences Scale, to evaluate combat exposure while the USAF personnel were deployed. The researchers also used the 17-item measure, PTSD Checklist-Military (PCL-M) version, which matches the DSM-IV (APA, 1994) diagnostic criteria for PTSD. Diagnostic scores ≥50 were considered to represent high levels of PTSD on the PCL-M. During pre- and post-deployment. Cigrang et al. reported significant changes showing a sharp increase in PTSD symptoms after returning home from their tour in Iraq.

Cigrang et al. (2014) used a nine-item measure, the Patient Health Questionnaire (PHQ-9) to assess depressive symptoms. Scores ≥15 on the PHQ-9 signified high levels of depressive symptoms. The reported results showed a small increase in depressive symptoms among USAF unit members in battle during their mission in 2009 and 2010.

Cigrang et al. (2014) used a 12-item measure, Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) to gather data on "subjective, perceived adequacy of social support across three sources including family, friends and significant other" (p. 60). The authors noted social support was only analyzed at post-deployment. Scoring of the MSPSS ranged from 12-84 totals with each question being rated on a "seven-point scale of 1, meaning very strongly disagree, and 7, meaning very strongly agree" (Cigrang et al., 2014, p. 60).

Cigrang et al. (2014) also evaluated a grouping of symptom levels in an individual's pre- and post-deployment. Results reported on the PCL-M assessment for pre-deployment were that 153 (93.3%) had few or no symptoms of PTSD, 10 (6.1%) had mild to moderate symptoms, while only 1 (0.6%) had severe symptoms. This is contrasted with the post-deployment scores on the PCL-M with 87 (53.4%) having few or no symptoms, 42 (25.8%) with mild to moderate symptoms, and 34 (20.9%) with severe symptoms. Furthermore, depression assessed on the PHQ-9 reported pre-deployment 158 (96.9%) had few or no symptoms, 5 (3.1%) had mild to moderate symptoms, and none (0%) having severe symptoms of depression. This contrasts with post-deployment reports of 115 (71%) with few or no symptoms, 32 (19.8%) with mild to moderate symptoms, and 15 (9.3%) with severe symptoms of depression.

Cigrang et al. (2014) reported an additional assessment of factors associated with USAF personnel's decline in behavior functioning post-deployment that caused a rise in scores to 37% for moderate deterioration and 20.8% for severe deterioration. Included in their study was the claim that participants who experienced combat attack or devastation doubled their chances of scoring in the severe deterioration range during post-deployment (from 20-25% to 40-45%). In addition, participants who had three or more previous deployments during OIF/OEF were at greater risk for significant deterioration in mental functioning (47.6%).

The final part of the study conducted by Cigrang et al. (2014) included semi-structured focus groups at the time of pre-deployment, deployment, and post-deployment, and participants were grouped by whether they were in an intimate relationship or not. The focus groups were used to gather feedback from the USAF members to improve resources available to them as well as to provide further clarification for the survey findings. One of the themes that resulted from the focus groups was the participant's belief that there was a lack of support from his or her home military unit during deployment. Feedback from post-deployment revealed a feeling of ungratefulness from military leaders. Positive feedback included the importance of maintaining relationships with fellow veterans in post-deployment. The feedback the USAF units provided could be used to support future veterans transitioning into civilian life.

Cigrang et al. (2014) determined there was a correlation between the amount of combat military personnel experienced and its effects on personal functioning. This supports Scurfield and Platoni's (2013) findings that combat exposure is a cause for PTSD and further psychological problems.

Reinforcing the findings of Gates et al. (2012) and Hoge et al. (2006) regarding the impact multiple deployments have on increasing the risk for combat-exposure-induced PTSD, Scurfield and Platoni (2013) also mentioned the relationship between deployment and combat exposure in their book *Healing War Trauma*. Gates et al. (2012) also concluded how important it is to diagnose PTSD soon after military personnel return home. Service members have fear of being diagnosed with PTSD because it might jeopardize their continuation of service in the military, and researchers further suggested that veterans who have not been diagnosed might carry their combat trauma with them without seeking treatment (Gates et al., 2012; Hoge et al., 2006). This could delay the use of clinically based coping mechanisms for PTSD symptoms (Gates et al., 2012).

In further support of services for OIF/OEF veterans, Larson and Norman (2014) researched whether targeted interventions would facilitate reintegration of military personnel into civilian life. The authors hypothesized there would be problems with outcomes like "financial well-being, work-related problems, unlawful behaviors, and general limitations due to mental health problems" (p. 416). In order to validate the assumptions, Larson and Norman (2014) conducted a study that included Marine service members who participated in the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) ($n = 461$) by completing a survey before and after their deployment. The pre-deployment assessment survey included combat exposure, resilience, pain, and PTSD. The post-deployment assessment survey included work problems, mental health, pain, and social support. The results of both surveys were compared and then combined to determine if there was validation in the hypothesized outcomes mentioned above. The longitudinal study, which started in January 2010, showed a correlation between PTSD after military deployment

and problems in adjustment to civilian life. Larson and Norman (2014) suggested addressing PTSD symptoms early in the transition period to lower the hazards involved with functional problems during civilian life transition.

Also focusing on transition, Herman and Yarwood (2014) conducted a study to assess the transition of United Kingdom military veterans. Describing military service as an "imprint" on a soldier's life (p. 45), Herman and Yarwood's objective was to identify the transition experiences of military veterans from service to civilian life. The data collection involved interviews of 27 former military veterans living in Plymouth, United Kingdom. The interview participants included 22 men and five women from the Army, Royal Navy, and Royal Air Force. The participants were recruited by an advertisement in the city of Plymouth and by using a snowball sampling. The participants' military service ranged from three to 38 years, with a 6-month to 30-year range of time since they left the service. Herman and Yarwood (2014) focused on veterans that considered their transition to civilian life as being successful because the authors found a gap in the literature that focused on successful transitions. The authors found military personnel moved often, which made it hard for the participants to identify a home base. This resulted in many veterans having a hard time settling into a permanent home in their civilian life. This was further complicated for some of the veterans because they were looking for employment in a specific field, like diving or oil rigs (Herman and Yarwood, 2014).

Herman and Yarwood (2014) further found, after analyzing the results of the interviews they conducted, that some veterans felt their transition was harder due to their military careers being cut short due to the UK's military cuts. The participants reported feeling the transition process was out of their hands and, therefore, they had no control.

However, staying in contact and attending reunion events was a way for the veterans to stay connected to their past. Other limitations uncovered by interviews included having limited work experience in the civilian world prior to deployment, which may have made it harder for veterans to re-approach work after leaving the military. Other veterans felt the clean break from the military allowed for closure and provided a sense of looking forward to a new life and its challenges. Herman and Yarwood (2014) concluded with recommendations for further research on the transition of veterans to civilian life for those that had a hard time transitioning.

Further study of military veterans was conducted by Mittal et al. (2013), who tested whether there was a stigma related to PTSD in veterans. The qualitative study included 16 OIF/OEF veterans, two females and 14 males. The study consisted of four focus groups of participants who ranged in age from 25 to 40 ($M = 35.8$), and were recruited from the Central Arkansas Veterans Healthcare System (CAVHS). Participants had been diagnosed with PTSD and were receiving psychological support from the CAVHS (Mittal et al., 2013). Participants had a mean of 4 years since their separation from the military, and a mean of 2.6 years since they were diagnosed with PTSD (Mittal et al., 2013). Each focus group was recorded and transcribed to uncover themes. Mittal et al. uncovered that veterans with PTSD felt there was a stigma related to having PTSD by the general public. If a veteran receives treatment for his/her PTSD, then they admit they have the condition and can be further labeled. This stigma prevented many of the focus group participants from seeking treatment within the first year of returning home. Once the veterans sought out treatment, they overcame the stigma. The participants of the study reported they felt camaraderie with their fellow veterans during group therapy. The

researchers concluded this supported the notion that group therapy and support is important for veterans returning home.

Based on the assumption that veterans with PTSD have a hard time transitioning into civilian life, Duax, Bohnert, Rauch, and Defever (2014) tested the relationships between PTSD, social support, and emotional hiding. The study involved OIF/OEF veterans who recently returned home from active duty. Of the 536 participants, 90.3% were male and 9.7% were female. Participants' criteria were that they had to have registered within the first year with the "Veterans Integrated Service Network 11, VA Ann Arbor Healthcare System (VAAAHS)" (p. 572), and have completed the post-deployment mental health screening questionnaire. The authors found 29.29% of the 536 veterans in their study were diagnosed with PTSD. Their research further analyzed a correlation between the degree of social support young veterans have with their chances of having PTSD via a questionnaire that was transferred to a logistic regression model to measure the association between social support and PTSD. Duax et al. (2014) reported that the lower the social support, the greater the chances were for the diagnosis of PTSD, or it can be viewed from the point of one unit of increased social support equates to 7% reduced rate of screening positively for PTSD.

The previous articles described the transition to civilian life, including issues caused by PTSD symptoms. A switch in discussion will uncover unique circumstances veterans who are entering college have compared to most civilian students entering college. The discussion includes a description of who is entering post-secondary education and whether they are studying online or in a traditional classroom on a campus.

Students entering college. The National Center for Education Statistics 2015 report provided the number of students who completed either a certificate, associate, bachelor, master, doctorate, or post-bac or post-master program was 4,748,673 students between July 1, 2012 and June 30, 2013 (Kena et al., 2015). From that total, 2,141,386 (45%) were between the ages of 18 to 24 years who received a degree. Additionally, the number of students beginning a post-secondary education as an undergraduate in the fall of 2013, on a full-time basis, was 10.9 million, and those beginning on a part-time basis was 6.5 million (Kena et al., 2015). Comparing these numbers shows there is a greater number of students entering than graduating from higher education institutions.

Niu and Tienda (2013) completed a longitudinal study of high school seniors in Texas schools. The initial participants totaled 13,803 survey responders, but due to budget constraints, a random sample of 8,345 seniors were pulled to complete a follow-up survey. The study focused on three distinct participant groups: Wave 1, a representative sample of the initial group (8,345 participants); Wave 2, a subsample 1 year after high school graduation (5,836 participants); and Wave 3, a small group that was interviewed 4 years after graduating from high school (485 participants). Niu and Tienda (2013) reported that the reason students did not persist in college was because they did not have enough support from their social and personal relationships. The students did not properly prepare for the rigors of college. Finally, the students did not have adequate financial support to pay for college. Students who reported graduating from an affluent high school were twice as likely to graduate from a 4 year college on time versus a graduate from an average-income high school (Niu and Tienda, 2013). The graduates from the affluent high schools also were 1.65 times more likely to remain

enrolled in college compared to those that graduated from an average-income high school (Niu and Tienda, 2013).

Further analysis of undergraduate students was conducted by Bowman (2010) and included 19 higher education institutions in his study of first-year undergraduate students. The longitudinal study included asking the students ($n = 4,501$) basic questions about their demographic information, their high school experiences, and their personal belief systems through a battery of assessment tools. The participants were asked the same questions at the end of their freshman year ($n = 3,081$). Bowman believed that if a student had a strong and positive psychological framework, they would succeed at college.

Bowman's study (2010) found women outperformed men on the self-evaluation tool when it came to doing well their first year with personal growth, mastering their environment, their purpose in life, and the positive outlook on relationships with others. Bowman (2010) reported that being 20-years old or older, and being in college for the first time does provide a greater chance of purpose compared to most 18 and 19-year-old freshman. Bowman also suggested that a supportive college campus increased the chances of greater psychological well-being. A supportive college campus was defined as a campus that offered opportunities for greater social and academic options while demonstrating diversity and encouraging communication. Additionally, the psychological perspective variables included the degree of diverse courses taken during their college years, the degree of alcohol consumption, their number of interactions with faculty, and the degree of challenging courses they took as students. When students took more diverse courses, drink alcoholic beverages little or not at all, communicated more with faculty, and took more challenging courses, they had higher scores in the area of psychological

perspective. A stronger psychological perspective increases the chances of being successful in college beyond the first year.

Additional assessment of undergraduate students was conducted by Brock (2010) who reviewed literature to uncover interventions that supported at-risk students to persist in college. He reported attendance at colleges has changed over the last 40 years where traditional students, students that enter college directly from high school, are no longer the average incoming college student. Students that enter a 4 year institution have greater success at persistence (60%) versus students that enter a community college (32% graduation rate) (Brock, 2010). Brock reported that students entering college directly after completing high school and who have taken repeated grade levels of reading and math have higher graduation rates. In contrast, students at risk were those who were considered non-traditional due to their full-time employment, family responsibilities, and inability to enter college directly after high school.

Brock (2010) reviewed additional articles that claimed students were not graduating due to the lack of supportive services that assisted students with their direction and goals, offering remedial courses on a shorter timeframe versus an entire semester in order for the students to catch up to other students, and offering more tuition assistance to increase student success. Brock reported that "over a lifetime, an adult with a bachelor's degree will earn about $2.1 million—roughly one-third more than an adult who starts but does not complete college and nearly twice as much as one who has only a high school diploma" (Brock, 2010, p. 110). Attending college and persisting can be crucial to a person's livelihood. There were 17.5 million students enrolled in the fall semester at 2

and 4 year higher education institutions in 2005 in the United States. This shows the volume of students reaching for success through entering higher education.

Transitioning to college from high school or for adult learners can be difficult without proper support. However, adult learners have more obstacles to success than recent high school graduates. Jamieson (2012) conducted a mixed-methods study that was based on a transitions model. Transitions are stages each person goes through in learning and adapting to life. The study provided examples of transitions in life that cause stress and experiences that force people to change their lives. Jamieson used a purposeful sample of adult participants. She wanted to find what life events created the need for adults to attend college.

Jamieson (2012) used three modes of research to conduct her study. The first mode was a questionnaire given to 1,600 students at the end of their first year of college, with 765 (47.8%) responding. The first mode focused on students' inspirations and advantage to attending college, their college experience, and their participation in formal study 5 years prior to beginning their college experience at the time of the study. The second mode was interviewing the original 765 respondents to ask about their study experiences. Last, the third mode was a questionnaire given to the original 765 participants, asking questions about their educational activities during the 5 years after being enrolled in college, which yielded a total of 195 (25.4%) respondents.

Results from the first mode reported the largest number of participants, who ranged in age from 30 to 39, with almost 60% employed, and almost 50% in managerial positions. Jamieson (2012) reported 589 (77%) of the original 765 participants stated they attended college for the intellectual stimulation. The results of mode two were not

reported individually. The results of the third mode, when combined with the results of mode one, identified four types of students: (a) *ongoing*, 54% of the 195, who continued their studies for 11 years; (b) *intermittent*, 32% of the 195, who studied on and off over the 11-year timespan; (c) *resumer*, 9% of the 195, who had not attended any college prior to enrolling in college; and (d) the *one-off*, 5% of the 195, who did not attend college before or after the original study. The results of the three modes were then compared to transition periods in people's lives. The transition periods varied from planned retirement to unexpected illness of the participants or their loved ones. Additionally, the level of stress the transitional experience caused could also determine the success rate of a student.

In summary, Jamieson (2012) explained that transitions in life do impact adult learners, and a coping strategy should be developed in order to succeed in college. Utilizing coping strategies in order to successfully transition through life may be one way of persisting in college. The following section describes the number of students attending college within an institution's physical classroom versus those studying online, offering two solutions for attending college.

Number of students in classrooms vs. online. The US Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2012) posted there were 2,002,815 students who took distance learning courses in 2012, which is 11% of all undergraduates. Distance learning was described as courses taken via a computer, live chat, or long distance. Although online courses are increasing, the majority of students are still attending the traditional brick and mortar classroom. As more veterans take advantage of their Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits to pay for college, the majority are still attending in-person

classroom settings and not partaking in online courses. This could be due to the lower amount of money offered for housing if a veterans takes online courses (US Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015).

Students with disabilities. PTSD is classified as a mental disorder, and it is important to review how people with mental disabilities are viewed and supported while in college. Megivern et al. (2003) focused on supporting the higher educational needs of people with mental disabilities. Megivern et al. utilized a mixed-methods study that examined, through interviews and data analysis, the post-secondary education experience of those with mental illness. After 35 students with mental illness had left college, they were asked to respond to semi-structured interview questions. The criteria for the respondents were that they had to have prior college experience, their symptoms of mental distress occurred before the age of 25, and they had withdrawn from college at least once in their lifetime. The respondents were under the age of 45 when interviewed for the study. The questions included why they applied to college, what mental health services they used while in college, and what other services should have been provided. Further questioning of participants included inquiry into their relationships with their families, with a mental health professional, and with college faculty. Another focus of the study was to better understand the reasons why students left college and what their next steps were after leaving college.

Megivern et al. (2003) initially interviewed participants asking for a timeline that included important events, episodes of psychiatric problems, and entrance and exit from college. After the initial interview, each participant was interviewed, again, asking for three specific information breakdowns that included: "background prior to college,

college experiences, and post-college outcomes" (p. 220). Variables were created based on themes heard in the interviews. Descriptive statistics were produced on demographics, number of times enrolled in college, background variables prior to college, academic variables, and the use of psychological service variables. T-tests were used to define modifications in timing of "functional onset, persistence, treatment utilization, and total semesters attended based on the major demographic variables" (Megivern et al., 2003, p. 220). T-tests were also used to analyze changes of "mental illness onset in persistence, functional onset, interference scores, mental health service use, and total semesters completed" (p. 220) in groups of those that had psychological symptoms that started before college versus those that had symptoms that began during college.

Megivern et al. (2003) reported that 18 participants had an onset of psychiatric symptoms before attending college (mean age = 16.56, SD = 3.52). The 17 remaining participants felt that the onset of their symptoms began while attending college (mean age = 19.65, SD = 5.61).

The results showed, on average, participants had 10 years between their last time in college and the date the interview was conducted (Megivern et al., 2003). Out of the 35 respondents, 28 reported they had at least one family member who was supportive of their college education. Thirteen of the 35 participants felt they lacked confidence in their abilities to navigate college. When asked how their symptoms interfered with college, 53.09% ($n = 43$) answered with feelings of reduced emotional and behavioral skills. They included irritability, sleeplessness, and lack of concentration. The major reason the respondents withdrew from college was because of their mental illness symptoms. In addition, 18.52% ($n = 15$) had academic problems that included many absences from

class, troubles with completing classwork, and low grades that were all associated with their psychiatric problems. Megivern et al. (2003) also reported that 8.64% ($n = 7$) of the participants had low self-efficacy resulting in low self-confidence and low motivation. Out of the 35 participants, 30 attained psychological health services while in college. Only 11 (9.32%) graduated from college with an undergraduate degree.

The Megivern et al. (2003) study was conducted for the general public with mental disorders and psychological problems. Through their study, data was collected that helped to identify obstacles for students, including: (a) judgment of students with mental disorders by college staff, (b) payment for and coordination of prescribed medications that are important to lower the effects of symptoms, and (c) the absence of (or minimal) support services on the college campus. As a result, a person with a disability may have distrust of others that extends from professors to financial aid staff.

Average veteran with PTSD entering college. During the years 2007 through 2008, the American Council on Education (2009) reported that 85% of active-duty military personnel and veterans in undergraduate degree programs were 24 years old or older. Women represented 27% of those veterans in college. In the same year, 23% of the students attended full time, and 37% attended part time.

Based on the 2007-2008 numbers, 43% of active and veteran military members were attending public 2 year schools, while 20% were attending public 4 year schools. In contrast, 13% were attending private not-for-profit 4 year schools, and 12% were at private for-profit schools (American Council on Education, 2009).

To determine the success of OIF/OEF veterans in college and work, Routon's (2014) longitudinal study used a mixed-methods technique of least squares, a sibling

fixed-effects approach, and a propensity score matching. The data used for the analysis came from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1997, which surveyed people born from 1980 to 1984 (Routon, 2014). A sample of 9,000 respondents was used for the study and the same sample of participants was continuously surveyed until 2010.

The means of the outcome variables across veteran status and by sub-sample in Routon's (2014) study revealed labor outcomes of non-veterans (n = 8,455) making an average hourly rate of $20.054, while veterans ($n$ = 348) made $17.564 per hour. The weeks worked and job satisfaction were very similar in numbers (weeks worked equaled 31.415 for non-veterans and 31.027 for veterans, and job satisfaction was 3.956 for non-veterans and 3.940 for veterans) (Routon, 2014). Educational outcomes in the study reported .521 non-veterans attempted college and .062 of the non-veterans graduated with an associate degree, and .595 veterans attempted college and .095 veterans graduated with an associate degree.

Overall, veterans were more successful with earning an associate degree (.095) compared to non-veterans (.062). Veterans graduating with a bachelor's degree was at .118, while non-veterans were more successful with a .194 outcome. This study shows a gap in the success rate of veterans persisting to graduate with a college degree (Routon, 2014).

Further support of success in college for veterans was a study conducted by Smith-Osborne (2009) in which she analyzed how Gulf War veterans' achievement of higher education affected their psychological well-being. The author initially evaluated articles to see if there was resiliency associated with combat work that would assist veterans with the transition into civilian life.

Smith-Osborne's (2009) research consisted of secondary data analysis for a
sample of 2075 Gulf War veterans, which was extracted from the 2001 National Survey
of Veterans (NSV) questionnaire data set, which was originally conducted to investigate
ecological domains. The NSV participants included 349 females and 1,726 males
between the ages of 18 and 36. The majority of the participants were Caucasian (71.1%),
had a mean education level of 14.15 years, and were married (69%). Descriptive statistics
for predictor variables ($n = 2,075$) included:

- Used VA educational benefits (yes: $n = 633$; no: $n = 1,442$)

- Used VA educational benefits for college (yes: $n = 470$; no: $n = 163$)

- Presence of disabling condition (yes: $n = 1,021$; no: $n = 1,040$)

- Have a service-connected disability "yes: $n = 1,099$; no: $n = 957$)

- Treated past year for PTSD (yes: $n = 129$; no $n = 1,934$)

- Ever used VA vocational rehabilitation (yes: $n = 265$; no: $n = 953$) (Smith-
  Osborne, 2009, p. 330)

The survey identified that 13% of the participants had received treatment for
psychological symptoms in the past month, and 49% had a disabling condition. Of the
49% with a disabling condition, 93% said the disability was due to their military service.
The mean disability rating was 15.86%. Psychosocial symptoms and levels of daily-
living functioning were assessed using a composite Likert scale generated from six items
on the Health Background Module of the NSV. The six items consisted of emotional
problems in the past 4 weeks and included: depression or anxiety that had interfered with
productivity and carefulness at work; social interaction of activities involved with daily
living; levels of energy; and levels of calm and low mood. Additional data was collected

on utilizing government education benefits and health insurance usage; however, for purposes of this paper, they were not reviewed.

Smith-Osborne (2009) reported that early detection of PTSD, early establishment of treatment, and utilizing established social support systems might aid in the attainment of post-secondary education. Smith-Osborne did not include data on military personnel who had attended college prior to deployment and those who were in college during deployment as part of the study; whereas, Smith-Osborne reported that long or several deployments could negatively affect college attainment.

A similar study that focused on PTSD in veterans attending college was conducted by Langer Ellison et al. (2012) who studied the effects of PTSD on veterans attending college. The authors assessed the creation of VA-supported educational services that were catered to specific age groups. Langer Ellison et al. used a qualitative study that included interviews and recorded focus groups of 29 veterans with PTSD in one of two age groups—18 to 29 years old and 30 years of age and over. While the study included two age groups, the focus was on the younger veterans because a review of literature reported a large number of OIF/OEF veterans were in the 18 to 29-year age range, and studies have shown that younger veterans have different needs compared to older veterans. The Langer Ellison et al. (2012) literature review also related PTSD symptoms with causing issues to succeeding in college, similar to Ackerman et al. (2009).

Langer Ellison et al. (2012) set further criteria for participants in the study by filtering for veterans who had been deployed during OIF/OEF as well as who had educational goals in place. The younger age group members ($n = 17$) had more members

who were single and had little or no former higher education. There were 15 male and two female participants in the younger age group. The older age group ($n = 14$), had all male participants. Coding was done to find common themes. Two codes, educational planning and reintegration challenges, were dominant for issues to education for younger veterans. Two codes that were common issues for both age groups were using government education benefits and coping with PTSD.

Findings from Langer Ellison et al. (2012) study asserted that older veterans had clear educational goals and knew how to attain them. In contrast, the younger veterans reported having a harder time with post-secondary attainment. This was based on their inexperience with the post-secondary education processes and lack of skills to live on their own. Participants in the study reported their PTSD symptoms caused problems in the classroom, similar to reports by Megivern et al. (2003). The most common symptoms reported by Langer Ellison et al. were student veterans feeling anxious in the classroom and having difficulty with concentration.

Further results of the study conducted by Langer Ellison et al. (2012) reported the younger respondents were concerned with failing college entrance exams and the inability to meet the expectations that college life holds. In addition, they had a harder time managing their money, which made it difficult to budget for college expenses. The younger veterans viewed reintegration into civilian life as difficult, while the older group of respondents felt transitioning into civilian life got easier with time. Veterans from both age groups found they were overwhelmed with emotions and psychological disturbances, which prevented them from consistently attending classes. Langer Ellison et al. (2012) also found when students had high levels of psychological disturbances, they responded

with either becoming hyper vigilant or they self-medicated with illegal or prescribed mood inhibitors.

As a result of the participants' negative experiences, the veterans offered some suggestions for improvement in the treatment of veterans on college campuses (Langer Ellison et al., 2012). Suggestions from participants included offering classes at alternate times, which would reduce the number of students in the classroom; offering a separate space for taking exams; and being allowed to record the class sessions with a tape recorder. Langer Ellison et al. additionally heard from the younger veterans that they wanted services offered through the VA that catered to the younger veteran. The model of services being offered at the time had been used for many generations of veterans. The younger group felt it was time to update how services were provided. For example, they expressed an interest in VA members that worked with younger vets to also be from the same age group and have similar experiences and use texting and other forms of electronic communication. Langer Ellison et al. also heard from the younger veterans that outreach efforts should be at places where younger veterans socialize, like sporting events and cafés. Both groups agreed it would have been beneficial to have information and services provided from other veterans who had similar experiences because it would be easier to relate with such people. Langer Ellison et al. (2012) discovered that as a result of the focus groups, many times information was shared amongst the group members that was beneficial to everyone. The group participants were divided in opinion regarding the degree of support needed. The support that was suggested ranged from full support and guidance to applying for and attending college, while others suggested little to no assistance. As a result of the suggestions from the respondents in the study, the VA

coordinated additional services that included psychological services and educational

support (Langer Ellison et al., 2012).

The participants suggested that college representatives offer information sessions

and college-entry support at the VA healthcare facilities (Langer Ellison et al., 2012). The

younger participants also suggested that colleges and universities have a veteran liaison

to assist veterans with the paperwork necessary to enter college and help to fix problems

that arise while the veteran was a college student. Langer Ellison et al. shared other

suggestions the veterans offered as they emphasized how colleges and universities could

better equip veterans with the tools necessary to succeed. They included: offering campus

housing that promoted veterans living together, student organizations catered to students

that are veterans, college staff and faculty that had knowledge about PTSD to increase

understanding of the veterans and their situation, and a person on staff that veterans could

always speak with about questions that were raised throughout their time on campus.

Langer Ellison et al. identified a need for greater support services to cater to younger and

older veterans. Although this article did not present the college success rates of the 29

veterans in the study, it did provide credible practices that could be implemented by

government agencies and post-secondary educational facilities to potentially improve the

transition of veterans with PTSD into college. The results in Langer Ellison et al. study

support Megivern et al. (2003) and Ackerman et al. (2009) studies by suggesting veterans

with PTSD may have a harder time transitioning into college after military service.

In addition to transitioning from a military culture to a civilian culture, veterans

have to consider their identity as a veteran during that transition (Jones, 2013). In Jones's

2013 study, the author focused on how the identity of veterans was based on their

military experience as well as their college student status. Multiple identities included former military personnel, family member, college student, civilian, and employee.

Jones (2013) chose to use a qualitative phenomenological study to focus on the development of identity of three veterans who were attending the same college on a full-time basis. They were chosen due to their membership in the on-campus Student Veterans of America group. The participants had also conveyed an interest in talking about their higher education experiences to potentially help other veterans enter college. In addition, the three student veterans were chosen because they had all completed at least 1 semester of college, which provided some time for transition. Interview questions included the participants' military information and challenges they faced transitioning into college. The interviews were conducted on an individual basis and were recorded and transcribed. The interview results were analyzed for themes. Three major themes were uncovered (Jones, 2013). They were civilian life adaptation, the role of college culture in integrating into civilian life, and the requirement for veterans' services on college campuses. The results in Jones study claimed the necessity of college-based support for the transitioning veteran because this might assist the veteran with successful college attainment. Limitations of the study included: only three months to conduct the interviews, participant population was small, and only one interview was conducted with each participant on a single college campus.

Student military service members and veteran identity in college was studied by Rumann and Hamrick (2010). In addition, the authors wanted to know how well the staff and administration of the college supported service members' reintegration. The Rumann and Hamrick study was a qualitative phenomenological research study that used

Schlossberg's theory of transition as the regulating theoretical framework. Participants were found by purposeful and referral sampling. The six participants (five men and one woman) in the study were registered as full-time students in an undergraduate degree program at a single university in the Midwest. The six respondents had all returned from one deployment in the military and noted they had enlisted in the military for the college benefits. Prior to deployment, five of the six participants were previously enrolled at the same university where the study took place, and one veteran was a transfer student to the university. There were several semi-structured interviews conducted over time to establish a relationship and congruency. Each interview was done in person, lasted about 90 minutes, and was recorded. "Archived campus newspapers from 2001 to 2008" were also used for relevancy to veterans (p. 436).

Results of the interviews conducted by Rumann and Hamrick (2010) found that friendships established in college prior to deployment were maintained while the former student was deployed. The respondents reported their college friends were complaining about life situations, but the military personnel could not relate. The service members felt the friends were missing the bigger problems in life and viewed what their friends were going through as minute and not important. Upon returning to college, the majority of the six felt more mature, had a clearer perspective on life, and were more focused on their goals.

The problems identified upon re-entry into college, by Rumann and Hamrick (2010), included complications with college policies. The college classes ran on a fixed schedule, which did not always match the study participants' deployment and return schedule, therefore, the students were delayed in taking the necessary courses to continue

with their education. Their friends on the college campus graduated sooner while the six participants were delayed in their graduation. Other problems involved in returning from deployment included a harder time being in large groups, being around big noises, and a harder time trusting people. They were also more selective when speaking about their military status because they were sometimes judged by people they met. Rumann and Hamrick also discovered respondents were searching for a new normal that reflected a balance of their identity as military personnel and as a college student. The study was limited because it was conducted with only six students at a single university in one geographical area; therefore, it lacked diversity and substance. The study included one female and no standardized testing of PTSD symptoms. The age of the students was not given, nor was the amount of combat experience described.

Another element to consider for military personnel attending college is how they viewed their life during their college experience. In a research article by Wilson, Smith, Lee, and Stevenson (2013), three specific questions were addressed: how military personnel viewed their reality; what they felt the military contributed to their post-secondary education; and what they viewed as the result of their military service and college education. The study was conducted at an education center on a single military base that offered classes from four colleges offering in-person and online classes. Thirteen military personnel and five education counselors were interviewed. The interviews with the education counselors were used for the research design only and the details were not elaborated on in the findings. The mixed-methods study included data from interviews, a questionnaire, as well as military and college documents. Coding was

completed of the recorded and transcribed interviews. The coding was done in a two-step process, first using structural coding methods and then elaborative coding methods.

Wilson et al. (2013) reported service men and women transitioned into post-secondary education with a mindset different than what the researchers' projected would happen. The authors hoped that as a result of conducting the study, the participants would remain in college and complete their degrees. However, no data resulted in supporting this claim.

The interviews conducted with military personnel by Wilson et al. (2013) found the focus of military personnel was the military, while education was secondary. The authors further determined that although many military personnel attended college, few graduated. The study uncovered that respondents took courses to better understand their military training or to earn points in the military. Wilson et al. reported the probable reason the respondents did not graduate was because they did not see the long-range benefits of having a college degree. It was noted by the researchers that the environment where classwork was conducted for the study was on a military base, which may have helped the military personnel with feeling comfortable in conducting their assignments. The results of the Wilson et al. (2013) study correlated to Jones' (2013) as he suggested service members have difficulty with adjusting to staying on a college campus.

In addition to the perspectives mentioned above, college support services for veterans should also be considered. Ackerman et al. (2009) conducted a study to identify how veterans' transitioned into college life, as well as what college staff could do to better support veterans' success. A qualitative study was conducted with six female and

19 male military personnel and veterans, who were full-time students at state or regional universities. Themes were uncovered after analysis of the recorded interviews.

Ackerman et al. (2009) found that enlisted veterans could be deployed while attending college, which forced veterans to withdraw from their courses. This caused a loss of credit for completed school work and money lost for courses not completed. Ackerman et al. (2009) found that veterans felt their instructors understood their situation, which reduced the students' feelings of guilt.

The Ackerman et al. (2009) study results suggested that problems with veterans' transition were created by the VA as well as the post-secondary institution's inability to provide strong support for the transitioning veteran. Symptoms of PTSD negatively affected students' attention span and their patience for sitting for long periods of time in a classroom. Additionally, the students with PTSD had problems with anger, stress management, and the inability to sleep. The participants identified there was no chain of command on the college campus to provide structure like the military. This presented as an additional barrier to their success in college. Military personnel in the study were not accustomed to the independence and the semi-structured environment a college presents. Therefore, it was hard for them to manage their time without being told how to spend each hour of their day.

In addition to Ackerman et al. (2009) studying whether PTSD caused a barrier for veterans attending college, Ostovary and Dapprich (2011) focused on the same topic. Ostovary and Dapprich's (2011) study reviewed research articles that focused on PTSD and OIF/OEF veterans in college. The authors indicated that PTSD is one of the top four military-related injuries, which causes many problems in the classroom that include

reduced concentration and increased irritability. Furthermore, the VA's bureaucratic system created issues to the veterans entering college as well as them staying in college. Lack of support on college campuses for the veterans to integrate and feel part of the campus were also mentioned.

Ostovary and Dapprich (2011) offered suggestions for improvement that included: a need for more social and emotional support, increased financial support, early PTSD treatment and therapy, and college services that cater to veterans and military personnel. Student veteran organizations on college campuses were reported to be of value for student veterans and staff (Ostovary & Dapprich, 2011).

Veterans with PTSD are entering college and finding it difficult to adjust to college campus life. They are not having an easy time mingling with fellow students (Porter, 2008; Vesilind, 2013). The military offered military member's structure, including the same mentality and points of view as every other military member; however, the goal of higher education is to widen a person's point of view and understanding of the world around him or her. Moving from the structure of military service to one of little structure is difficult for veterans (Porter, 2008; Vesilind, 2013). As veterans transition to college life, Vesilind (2013) suggested supportive services on the college campus to increase the success rates of veterans acclimating to their new environment as well as to increase graduation rates.

Veterans in classrooms vs. online. Online courses offer a more flexible schedule for veterans that are not close to the college of their choice as well as offering the opportunity for veterans to work a regular weekly schedule. However, the funds available for online courses via GI Bill benefits are not as much as for attending courses in person,

and the housing allowance per month is reduced when a veteran takes online courses (American Council of Education 2012).

Griffin and Gilbert (2012) reported online, for-profit schools have intentionally targeted veterans knowing there was guaranteed funding. The authors also reported that in 2010, half of the top schools recruiting veterans were for-profit online schools. As a result of their tactics, there was a 50% dropout rate for online schools (Griffin and Gilbert, 2012). The for-profit online schools that take advantage of the veteran's guaranteed college funding have cost the government wasted funding. Once a student drops out of an online school and re-enters another institution, they often times pay out of their pocket as the Post 9/11 GI Bill only covers 36 months of training (Griffin and Gilbert, 2012).

In addition to being taken advantage of by for-profit schools, Crawley and Fetzner (2013) reported there was a lack of institutional support for online learners. The authors pointed to the fact that online learners cannot always stop by the college for supportive services. Therefore, what types of services are there available or could be improved upon for online learners? One solution suggested by Crawley and Fetzner (2013) was peer support programs. Peer support programs allow enrolled students who do not need support to assist students who do need support. Peer support might also be helpful for veterans in college by teaming up with an already-enrolled student veteran who could relate to the newly enrolled student veteran. These arrangements could potentially benefit colleges as well as the student veterans. Crawley and Fetzner mentioned the ease of speaking with a peer versus a staff member. Sometimes students will not ask questions or seek help due to the stigma associated with asking others for help. However, a student

seeking help is more apt to reach out more quickly to a peer (Crawley and Fetzner, (2013).

      Post-secondary point of view. DiRamio and Jarvis (2011) reported in their literature review that 22% of higher education institutions offer transition services to incoming veterans. They further explained that when a college or university offers transition services and other veteran-specific support services, the greater number of veterans will attend that institution. DiRamio and Jarvis also reported that only 35% of private-sector 4 year institutions accept military training as college credit. In comparison, public 2 year institutions had a higher probability of 55%, and public 4 year institutions were at 60% for accepting military training for college credit. This shows a disparity in military training being credentialed as college work, and it might hinder a veteran from either graduating on time or staying in college. Additionally, this suggests that a universal system for easy translation of military training and experience into college credit would provide veterans with gaining college credit while they are in the military. When someone graduates from a foreign college, there are opportunities for the degree to be transferred to a US post-secondary degree. A similar program should be provided for military veterans to ease their transition into higher education (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). The authors reported that this would present an equal opportunity for access to any college or university a veteran wanted to attend. Additionally, the American Council on Education offers evaluation of military training, including boot camp, to determine the number of college credits that can be earned. A conundrum for veterans is they feel they need to re-enlist in order to keep financial benefits, such as the GI Bill. DiRamio and Jarvis (2011) reported that when a military service member is deployed during a college

semester, many colleges are ill equipped to handle the situation. They found that 26% of private 4 year institutions had a tuition refund policy, compared to 53% of public community colleges and 65% of public 4 year institutions that had tuition refund policies.

Griffin and Gilbert (2012) described the Environmental Evaluation for Veterans Index (EEVI) as a resource for colleges and universities to measure their accessibility for veterans. Things measured include: veteran services, policies and structure, and social and cultural support (Griffin and Gilbert, 2012). The EEVI allows the higher education institution to assess themselves in order to identify weaknesses that can be improved upon. Once a college has strong resources for veterans, the students feel more engaged and successful (Griffin and Gilbert, 2012).

Colleges and universities have traditionally seen the college freshman as someone directly out of high school. In the last 30 years, there has been an increasing number of adult learners entering the post-secondary education market. Slowly intertwined with this group has been the military veteran. Colleges and universities have a hard time keeping up with the changing demands of their clientele. DiRamio and Jarvis (2011) expressed concern for the lack of readiness of higher education institutions for the mass of military personnel and veterans who will be entering these institutions in the upcoming years. There is a lack of support for veterans entering higher education, which results in student veterans not persisting (Ackerman et al., 2009; Daly & Fox Garrity, 2013; Vacchi, 2012). Offering more support by campus staff and faculty will guarantee student success (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011). Social integration and membership in activities on campus are also proponents of success in higher education (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski). Miller Brown (2002) reported social integration has little effect on adult

learners due to their complex lives. Miller Brown also suggested that persistence in college relates to the adult learners' grade point average. The more the student struggles with course work, which results in lower class grades, the more likely an adult learner will leave college. Miller Brown (2002) also suggested the greater the support by the post-secondary campus resulted in increased persistence by the adult learner.

A study by Barnard-Brak, Bagby, Jones, and Sulak (2011) offered insight into how post-secondary education campuses perceived student veterans with PTSD, as well as how they could successfully serve this student population. Therefore, the objective of the Barnard-Brak et al. (2011) study was to identify self-efficacy of faculty at college campuses in relation to how they served the veteran population.

Barnard-Brak et al. (2011) conducted an online survey of 596 faculty members about their "views of serving in the military of the United States and its involvement in the Iraq/Afghanistan wars, and perceptions of their ability to address the special needs of these returning student-veterans in the classroom" (p. 30). Initially, 4,554 faculty-member email addresses were contacted from public websites. The final respondent tally was 596 participants, 358 were from public institutions and 238 were from private institutions from across the country. Of the participants, 41.5% were female, and 58.8% were male. While the average number of years teaching was 16.5 years, with values ranging from 1 to 52 years. The quantitative study was measured on a "five-point Likert scale, with values ranging from 'strongly agree' (5) to 'strongly disagree' (1), for faculty self-efficacy to work with returning veteran-students who may have symptoms of PTSD" (Barnard-Brak et al., 2011, p. 31).

The results of the Barnard-Brak et al. (2011) study reported, "faculty self-efficacy to serve student veterans with PTSD may be considered as being moderated" (p. 33). Thus, it was possible for faculty to put aside their negative feelings about the war and have the ability to teach and work with student veterans who had symptoms of PTSD.

Barnard-Brak et al. (2011) reported that offering training courses for faculty who teach and serve student veterans with PTSD may be useful to reduce bias and judgment in order for faculty to better serve the student veteran. Lack of training for the faculty could be perceived as a barrier for veterans with PTSD to be successful in college.

As the literature provided validation for further research into issues veterans with PTSD face as they try to persist in college, the next section explains the theory upon which this research is based.. The theory section explains the preferred theory for this research as well as possible theories that could also be used when conducting such research for similar participants.

Student development theory. There are five areas of focus for student development theory: "psychosocial theories, cognitive development theories, maturity models, typology models, [and] person-environment interaction models" (Baxter Magdola, 2009, p. 621) (Appendix B). With a complex degree of theories and models, student development theory is still the best-defined theory to describe the success of students through the layers or lenses used to view a student. These complex lenses offer greater insight into the development of students and they provide a theoretical approach as to why someone could be successful in college (Baxter Magdola, 2009).

Miller and Prince (as cited in Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010) proposed student development theory is "the application of human development concepts

in postsecondary settings so that everyone involved can master increasingly complex developmental tasks, achieve self-direction, and become interdependent" (p. 5). This definition provides further depth to understanding a student because it recognizes complex human characteristics. Veterans are very complex as a result of their experiences in the military as well as their new college experiences. Entering the college campus alone after being in the military and being a member of a troop or unit can be difficult (Gates et al., 2012). Adding the diagnosis of PTSD creates a further complexity (Hoge et al., 2006). Therefore, utilizing student development theory best supports the research topic.

Tanaka (2002) described the five lenses of student development theory to be voice, power, authenticity, self-reflexivity, and reconstitution. Using this description, it is understandable why social development theory has been used as framework for complex theories such as queer theory and feminist theory (Baxter Magdola, 2009).

Jacobi, Astin, & Ayala (1987) reported student development evolves from students' involvement on college campuses. Higher education institutions that incorporate student development theory into their practices will increase their chances of identifying the needs of the students as well as their success (Evans et al., 2010; Jacobi et al., 1987). Jacobi et al. also claimed that the less involved students are on the college campus, the less likely they are to graduate. Additionally, the taxonomy of assessing student development as it relates to the mission of a college will prove to be of more value than just assessing students' successes.

Offering many perspectives to analyze success of a student is why student development theory provides the strongest framework for the upcoming research. The

paradigm offered by this theory assists in explaining how well a student integrates into a learning environment. With so many lenses to view a student through, student development theory explains the complexity of each student without generalizing. Therefore, utilizing student development theory has the potential to change policies, increase student services, and change recruitment of student veterans on college campuses.

Tinto's theories. Tinto had three major theories: theory of social and academic integration (1975) theory of student retention (1993), and theory of persistence (1975) (Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011; Tanaka, 2002). The theory of persistence defines a student's goals of completing college as the way to persist and become successful in higher education (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). If veterans focus only on completing a semester, then they do not persist, based on Tinto's theory of persistence. There is no documentation that supports the notion that the VA offers veterans support in looking at the long-term goal of college graduation. Nor is there anything that supports the rationale of short- and long-term goal focus for veterans. Also, based on Tinto's theory of persistence, students must integrate their college experience academically and socially in order to persist (Stuart, Rios-Aguilar, & Deil-Amen, 2014). Furthermore, Stuart, Rios-Aguilar, and Deil-Amen suggested that Tinto's theory of persistence does not take into account the economic impact of a student who does not persist in college.

Most students enter college with a goal of graduating in order to become more employable (Abel & Deitz, 2014). As a result, they are able to contribute to society and increase their chances of higher pay. However, when students do not persist in post-secondary institutions, they are less likely to find employment that provides enough

money to sustain daily living without outside support (i.e., parental and/or governmental support) (Abel & Deitz, 2014). Tinto's theory of persistence does not take into account the adult learner who has a dependent family or who does not live on a college campus and has a lack of time to engage in extra-curricular activities. They may, however, still persist because of their commitment to education and their family.

Daly and Fox Garrity (2013) proposed that the structure of a college or university that is categorized as friendly to veterans, based on Tinto's (1975) theory of persistence, determines the success of the student veterans. Their study utilized data collected by the Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC), which is a registry for veteran-friendly colleges and universities (total of 1900 members). Each of the campuses hires a Veterans' Certifying Official (VCO) to assist veterans who are transitioning into post-secondary education. The duties of the designated person vary by each campus. Daly and Fox Garrity reported that 70% of the post-secondary institutions who were members of the SOC only had part time VCO staff. Therefore, how could a veteran be fully supported by a VCO if the VCO could not commit the proper amount of time to the veteran? And, how could the SOC report veteran-friendly institutions if the expectation of a supportive VCO was under false pretense? The consortium of listed colleges and universities by the SOC was dissolved in December 2014. At the time of this research, the SOC was refocusing its agreement with the Department of Defense (Department of Defense, 2014).

Tinto's (1975) theory of persistence shows that if a post-secondary institution does not have a strong structure of veteran support in place, the student veteran is less likely to persist in college. Demetriou and Schmitz-Sciborski (2011) described the importance of retention of students by using Tinto's (1993) theory of student retention to

encourage support by college campuses of students, as well as the integral part students play in their own success by participating in college life activities.

Schlossberg's transition theory. Griffin and Gilbert (2015) conducted a qualitative study that used Schlossberg et al. (1995) transition theory to better understand how schools could improve support of student veterans during their transition into higher education. Their study included purposive sampling of veterans, college administrators, faculty, and staff. Semi-structured interviews were conducted on seven campuses with 72 college administrators, staff, and faculty, and 28 student veterans were interviewed. The interviews were individual, in group, and in focus groups. The data collected was compared to the four "S's" (situation, support, self, and strategies) of Schlossberg's theory (1995). Three themes resulted from the research: importance of having knowledgeable staff on campus to support veterans; campus structure has to include credible veterans' benefits offices; and having support services and offices on campus for veterans socially and academically. Utilizing Schlossberg's transition theory sheds light on how important the transition into college is for the success of students (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). However, as Tinto's (1975 and 1993) three theories and Schlossberg's (1999) theory focus on a piece of the puzzle for veterans to persist in college, student development theory offers a more complete framework to ensure a more well-rounded view of veterans as students which results in increased persistence in college.

Similarities between theories. The theories presented are similar in that they all describe, in some degree, the dynamics for a person entering higher education. They all identify something that has to be considered when entering and persisting in school.

However, further clarification of what and how a student succeeds is best defined within the framework of student development theory.

Differences between theories. Student development theory is more complex than the theories previously described. This particular theory encompasses the development of a student in post-secondary education. Schlossberg's transition theory (1999) only describes the transition into college and not the persistence to be successful in college. Whereas, Tinto's (1975 and 1993) three theories describe success or failure in parts of the higher education process, but again, is not as all-encompassing as student development theory. Therefore, utilizing student development theory is best for identifying why young military veterans may be unable to persist in higher education institutions as viewed through the many lenses of the theory.

Chapter Summary

The issues veterans with PTSD face while attending post-secondary educational institutions can be complex. The literature review utilized empirical studies and books to emphasize the reasons why further research is necessary to uncover what the issues are, from the young veteran with PTSD perceptive, so that these veterans can persist in college in order to graduate. Jacobi et al. (1987) associated a student's success with the depth of support the higher education institution provides (i.e., college orientation, tutoring, on-campus associations, etc.). The stronger the support and help with the transition that is offered by the college, the chances of graduation increase (Jacobi et al., 1987). Offering student development theory in support of further research may result in identifying the resources veterans need to graduate.

Chapter 3 will explain the research methodology that will be used to uncover the issues young military veterans are facing as well as how they are issues to their persistence in college.

As Nelson Mandela (2003) once said, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world."

Chapter 3: Research Design Methodology

Introduction

Over the last 10 years, larger numbers of veterans with and without PTSD have been returning home from military service than in previous wartimes (Finley, Pugh, Noel, & Brown, 2012; Langer Ellison et al., 2012; Smith-Osborne, 2009). In today's economy, a college degree is required to sustain an average household (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). Recent veterans are able to use government funding to enter college, but studies have shown that veterans are not using their GI Bill benefits and are not completing a college degree (DiRamio, 2011; Drebing et al., 2012; Langer Ellison et al., 2012). Therefore, the research sought to identify the issues concerning persistence for this specific population and how those issues negatively affected persistence.

From the perspective of military veterans, ages 22-27, self-diagnosed with and without PTSD, who were or are enrolled in a minimum of two semesters of college, the research questions were:

1. What issues in veterans' personal lives affect persistence in college?

2. How do the named issues in veterans' personal lives affect persistence in college?

3. What issues within the college affect persistence?

4. How do the named issues within the college affect persistence?

5. What issues within the Veterans Administration affect persistence in college?

6. How do the named issues within the Veterans Administration affect

persistence in college?

The research design and methodology for this study included qualitative research in the form of individual telephone interviews to explore a phenomenon experienced by veterans and their perceptions of the challenges to persistence. The phenomenological format allowed for several participants to explain their perspective and to establish the reasoning of the phenomenon through their lived experiences (Creswell, 2013). The phenomena have to be experienced by the participants in order to be uncovered; therefore, the purposeful sampling included veterans self-diagnosed with and without PTSD to uncover differences and commonalities between the two groups. Brinkmann and Kvale (2014) described that the end result of a phenomenological study is to find the common essence of a topic in order to validate whether a problem existed and how it affected a variable. Interviews were the primary data collection method in the phenomenological methodology. Semi-structured questions were utilized so that the questions would remain consistent within each telephone interview. The telephone interviews allowed the veteran participants to speak freely about the phenomenon of the issues and how they were issues to persisting in college. The data analysis included a review of the transcribed interviews, looking for significant and recurring statements and themes to uncover the experiences from the veterans' perspectives.

The most common type of research in the literature reviews were focus groups to uncover phenomena that affect military veterans (Dao, 2013; DiRamio, 2011; Gates et al., 2012; Hoge et al., 2006). However, individual telephone interviews offered greater anonymity and eliminated the details involved with finding a neutral location to conduct

an in-person interview. Telephone interviews offered a venue for the participants to speak freely without fear of judgment by other participants. Additionally, a greater number of participants could participate from across the country versus having only participants from one central location.

Research Context

The study was conducted in a city with a population of 147,306 that is within a metropolitan area with a population of 732,000 (US Census, 2000). At the time of the study, the unemployment rate was 11.1% in this industrial city in the northeastern section of the United States. However, there were many state- and county-based economic programs available to establish employee training and strengthen business development in order to increase employment in the area.

This region has 44 private and state educational institutions that offer potential locations to find participants (City of Syracuse Demographic, 2015). One university, in particular, has a very large veterans' center that offers many support services for veterans and their families. The robust number of quality higher education facilities in the area allowed for ease of accessibility of participants, and it also offered established support services for veterans in college, and resources for the study.

Research Participants

The population that was the focus of the study was young military veterans, between the ages of 22 and 27, self-diagnosed with PTSD as well as those not diagnosed with PTSD who had attended college for at least two semesters. The purposeful sample included a mixture of college dropouts, graduates, and current students. The participants included those who began college prior to their military service and decided to return to

college after their military service, as well as those who started attending college only after their military service. The interviews concentrated on the veterans' perception of persistence in college in order to graduate. Brinkmann and Kvale (2014) suggested interviewing a minimum of 10 participants in a phenomenological study. The participants were located through personal contacts and flyers, which were displayed at area college campuses in order to locate a purposive sampling. This provided participants with and without PTSD an opportunity to participate and offer their perception of issues they face in their personal lives, from the college perspective, and from the VA.

After potential participants were notified of the study, those interested in participating contacted the researcher, initially, via email and self-reported PTSD, were between 22 and 30, had been in a branch of the military, and attended college for at least two semesters. A return email was sent from the researcher that included the Letter of Introduction and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved Consent Form (Appendix C and Appendix D) requesting they sign the consent form and return, via email, to the researcher. Once the signed consent form was returned to the researcher via email, the recorded telephone interview was scheduled. Included in the email was a statement offering information for the participants about who to contact if the interview triggered any anxiety or trauma.

At the beginning of the interview, the participants were asked to provide a false name to be used for the study to ensure confidentiality. In order to capture notes during the interview and for the transcribing of the recorded interviews, an Interview Sheet was created (Appendix E). The interview questions that lead to the answering of the research questions was initially created to engage in conversation and build trust (Appendix F).

Only the researcher knew the participant's real name, telephone, and email contact information. The information was kept in case the participant had to be contacted a second time for additional information. The participants' information was kept under a pseudonym, along with their interview responses. The participants provided a contact telephone number for the researcher to call at a predetermined time. The telephone conversations were recorded. Confidentiality was assured to each participant in order to ensure privacy and respect.

Once the interviews were completed, the researcher had the recorded interviews transcribed by a professional transcriber. The researcher then listened to the recorded sessions while reviewing the transcription document to ensure there were no occurrences of inaudible comments and to ensure validity of the transcribed product. Each response from each participant was formatted into easily coded themes. This provided a way for the researcher to uncover common themes. All recordings and transcriptions were kept under lock and key at the researcher's home, and will remain there for at least 3 years after the research is completed. At the end of the 3 years, all recordings and transcripts will be destroyed.

Instruments Used in Data Collection

The phenomenological design permitted participants to give their narrative on what they believed the issues were to persisting in college and how those issues affected persistence. Rapport was established in the beginning of each interview to ensure success. Brinkmann and Kvale (2014) suggested building trust and using strong listening skills in the beginning to allow the participants to talk freely. Once the scheduled interview began, the audio recording was activated in order to capture the conversation. The researcher

ensured a private and quiet environment was used in order for a clearer recording to take place and to reduce background distractions during the interviews. Sixty minutes was allotted to each telephone interview. Each interview began with the researcher requesting the participant to create a pseudo-name for purposes of ensuring confidentiality. Also at the beginning of the interview, the researcher confirmed the participant had signed the consent form, and the researcher provided a basic description of the study. Interviewees had the option of stopping the interview if they felt uncomfortable or no longer wanted to participate. The option was offered to the participant that he or she could continue the interview at a later date and time. Data from stopped interviews that were not continued were not included in the final research.

Initially, basic demographic information was asked, and the researcher confirmed the person was ready for initial questioning. Initial questioning consisted of preliminary questions that engaged the participant in conversation. After the questions were asked, the primary research questions were asked in order to uncover the issues in the participants' personal lives, from the college perspective, and from the VA perspective. Once each question was initiated, the interviewer allowed the interviewee time to answer without pressure to answer quickly. Additional questions were asked in order to obtain explicit answers and to gain a greater understanding of the questions that were not answered completely. Brinkmann and Kvale (2014) suggested offering cues to assist the participants with recalling examples of their lived experience. Brinkmann and Kvale viewed interviewing as a form of mining for precious metal. The precious metal references valuable knowledge found within the answers to the interview questions. At the end of each interview, the researcher confirmed the participant had nothing further to

say about the questions asked, asked if the participant was in need of any assistance as a result of the interview, asked the participants if they had any questions for the researcher, and thanked the participant for agreeing to be interviewed. The researcher confirmed with each participant if he or she was comfortable with being contacted again, if further questioning arose. Additionally, the interviewees were offered access to the findings once the dissertation was completed.

Procedures Used in Data Analysis

The data analysis began with the transcribing of the recorded telephone conversations by the transcriber. The transcribed conversations were reviewed for accuracy. Immersion into the study was achieved through repeated listening of the recorded interviews while viewing the written transcript of each interview. Notes taken during the interviews also helped during this phase to supplement understanding. Categorizing the answers based on the research questions further assisted with analyzing and coding the data. Initially, three to five codes were established per question, but more were created as the coding process expanded (Creswell, 2012). Heuristic coding provided the ability to categorize data in order to uncover themes. This, then, allowed the themes to be grouped into common and outlying themes. The coding method used was by hand without the use of computer-based software. Coding the transcribed interviews allowed for the uncovering of themes to validate the phenomena. All of the codes were categorized by a common key in order to interpret the codes at a later date. Organization of the themes was developed by the researcher's interpretation in order to compare it to previously reviewed literature. The researcher's biases were identified prior to conducting the interviews in order to allow the transcribed interviews to be honest and

accurate. Further awareness of bias was acknowledged when the coding began in order to avoid adding predetermined bias into the results.

The data was coded and interpreted to uncover common and new phenomena that offered new knowledge in order to better understand what the issues were and how the issues were faced by veterans regarding persisting in college. The themes and concepts were organized and analyzed to systematically explain the common phenomenon. The resulting data allowed for the analysis of the study, which is described in Chapter 4.

Summary

A qualitative study conducted via telephone conversations elicited a true narrative from the participants' points of view. Once the IRB at St. John Fisher College approved the study, the qualitative research began. Within 1 week of IRB approval, area colleges were approached requesting they post an advertisement asking veterans, self-diagnosed with and without PTSD who had attended at least two semesters of college, respond to the flyer and consider participating in the study. Personal contacts were also approached and asked if they would like to participate in the study.

Once potential participants emailed the researcher indicating their interest in participating in the research, a response email was sent within 48 hours. Once the confirmation email with a signed consent form was returned to the researcher, potential telephone interview dates and times were sent to the participants within 48 hours of receipt of their email. When participants agreed to scheduled interview times, a phone number was requested from the participant for the researcher to call. All interviews were scheduled within 10 days of initial contact by the participants. The 10 interviews were done within 7 weeks of IRB approval. The interviews were reviewed and transcribed

within 4 days of each interview. Heuristic coding of the data was completed that uncovered themes for each research question asked. This resulted in why and how there were issues to persistence in college. Overall analysis was completed and reviewed with the dissertation committee, prior to writing Chapter 4 of the dissertation, within 2 months of IRB approval.

Chapter 4 will display each research question, how the participants answered each of the questions, themes that were uncovered, and finally the data analysis will be explained.

Chapter 4: Results

Research Questions

The study sought to answer the following questions from the perspective of military veterans, ages 22-27, who were able to self-report whether they had PTSD, who were previously, or at the time of the study, enrolled in a minimum of two semesters of college:

1. What issues in veterans' personal lives affect persistence in college?

2. How do the named issues in veterans' personal lives affect persistence in college?

3. What issues within the college affect persistence?

4. How do the named issues within the college affect persistence?

5. What issues within the Veterans Administration affect persistence in college?

6. How do the named issues within the Veterans Administration affect persistence in college?

Purposeful and referral sampling was used to locate potential participants. The researcher's email information was posted on the flyers that were distributed so that participants could email the researcher showing interest in the study. In response, they received the introduction letter (Appendix C) and a consent form (Appendix D) that had to be signed and returned to the researcher prior to a phone interview being scheduled. Once the researcher received the signed consent form, an interview was scheduled. A total of 10 interviews were conducted via telephone and were audio recorded. The ages of

participants ranged from 23 to 31 years of age, nine were male and one was female, and the participants attended a total of 10 different colleges throughout the nation, see full demographic information in Appendix G. Each of the participants was required to create a pseudonym to be labeled in the study to ensure confidentiality. Semi-structured questions were asked and were open ended in order for participants to provide a narrative. This allowed for clarifying questions to be asked so that richer context could be provided. Interviews lasted between 24 and 60 minutes.

Initially, only veterans with self-reported PTSD were sought, but soon the researcher found that veterans with PTSD had fear of speaking with a stranger and answering questions they perceived as intrusive. This was uncovered through speaking with personal contacts that knew veterans with PTSD and from speaking with veteran service offices on college campuses. After exhausting all avenues of reaching out to several personal contacts and colleges throughout the nation for participants with PTSD, veterans without PTSD were included in the study to offer additional perspectives and provide a more robust sampling of participants.

After each interview, the recorded telephone conversation was transcribed into a template (Appendix F) by a transcriber. The researcher listened to the recordings and reviewed the transcribed interviews to check for consistency and clarity. The notes taken during the interviews were added to the transcribed reports to develop more robust notes.

Data Analysis and Findings

The researcher conducted the data-driven coding which began with open coding to identify initial meanings. Additional analysis was completed to create additional codes and uncover uncommon themes and outlier categories. Codes were developed by locating

key segments of text that were similar in participants' responses. Through each of the four cycles of data review, the researcher uncovered further categories. This assisted with reviewing and revising codes. Themes and findings were uncovered for each category. Brinkmann and Kvale (2015) stated that categorization necessitates robust descriptions of phenomena to be coded and categorized.

The participants answered several questions that led to the focus on the six research questions. Initial results found there is an overwhelming sense of loss of identity. Every participant mentioned initially feeling misplaced in their new civilian environment and found it hard to transition from their military-focused environment. The military offers classes during the transition period called Transition Assistance Program (TAP). However, the participants in the study say they really didn't pay attention to what was said because they just wanted to go home. The transition is a confusing time in their lives. They want to go home, but they also find their identity is with the military. As one said, "I felt stripped of my sense of purpose" (Jodi). Military personnel have a frame of mind that includes a purpose and clear end goal. Once they re-enter the civilian life, they have to find a purpose and end goal. They are now an individual whereas before in the military the focus is on your brotherhood and sisterhood with fellow military personnel. Without the military structure and guidance, it was hard to see the light at the end of the tunnel. Participants mentioned they were used to the military holding their hand and telling them how to do things. However, entering college was not easy without that support from the military. Without the military structure, the participants stated they felt confusion and disorganization. As one said, "I needed support from someone to see the light at the end of the tunnel" (Rachel). As another said, "I didn't have the military

structure anymore, so I didn't know what to do. I couldn't set priorities. It felt like a rollercoaster" (Jose).

In addition to the initial findings, the participants offered their insight into the phenomena that was uncovered by focusing on the six research questions. Those questions, themes, subthemes, and quotes are discussed.

Research Question 1

What issues in veterans' personal lives affect persistence in college?

The three themes uncovered are support, communication, and trust. Lack of support from family and friends was heard from seven participants. The inability to communicate with friends and family was heard by four of the participants. Lack of trust with civilians, family, and friends was heard from five of the participants.

Support from friends and family was difficult for seven participants. The participants felt they could not relate to their family and friends the way they did before entering the military. As one said, "I moved away from home to attend college. My friends and family don't really know how to support me" (Vincent). Another said, "My friends and family really don't like me being away at school" (Lamar).

The second theme, communication, was lacking at many levels in the participants' personal lives. On many occasions throughout all of the interviews participants stated they could no longer communicate with family and friends the way they did before the military. As one said, "My family really wanted me to go to college, but they did not know I first signed up for the military. I kept it a secret from them until I had to go for my physical. They were very upset" (John). As another said, "Relationships are broken, bonds are broken, the very typical PTSD dude. My relationship with my

parents is getting better, it was pretty bad when I got back" (Jose). As another said, "Friendships change. You move away from home and are solo" (Jodi).

The third theme, trust, was reported by participants as being difficult to have with others because they did not feel they had support or clear communication in order to build a trustful relationship with someone. As one said,

I'm used to being in a controlled environment and having people around me that I trust and that I know will protect me or help me when I need them to. To go into an environment where I'm completely on my own and I don't know anyone is hard. I have had anxiety attacks before, I have to remind myself this is what's normal, that people crowding around you is not such a big deal. It's an adjustment and culture shock because I have been in the military so long, so I'm used to having people around me that I trust. And having a controlled situation of where I'm more in charge of the situation then the people around me. But I still hold the door open and people think it's because I'm being polite, but it's because I just don't like people walking behind me. Especially if I don't know who it is. It's kind of an adjustment but it's not a bad adjustment because it is seen as polite, so I still do it. (Lamar)

Research Question 2

How do the named issues in veterans' personal lives affect persistence in college?

There were subthemes that were uncovered during the interviews. The themes and subthemes are listed in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

Personal Life with Subthemes

Support	Communication	Trust
Family/Friends	Broken relationships	Relating
Balance	Misunderstandings	Feelings of betrayal
Lost relationships	Appropriateness	Isolation
Structure	Association	

The first main theme, support, in the participant's personal lives was practically non-existent for veterans with PTSD and the veteran suffered due to the lack of support from family and friends. Eight were single at the time of the interviews, and mentioned being in a serious relationship or married when they returned to civilian life after being in the military. Broken relationships caused veterans to feel less supported. The reduced support affected how they could not persist in college. This led to four subthemes under support: family and friends, balance, lost relationships, and structure.

The first subtheme under support that addresses how the issues affect persistence is family and friends. Six of the participants stated they had little or no family and friend support to help them stay focused on college. As one said, "My friends and family felt I should not attend college. They thought I should stay home and be with them the way I did before entering the military" (Lemar). The lack of support reported by the participants from their family and friends created stress, which resulted in feeling alone and having no one to talk with.

The second subtheme under support that addresses how the issues affect persistence is balance. Five of the participants mentioned balance was lacking in their lives. The lack of balance leads to less order and lack of priority setting. Lack of balance

affected their persistence in college because they did not know how to balance college and their daily lives. As one said, "It was hard to have balance in my life after the military. I had to find a way to balance school, a family, study time. It was really hard in the beginning" (Rachel).

The third subtheme under support that addresses how the issues affect persistence is lost relationships. A total of eight of the participants were single at the time of the interviews. Three of the participants mentioned being married while in the military, but were now divorced. Two mentioned having a girlfriend at the time of the interview. Lost relationships reduce support for a person. The feeling of support one receives by a significant other is something most people search for. When that support is gone, there is reduced support to help a participant achieve their dreams of completing a college degree. As one participant mentioned, 'There was a screw up with the divorce paperwork, so me and my husband had to go home and talk out our problems. We ended up staying married" (Rachel). Another said, "Relationships don't last more than a couple of months" (Jose).

The fourth subtheme under support that addresses how the issues affect persistence is structure. All the participants mentioned the structure the military provides while in the military, but feeling a loss of it afterwards. Some did better than others with finding a new structure in their lives, but not everyone. Seven mentioned they were loners and liked it that way. As one said, "I have trouble, and I'm a loner. I just don't get along with people" (Joseph). Six of the participants found it difficult to persist in college due to the lack of structure the military previously provided. As another said, "I didn't have direction once I left the military" (Mike).

The second main theme is communication. Communication in their personal lives was difficult as family and friends had difficulty knowing what to say. As one said, "My brother and I no longer talk. We have different views, so I see no reason to speak with him anymore. It came to blows and our parents had to separate us" (Jose).

Four sub-themes were uncovered under the second main theme, communication. They were: broken relationships, misunderstandings, appropriateness, and association.

The first subtheme under communication that addresses how the issues affect persistence is broken relationships. Similar to support, broken relationships prevent communication with someone close. As one said, "I was married when I first got out of the military, but that relationship didn't work out" (Robert). As another said, "Really hard to focus on school and work at the same time. My family has not really been supportive" (Victor). The inability to discuss personal struggles and fears with someone close creates a lack of communication and transparency. Not having close relationships available for the participants affected how they struggled with their feelings and self-doubt with persisting in college.

The second subtheme under communication that addresses how the issues affect persistence is misunderstandings. Misunderstandings happened when the participants didn't know what to say to friends and family. "While I'm in college, my friends back home don't understand why I'm going to college. They treat me like I'm still in the Army. They feel I should just stay home and find a job" (Vincent). The inability to speak freely with friends and family caused the participants to limit their interactions with others. This affected their persistence due to their fear of misunderstandings by friends

and family. This also discouraged four of the participants from seeking new relationships both platonic and intimate.

The third subtheme under communication that addresses how the issues affect persistence is appropriateness. Appropriateness was mentioned throughout the interviews with every participant. Civilians have asked participants if they ever used their guns to shoot people and how many times did the veterans get shot at. As one said, "I got tired of being asked about how many people I shot, so I just try to avoid people" (Joseph). As another said, "Even veterans that have not been in combat ask stupid questions. I just avoid telling anyone I was in combat" (Jose). Open communication with others should not be limited for anyone. This affects the participants' persistence in college by limiting their communication with classmates, professors, and limits their building of trusting relationships.

The fourth subtheme under communication that addresses how the issues affect persistence is association. Association was something each of the participants mentioned. They all had association with the military, and used the jargon from the military. Often times they would mention military classes and levels that the researcher did not understand. For clarification the researcher would ask additional questions, but still found it hard to adjust to the jargon. Their communication skills were based on their association with the military. The researcher does not have a military background, so some conversations took longer to understand. The military is such a huge part of the lives of veterans that communicating clearly with civilians can be challenging. Most civilians do not understand military jargon, so if military personnel or veterans want to share their personal story with someone to build a relationship at any level, they would find it

difficult. This affects persistence in college because veterans are lacking the ability to speak freely without associating with the military. Additionally, the association could slow down reintegration into their civilian environment.

The third main theme in their personal lives is trust. Trust was hard to have with family and friends because the veterans in the study felt they could not relate to others so they had a lack of trust. Trust had three subthemes: relatability, feelings of betrayal, and isolation.

The first subtheme under trust that addresses how the issues affect persistence is relatability. As one said, "My friends made me drive home every weekend to hang out with them. My grades suffered and I wasn't doing good in school. I had to stop commuting so much and study on weekends. I saw my friends as unsupportive and I couldn't trust them to support me" (Lemar). As another said, "I mostly hung around my military friends. I didn't really need to make other friends" (Robert). Neither participant felt they could relate to others. Lacking relatability with others reduces trust which affects persistence in college.

The second subtheme under trust that addresses how the issues affect persistence is feelings of betrayal. Feelings of betrayal were mentioned by four of the participants. The four mentioned betrayal by friends, family, and the military. The betrayal they described caused hurt and fear of building new relationships. As one said, "Once you leave the military, you get stripped of your sense of purpose. The bonds you had with family before entering the military are now broken" (Jose). As another stated, "Our dad left us and so because of him leaving the country, our immigration status would be jeopardized. So once we got our green cards, I went into the military" (John).

The third subtheme under trust that addresses how the issues affect persistence is isolation. Isolation was mentioned by three of the participants. They lacked trust of others and felt being alone and isolated was more comfortable than being around people. However, being alone reduces one's support system and bonding with others. As one said, "My wife is supportive, but I am a loner and don't like dealing with people" (Joseph). As another said,

> Back home you feel like an outsider because like you were gone for 7 years, and now you're leaving again for college so you don't really fit in back home because you haven't been around. Home feels very small after everything you've done and experienced. So, like right now I really don't fit in at school and I don't fit in at home and I kind of feel lost. And I no longer fit in at the military, obviously. I think the negative is not really having or feeling a part of anything (Lemar).

Research Question 3

What issues within the college affect persistence?

Lack of support from the college was heard from eight of the participants. The inability to communicate with college staff, faculty, and fellow students was heard from seven of the participants. Lack of trust with staff, faculty, and fellow students was heard from eight participants.

The first main theme is support. The college campuses were not adequately supporting the veterans with services. Four participants mentioned they did not know who to talk to about completing paperwork properly. The same four did not know to whom to ask questions and felt it was important to have someone on campus that was a veteran that could help with questions as well as be someone to whom they could relate.

As one said, "When the college didn't provide help, then you feel disappointed and have no direction" (Rachel). "I moved away from home, but I don't have a lot of contact with friends from home. A lot of the friends I made at school are veterans. The support on the campus is not the best, but the veterans I met have been great" (Jodi). As another participant stated, "If you don't do it on your own then you are not going to know. You have to keep asking for help because no one steps forward to offer support" (Lamar).

The second main theme is communication. Seven of the participants mentioned they could not relate to the other students in class. In addition, the same seven stated their communication with fellow students and staff was limited. While eight participants felt they were on different planets from fellow classmates. One of the participants mentioned, "When there were class discussions, the students always looked at the topic in one way. I had to bring a different perspective for them to look at things" (Joseph). As another said, "The students are very young, annoying, and immature" (Jose). As another said, "It is hard fitting in. You feel like an outsider at school" (Lemar). As another said,

> I don't blend in, but most of the time I do try. The students are on computers and then they talk amongst themselves while the professors are talking. They are so disrespectful. They are on their phones and laugh at each other and taking pictures. A lot of people are on their headphones listening to music when the professor is teaching. It's annoying and disrespectful. You would be yelled at if you were in a military class (John).

Professors were hard to communicate with for five of the participants because the professors treated the student veterans like they just finished high school. As one said,

The professors looked at everyone like they just started college. When I would ask a question, the professor would respond 'like you learned that in 11th grade or you should already know this', so that discouraged me from asking questions and my grades suffered (Joseph).

As another said, "The professors treated me like I just graduated from high school, and I didn't like it. They talked down to me" (Jose). As another stated, "There are varying academic levels of students and abilities. Professors need to understand that" (Baldrick).

Trust is the third main theme. Three of the participants felt trust prevented them from persisting in college. As one said, "I felt annoyed and only went to campus for classes" (Joseph). As another said, "The professors gave me a hard time about being in the military, so I did not trust them" (Jose).

Research Question 4

How do the named issues within the college affect persistence?

Each of the three themes had subthemes that described how the issues affected persistence. The four subthemes under support are: association, clarification/procedures, veterans' services offices, and integration. There are four subthemes under communication: relationships, isolation, veterans' services offices, and culture. Trust had two subthemes: relating and fellow students. They are listed in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

College Campus with Subthemes

Support	Communication	Trust
Association	Relationships	Relating
Clarification /Procedures	Isolation	Fellow students
Veterans' services offices	Veterans' services offices	
Integration	Culture	

There are four subthemes under support: association, clarification/procedures,

veterans' services offices, and integration. The first subtheme under support that

addresses how the issues affect persistence is association with fellow students and the

college campus, as seen through the veteran's perspective. As one said, "I did not

associate with the students on campus because they were stupid" (Jose). Association with

fellow students on campus was difficult for all of the participants because they felt the

other students lacked maturity. As one said, "I did not hang out with the young students

because they had nothing in common with me and they laughed at the most stupid things

in class" (John). As another said, "I have many life experiences that they don't have. And

I don't stay on campus, I just go to class and leave" (Joseph). Lack of association with

students and the college affects the veterans' persistence by making them feel like they

don't belong. As another said, "My life experiences kept me from connecting with

students on campus. Most of my friends were in the military. I spent money to attend

college, but I didn't get much in return" (Robert).

The second subtheme under support that addresses how the issues affect

persistence is clarification/procedures. Clarification of expectations and proper

procedures for students was lacking for seven of the participants. The same participants mentioned there was no one to tell them how long to study for or how to balance a school week. As one said, "No one tells you how long to study. I was killing myself trying to read everything and remember it. Then I was trying to hang out with my veteran friends. It didn't work out. My grades suffered" (John). As another said, "The bachelors program I applied to had no one on campus to help me with paperwork. I felt disappointed and had no direction" (Rachel). Lack of clarification affects persistence in college because procedures are not explained and confusion is created.

The third subtheme under support that addresses how the issues affect persistence is veteran service offices on college campuses. Only two of the veteran service offices were helpful. When the office was supportive, the veterans maneuvered through the system easily. As one said, "When I attended the community college, the veteran's services office met with me and helped guide me through the process. The military does that as well. You are told what to do and how to do it. The bachelor's program I applied to did not offer that type of support" (Rachel). "The veteran's office on campus is not very helpful. I don't go there" (Joseph). Veteran service offices on college campuses that meet the needs of the student veterans assists with persistence in college. As another said,

> Some veteran services offices on campus were not as supportive as other colleges I attended. I attended four colleges total and I can say a couple of them had veteran services offices that were more available to get a hold of and work with. One of the colleges wanted me to initiate the veterans group on campus, but I didn't have the time or want to do it (Robert).

The fourth subtheme under support that addresses how the issues affect persistence is integration. Integration on the college campus was lacking for eight of the participants. Each of the eight participants mentioned they did not associate with people on campus or participate in extra-curricular activities so did not feel integrated into the college environment. As one said, "I go to class and the only reason I'm on campus is to get to class. Once I'm done with class I go home and I study somewhere else just to stay off campus. I don't like being on campus at all" (Jose). Another stated, "I didn't really have any bad experience on campus. I don't deal with the students, veterans' services or anyone, I am a loner" (Joseph). As another said, "There are a lot of options at school. It's hard to set priorities" (John).

Communication is the second main theme from the college perspective. The four subthemes are relationships, isolation, veterans' services offices, and culture.

The first subtheme under communication that addresses how the issues affect persistence is relationships. The relationships student veterans had been mostly with fellow student veterans and not with civilian students on campus or with professors. As one said, "There was a disconnect with the students in my classes" (Robert). As another said,

> It is really hard to relate to people. Besides the veterans at my school, it is really hard. It's really hard to relate to people. Again, I'm really lucky that the veterans are there, but if they weren't than that would be one of my primary issues. At college it's a bunch of 18 and 19 year olds that have done nothing with their lives and feel entitled (Jodi).

> As another stated,

They have veterans' organizations on campus. I've met a couple vets there and most these guys are not combat veterans. You meet these vets thinking maybe we have something in common or whatever, and they start talking and you find out they're like a mechanic or supply. It gets annoying. They try to talk you up to their friends. I'm just not ok with that. They turn everything into a competition. Most of the guys who served and the environment I was in, we knew it was not ok to brag or compete. It's a mutual understanding". In addition, the same participant mentioned he had a hard time relating to professors. He stated, "I had a couple professors give me a hard time. Just an example like one professor went around the room asking students why they decided to go to school, and most students said oh you graduate high school you go to college. When it came to me why I decided to go. I don't know why, I decided to tell him I was in the military and this and that. Somehow the conversation got really aggressive with me and him. Somehow, like a combat thing got brought up, and he was like oh you never seen combat or whatever and rolled his eyes and kind of like tried to make fun of me in front of the other students, he tried to belittle me, I don't know why you would do that but that was a negative experience for me (Jose).

The second subtheme under communication that addresses how the issues affect persistence is isolation. Eight veterans felt isolated and not connected to the college campus they were attending. As one said, "When I was trying to transfer to a bachelor's program, the college did not have a veteran to help with questions. I felt I had no one to talk with" (Rachel). Another stated, "If it involves me being in that environment, I try to stay off campus as much as I can" (Jose).

The third subtheme under communication that addresses how the issues affect persistence is veteran service offices on the college campuses. Out of all of the veteran's services offices on college campuses, only a few were easy to work with and communicated in a way that helped the veterans. As one of the participants said, "The veteran services office on campus offers meetings and events, but they are always offered when I have class. I don't try to attend" (John). As another stated, "I had to ask the vet services office for help. They didn't offer any unless I asked" (Lamar).

The fourth subtheme under communication that addresses how the issues affect persistence is culture. The culture on a college campus is very different from the military. On the college campus there is less structure and one is encouraged to have creative independent thoughts. In contrast, the military provides structure, guidance, and encourages a team thought process. In the military everyone is ranked, classified, and wears similar uniforms. In college you wear what you want and you are not mandated to attend classes. The two are very different environments to learn in. The shift from military to college makes for a tough transition. As one said, "When the college didn't provide help, then you feel disappointed and have no direction" (Rachel). Another stated, "There are cultural differences between college and military. It is hard to relate to people that are not in your culture" (Baldrick). Another stated, "Other students are disrespectful of the professors. They play on their phones and talk in class during the lecture. You could never do that in the military" (John).

The third main theme is trust. Under that are two subthemes: relating, and fellow students.

The first subtheme under trust that addresses how the issues affect persistence is relating. First, relating was uncovered as a subtheme because all of them spoke about who they could and could not relate to in order to build trust. All of the participants mentioned fellow veterans or supportive family and friends as trustful relationships. Eight of the participants attended brick and mortar schools and felt they could not relate to civilian students on campus. As one said, "Besides the veterans at my school it's really hard to relate to people. But again, I'm really lucky the veteran thing is in place there because if it wasn't I could see that being one of my primary issues" (Jodi).

The second subtheme under trust that addresses how the issues affect persistence is fellow students. As one stated,

> It's all like a bunch of 18-19 year olds who have done nothing with their lives and are arrogant because they just got out of high school and is even worse cause it's an art school. They think they're extra special or something and they think they're super talented. Other kids just don't get it, when they're in class they are rude and disruptive. We have clubs and stuff but I'm not into clubs (Jodi).

Another said, "So you kind of do feel like an outsider a lot at school. It's kind of weird fitting in within the college because you don't obviously feel like you can hang out with these kids" (Lamar). The lack of trust each of the participants felt they had with people around them decreased the number of people they could depend on to help with persistence in college. With the lack of trust built with others while on a brick and mortar college campus, also eliminates reasons to join extracurricular activities and learn more about the college experience.

Research Question 5

What issues within the Veterans Administration affect persistence in college?

Lack of support from the Veterans Administration was heard from each of the participants. The inability to communicate with staff and the lack of trust with the VA making payments on time was heard by eight of the participants. Seven participants stated they had a hard time understanding VA expectations, which lead to all three themes.

Support from the VA is the first major theme. The VA is a military focused branch of the government where there are strict guidelines and procedures. However, five veterans had a hard time with scheduling medical appointments within a reasonable amount of time. This caused frustration and stress. As one said, "I tried to make an appointment, but they told me I would have to wait 9 months. I don't go there for medical treatment anymore" (Robert). Another stated,

> The VA would randomly schedule my TBI appointments and call me the day of. I would tell them I have class and can't attend. They would want to dock me for not going to my appointments, but I explained that I have a TBI so you can't remind me once of an appointment (Jodi).

The Post 9/11 GI Bill funding only covers 36 months of education. Therefore, if a veteran changes majors or does not do well in a course, they are required to take additional courses. The student veteran is penalized by not receiving additional funding coverage by the GI Bill and, as a result, the veteran is required to pay out of pocket or apply for student loans. As one said, "I changed majors because I wasn't challenged. This

is actually my last semester they are going to pay for. The 36 months are up so after this it's going to be all out of pocket" (Jose).

Communication is the second theme under the VA perspective. Communication with VA staff was not consistent among the participants in the study. None of them had the same experience, but they all had similar experiences with lack of understanding what to do and when to do it within the VA system. As one said, "The VA delayed my payments, so I had trouble finding someone to talk with about how to fix it" (John).

Trust is the third theme. The veterans felt they could not trust the VA to be consistent with paying their living expenses. As one said, "You have to know who to talk to, or it doesn't work. It is a clunky system" (Mike). Another one stated, "There was a lag time with payments" (Jodi).

Research Question 6

How do the named issues within the Veterans Administration affect persistence in college?

The three themes and their subthemes that further describe how the named issues affect persistence are described in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3

VA with Subthemes

Support	Communication	Trust
Funding/Financial	Procedures	Fear of losing benefits
Medical		Stress
Procedures/Protocol		

The three themes: support, communication, and trust, each had subthemes that describe how the issues affected persistence. Support has three subthemes: funding/financial, medical, and procedures/protocol.

The first subtheme under support that addresses how the issues affect persistence is funding/financial. Eight of the participants mentioned having difficulties with funding and financial support from the VA. As one said, "I was not receiving payment and when I called the VA, the woman told me on the phone that all I had to do was call once a month to confirm I was attending classes. How was I supposed to know this" (John)? Funding and financial support are crucial to feeling financially stable and being able to complete a degree without taking out loans. As another said, "I can't study because I am focused on having no money because the paperwork was messed up" (Jose).

The second subtheme under support that addresses how the issues affect persistence is medical. There was a lack of support from the Veterans Administration offices, which caused confusion on the part of five of the veterans. As one said, "I needed a physical in order to go to college, but I was told by the VA that I had to wait 6 months. I was almost kicked out of college, but at the last minute we figured it out so that I could continue attending classes" (Jose).

The third subtheme under support that addresses how the issues affect persistence is procedures/protocol. The procedures required for receiving timely payment for classes and living expenses was delayed for five participants. There was no real structure for what to do and when to do it, which was heard from seven of the participants. Therefore, four mentioned their credit scores went down. Three took out loans. Five had to call repeatedly to better understand what to do the next time they had to call the VA.

Communication is the second main theme and has one subtheme: procedures. Communication is a key piece missing from efficient support from the VA as reported by six of the participants.

The subtheme under communication that addresses how the issues affect persistence is procedures. Procedures were not well explained for any of the participants. All of the participants mentioned getting a hold of the right person or communicating with VA staff was not easy. They felt they had to already know who to speak with before problems were raised. Otherwise, they would have to call around until they found the right person. This caused stress and anxiety. As one participant stated, "I was not receiving payment for living expenses so I was behind on my car insurance payment and had no money to eat. Finally, someone at the VA told me I had to call every month I was in school to tell them I was still in school" (John). When other participants were asked if they had to also call while attending college, they stated they did not. Each participant had a different way of working through the system while attending classes.

Trust is the third main theme and has two subthemes: fear of losing benefits, and stress. The first subtheme under trust that addresses how the issues affect persistence is fear of losing benefits. Seven of the veterans had a fear of losing their benefits. The Post 9/11 GI Bill only covers 36 months of education. Three of the participants had changed their major while attending college, so they now have to pay out of pocket to complete their degree. Each of the veterans feel they cannot easily find the right person to speak with regarding questions they have, so they end up getting frustrated. If the veterans do not feel there is someone to talk with at the VA, then they lose trust. One of the participant's said, "I could not get an appointment with the VA for 8 months, so I decided

to find a healthcare provider outside of network and paid for the visit myself" (Robert).

Another stated,

> Since I changed majors, I know if I want to finish college I will have to get loans. When I first attended college, I just chose a major not knowing what I really wanted to do. That major was not challenging enough and gratifying. I changed majors and am much happier now (Jose).

In addition, the same participant mentioned "Since I did not receive money for my living expenses I was evicted from my apartment" (Jose).

The second subtheme under trust that addresses how the issues affect persistence is stress. Stress caused by a lag in payment has happened for five of the participants. As one said,

> A few years ago they messed up my paperwork somehow and they didn't pay me for like 3 months. It led to a whole eviction process, because you live off that money pretty much unless you have a part time job, which is even harder. When you're focused on money it's kind of hard to study and you are stressed (Jose).

Another one stated,

> The delayed payments from the VA caused stress and my credit score went down. My car payment and other bills were 2 months late. I had to dip into my savings for food and books while I waited for the late payment. It was hard to focus on school (John).

While another stated, "The VA tuition and stipend was late in payment, but I just explained to people that the money would be there, but it would be late. I got paperwork documenting there would be payment and I sent it to everyone" (Robert).

Summary of Results

In summary, the telephone interviews uncovered three major themes and several sub-themes that resulted in identifying issues and how they were issues to persistence in college. Support, communication, and trust were the three major themes that were found in their personal lives, in their college experience, and within their interactions with the VA.

In their personal lives, there was a lack of support from friends and family as they did not understand what the veteran was going through in life. Veterans with PTSD that did speak about positive family support seemed to be doing better in college because they knew they had someone to speak to in their personal lives. Communicating with friends and family like they used to do before entering the military was a major challenge. Trusting others to understand their needs and expectations was the third theme in their personal lives.

The college campuses were not adequately supporting the veterans with completing paperwork to enter college and signing up for classes each semester. This resulted in more confusion and stress. Participants could not relate with fellow students. The students in class were mostly younger and less mature than the participants. Professors seemed to point out the veterans in class, which made the veterans feel uncomfortable. Furthermore, professors made the veterans feel ill-equipped for class by discouraging their questions and assuming they remembered the same class material the other students knew.

The VA had a lack of available appointments for veterans to see a medical provider and the Post 9/11 GI Bill funding coverage was not adequate to support higher

numbers of graduation rates from four year institutions. No participant had the same experience or protocol when it came to working with the VA for payment of living expenses.

   This chapter explained the results of the study conducted with 10 participants that were veterans that had attended college. The results showed there are issues for these veterans and there are strategies to overcome the issues. Chapter 5 will summarize the findings in Chapter 4, explain who should be interested in these findings and who they will help, as well as explain the significance of the study.

Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

The research was an examination of factors that influence the persistence in college for military veterans, ages 22-27, with or without self-reported PTSD. Literature reviews verified a high percentage of student veterans were not graduating from a 4-year higher education institution. The research study uncovered issues student veterans perceived as affecting their persistence in college.

The research study supported Ackerman et al. (2009) and Ostovary & Dapprich (2011), which found there were low graduation rates amongst young military veterans in college. The issues were important to uncover so that graduation rates could increase for these young veterans. In addition, this study supports Langer Ellison et al. (2012) who focused their study on veterans with PTSD attending college and having difficulties with persistence.

Implications of Findings

Implications of the findings are significant in that they provide tangible actions student veterans, the college campus, and the VA can take in order to increase graduation rates of student veterans. The following sections explain what each party can do to better support veterans in college.

Personal life perspective. In regards to the veteran's personal life, support, communication, and trust are key themes to improving veteran persistence in college. The young military veterans spoke about returning home from military service and how they

were a different person based on their experiences in the military. Whether they were in combat or not, they were changed. Returning to civilian life as a significantly changed person causes friction at home with family and friends. This results in a lack of communication and understanding. Very few times do civilians have significant change in their lives that would be at the same level as someone who has participated in a branch of military service. The veterans returning to civilian life want to assimilate to their previous life, but cannot connect unless they have a veteran at home that can support them. As a result, the veterans disconnect from friends and family. Friends and family must understand that the person who enlisted in the military will not be the same person returning home after military service. The military personnel experience a new normal when they return home. As a result, friends and family cannot understand or adapt their ways of supporting and communicating with the military member, which results in broken relationships. Surrounding oneself with positive relationships with friends and family is a key piece to socialization. Therefore, to ease further stress that can trigger PTSD symptoms, greater understanding by friends and family are important to assist with the transition for veterans once returning home. Rumann and Hamrick (2010) reported the participants in their study had a hard time with personal relationships. Cigrang et al. (2014) reported over 30% of their study participants had ended their relationships after deployment and had reduced social support. Cigrang et al. (2014) suggested support as key to improving resilience among veterans. Brancu et al. (2014) reported social support as integral to overcoming issues associated with PTSD. These studies are similar to the current research in which all of the participants described their hardships with personal relationships and the importance of support.

Communication was the second theme in the research study. Communication was lacking in their personal lives with friends, family, and civilians. Communication included the participants' association with their military experiences and often times compared themselves to civilians. Removing common military jargon, improving understanding of civilian knowledge, and being more open with family and friends may improve communication in the veteran's personal life. Open and honest communication can lead to stronger relationships. This confirms the work by Finley et al. (2012) whose research reported veterans with PTSD had declined communication with their family and friends once returning home from military service.

Trust was the third theme in the research study. Trusting relationships with others was difficult for the participants in this study. Most were loners and were not transitioning well into civilian relationships. Additionally, they were not relating to their family and friends once they returned home. This study confirms work by Rumann and Hamrick (2010) which reported their respondents had a hard time with trusting people around them.

Student development theory was used as a basis for the current research. The five lenses of student development theory: psycho-social, cognitive, maturity, typology, and person-environment (Baxter Magdola, 2009). The three major themes in the veterans' personal lives are supported by the student development theory as each lens falls within support, communication and trust. The positive psycho-social, cognitive, maturity, type of person, and interactions with their environment all determine the veteran's increased support, communication, and trust within their personal life in order to increase their success in college.

College campus perspective. In regards to the college campus, support, communication, and trust are key themes to improving veterans' persistence in college. The study confirmed support from family and friends while the veteran attended college was important. Clarification from college campuses and explanation of required forms to be completed was important to the veteran's success. The current research confirms the work by Rumann and Hamrick (2010) who found veterans had difficulty with transitioning to college, including the paperwork necessary to become a student on a college campus. The authors' also reported student veterans compared their routine strict regimen of the military to their lack of structure on the college campus. Daly and Garrity (2013) reported the lack of consistent support for veterans on college campuses. Additionally, DiRamio and Jarvis (2011) reported colleges lacked support for veteran students. This was uncovered in the current research study where participants reported not all colleges treat veterans the same. Increasing support for veterans to feel like they belong and are included would increase their persistence in college.

Communication with fellow students in class was limited, as reported by the participants in the current study. The participants felt isolated and not every veteran service office on college campuses were equal. The isolation and inconsistent communication reduced the success of veterans and caused serious issues for the veterans' persistence. Once student veterans overcame communication problems, they felt more comfortable on the college campus. This study confirms the work of Wilson et al. (2013) who reported the importance of college faculty communicating with veterans in college to increase student veteran persistence. Ackerman et al. (2009) study also

relates to the current research findings in that they reported the importance of having veteran support services on the campus to assist student veterans with persistence.

The culture on college campuses is very different than military culture. The current study provided several examples of how participants had a hard time relating to the college culture. This confirms the work by Porter (2008) in which she reported veterans in college had a hard time with college culture.

Lack of trust with fellow students and professors was reported in the current research. Trust was only positive with fellow veterans on the campus. This confirms the work of Rumann and Hamrick (2010), who reported participants in their research had a hard time relating to and trusting civilian students in their classes. The current study also confirms Griffin and Gilbert (2012) who reported the lack of trust veterans have with college students and relating with those students.

Student development theory was used as a basis for the current research. The five lenses of student development theory: psycho-social, cognitive, maturity, typology, and person-environment (Baxter Magdola, 2009). The three major themes that associate with the college campus are supported by the student development theory as each lens falls within support, communication and trust. The positive psycho-social, cognitive, maturity, type of person, and interactions with their environment all determine the veteran's increased support, communication and trust with college staff, faculty, and civilian students in order to increase the veterans' success in college.

VA perspective. In regards to the Veterans Administration, support, communication, and trust are the key themes to improving veteran persistence in college. The VA offers classes for veterans once they leave the military that offer guidance with

entering college and the job market. However, veterans are often times not focused enough to really take advantage of these courses. In addition, the red tape to receive payment for college causes the veterans to take out loans to pay for college and then get reimbursed. The Post 9/11 GI Bill offers 36 months of college financing. If a student decides to change majors or attend a different college, they have the increased chance of running out of funding from the VA. Therefore, they are taking out loans and putting themselves in debt. This confirms the work of Griffin and Gilbert (2012) who reported the lack of control over accredited schools that take advantage of veterans' GI Bill benefits leaving students without a credible degree and the need for additional loans in order to graduate. Therefore, ensuring veterans utilize their Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits at an accredited school will further increase the veteran's chances at persistence in college. Otherwise, veterans could get discouraged and no longer feel the need to incur debts to complete a degree.

Participants have also mentioned that the Post 9/11 GI Bill does not cover housing during breaks from college, so the students need to find funding to pay for housing. When a veteran has PTSD and attending college, they should not have to be burdened by finding money to pay for housing, medications, and finding a physician to see them since the VA Healthcare facilities are backlogged with veterans trying to schedule appointments. This confirms the work of Ackerman, DiRamio, and Garza Mitchell (2009) in which they reported the VA's bureaucracy reduces veteran persistence in college. Langer Ellison et al. (2012) also confirms the problem with difficulties with receiving support and problems with communicating with VA staff in order to receive financial support and medical support. Langer Ellison et al. (2012) further supports the

theme of trust as their participants found it hard to trust VA staff with regards to correct

information, which was also uncovered in the current research study. Once the VA

streamlines guidelines and procedures in order to improve consistency for student

veterans in using their Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits, then this may increase the number of

veterans attending college and graduating. Additionally, increased availability of medical

appointments and support for veterans by the VA could increase the help veterans ask for

which results in improved health of the veterans. This is in contrast to the current study

where participants reported a deficiency in both health and financial support. Repairing

both broken systems could increase support, communication, and trust of the VA by

veterans in order to increase veteran persistence in college.

Student development theory was used as a basis for the current research. The five

lenses of student development theory: psycho-social, cognitive, maturity, typology, and

person-environment (Baxter Magdola, 2009). The three major themes from the VA

perspective are supported by the student development theory as each lens falls within

support, communication and trust. The positive psycho-social, cognitive, maturity, type

of person, and interactions with their environment all determine the veteran's increased

support, communication and trust with the VA in order to increase their success in

college.

Limitations

Limitations of the study include the low number of participants who had self-

reported PTSD. There were three additional people that wanted to participate in the

study, but had fear their PTSD would be discussed. There was nothing that could have

been said by the researcher that would have reassured them to participate. Therefore, the researcher had to locate participants that did not have PTSD.

Recommendations

Actionable recommendations to improve persistence in college for student veterans include stronger support, increased communication, and greater understanding of the veteran that has returned home from service.

Within the student veteran's personal life, family and friends should acknowledge the new person that has returned to civilian life. Family and friends cannot compare the returning veteran to the same person that entered the military. The military provided unique training and life experiences that mold the veteran into a new person once they reenter civilian life. Family and friends should receive resources on what to expect once the veteran returns home and guidelines for what kind of conversations can be solicited. Veterans should surround themselves with fellow veterans for camaraderie and association.

Within the student veteran's college life, they should be supported by college staff and faculty with greater understanding. Making veterans feel included in the college campus creates a more positive experience for the veteran. Utilizing tools and services the college offers for all students may need to be catered to veterans in order for the veterans to feel included and encourage persistence. Competency classes about veteran students should be created for college faculty and staff in order to increase communication and trust. Open and honest discussions should be developed on the college campus in order for greater understanding of veterans. This will facilitate civilian students with increased understanding of veterans in the classroom and promote

integration of the veterans. All of this will further increase veteran persistence in college which leads to higher graduation rates.

The Veterans Administration must increase support, communication with, and build trust with veterans utilizing VA services. Increasing healthcare appointment options, assessing veterans while they attend college for increased health benefits, and offering more healthcare providers may lead to veteran trust and communication with VA staff. Since the participants in the current study all had different experiences with the VA, a change is necessary in order for increased consistency in services provided to veterans. Specifically, Post 9/11 GI Bill support should be extended for veterans that change majors or transfer to different colleges. Stronger regulations for colleges, specifically for-profit colleges, that accept GI Bill funding must also be implemented. This would prevent wasted funding to for-profit colleges that solely take advantage of veterans and their guaranteed funding.

Recommendations for further research. Further research should consist of exploring what friends and family could do better in order to increase support for veterans to persist in college. College campus staff should be surveyed to uncover what resources they perceive would better equip them to serve student veterans. The VA staff at each facility should be questioned on services offered to student veterans so that inconsistencies can be uncovered and alignment in services could be addressed.

Recommendations for policy development. Local politicians and government officials should provide increased awareness of veterans and facts about young veterans within each community. Therefore, community resources could be established for open dialogue and increased support for veterans and their families. Additional resources

should be offered to mitigate problems and family therapy sessions should be offered. Politicians and government officials need to formalize guidelines for veterans that describe exactly what an accredited school is and the repercussions for attending for-profit schools.

Leaders on college campuses can ask current student veterans to participate in meetings that would encourage support and greater understanding of veterans so that their needs can be addressed. Offering an opportunity for open dialogue builds trust, opens communication, and offers support for the student veterans. Colleges should increase understanding of veterans for faculty and staff by offering competency courses and encouraging open dialogue.

The Department of Defense (DoD) and the Veterans Administration (VA) should require veterans and their close friends and family to attend counseling that rebuilds relationships. Policies should be in place that better support personal relationships with veterans and recognizes the importance of those relationships. Assessment of skills and abilities by the VA of veterans should be conducted to determine specific fields of study the veterans should focus on in college would prevent wasted courses and majors taken in college. If college courses are not fully utilized by the student veteran due to a college degree change, then the veteran should not be penalized with reduced funding from the Post 9/11 GI Bill. The VA Medical Center can find ways to reduce wait times for medical appointments and follow up while the student veteran attends college.

Recommendations for practice. Recommendations for practice within the veteran's personal life include self-awareness of psychiatric conditions and knowing when to seek help. Furthermore, veterans have to build relationships with their family

and friends, understanding they may be difficult, but are necessary to increase support, communication, and trust.

College campuses should offer more veteran services offered by veterans to support the success of student veterans. Veterans are accustomed to the military culture where they are told what to do, how to do it, and when to do it. Entering a college campus with no direction or support discourages veterans from having success on the college campus. Higher education facilities must care enough about these men and women to educate them fairly and adapt resources on campus to create a supportive environment. There must be an established check list that colleges and universities can utilize in order to increase graduation rates of veterans. This would provide more consistency, credibility, and success for both colleges and veterans.

The VA should increase favorable marketing of the men and women that have served this country. This would expand the knowledge civilians have about veterans, reduce misunderstandings about military service personnel, and improve the image of Veterans Administration.

Conclusion

Chapter 1 introduced the research and described the problem that was going to be used for the study. Over the past 10 years, PTSD has been reported in as many as 20% of young military veterans returning home from military theater known as OIF/OEF. There are issues to persisting in college that are caused by PTSD. This qualitative phenomenological study explored the factors that influence persistence in college for military veterans with and without PTSD between the ages of 22 and 27. Veterans are attending college with multi-layered life situations; therefore, student development theory

best supports why they are not persisting in college. The theoretical framework of student development theory proposed that persistence relates to a veteran's psycho-social, cognitive, maturity, typology, and person-environment interactions.

The literature reviews that were included in Chapter 2 implied student veterans were not graduating from 4-year higher education institutions but were entering college at higher rates over the past ten years. The issues veterans with PTSD face while attending post-secondary educational institutions can be complex. The literature reviews utilized empirical studies and books to emphasize the reasons why further research is necessary to uncover what the issues are, from the young veteran perceptive, so that these veterans can persist in college in order to graduate. Jacobi et al. (1987) associated a student's success with the depth of support the higher education institution provides (i.e., college orientation, tutoring, on-campus associations, etc.). The stronger the support and help with the transition that is offered by the college, the chances of graduation increase (Jacobi et al., 1987). Offering student development theory in support of further research may result in identifying the resources veterans need to graduate.

Chapter 3 explained the methodology for the phenomenological study, who the target participants would be, and the data collection technique used to develop Chapter 4 and 5. A qualitative study conducted via telephone conversations elicited a true narrative from the participants' points of view. Once the IRB at St. John Fisher College approved the study, the qualitative research began. Veterans, self-diagnosed with and without PTSD who had attended at least two semesters of college, responded to the flyer and considered participating in the study. Personal contacts were also approached and asked if they would like to participate in the study. Interviews were reviewed and transcribed.

Heuristic coding of the data was completed that uncovered themes for each research question asked. This resulted in why and how there were issues to persistence in college. Overall analysis techniques were described.

Chapter 4 described the results of the research study and according to the ten participants interviewed, three lenses: personal life, college perspective, and VA perspective were used to define the issues to persistence and how they were issues. In summary, the telephone interviews uncovered three major themes and several sub-themes that resulted in identifying what the issues were and how they were issues to persistence in college. Support, communication and trust were the three major themes that were found in their personal lives, in their college experience, and within their interactions with the VA.

In their personal lives, there was a lack of support from friends and family as they did not understand what the veteran was going through in life. Veterans with PTSD that did speak about positive family support seemed to be doing better in college because they knew they had someone to speak to in their personal lives. Communicating with friends and family like they used to do before entering the military was a major challenge. Trusting others to understand their needs and expectations was the third theme in their personal lives.

The college campuses were not adequately supporting the veterans with completing paperwork to enter college and signing up for classes each semester. This resulted in more confusion and stress. Participants could not relate with fellow students. The students in class were mostly younger and less mature than the participants. Professors seemed to point out the veterans in class, which made the veterans feel

uncomfortable. Furthermore, professors made the veterans feel ill-equipped for class by discouraging their questions and assuming they remembered the same class material the other students knew.

The VA had a lack of available appointments for veterans to see a medical provider and the Post 9/11 GI Bill funding coverage was not adequate to support higher numbers of graduation rates from four year institutions. No participant had the same experience or protocol when it came to working with the VA for payment of living expenses.

Chapter 5 concludes this research study of ten military veterans that self-reported whether they have or did not have PTSD. The findings produced three major themes through the personal life, college life, and VA perspective. The three themes were: support, communication, and trust. The implications from the study suggest in the veteran's personal lives the veteran still associates with the military and views civilians as coming from a different culture. Relationships with friends and family need to be strong in order for the veterans to feel supported. The implications for the college suggest there is a lack of support, communication, and trust from college staff, faculty, and civilian students. The implications from the VA suggest there is not a consistent procedure for every person that utilizes VA benefits. Nor is there enough resources for the veterans from the VA. Recommendations suggest stronger family and friend support, college campus support, and VA support. Communication with family and friends needs to increase while communication with staff, faculty and students on the college campus needs to improve and increase. The VA also needs to improve their communication techniques with veterans. Trust has to be built with veterans by their friends and family,

the college campus and civilian students on the campus, as well as with Veteran

Administration staff. Increasing their graduation rates provides a more educated veteran

population that can result in better job security and an increase in pay.

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Appendix A

Problem Statement

Persistence =
2 semesters

There are possible
issues caused by
PTSD in young
military veterans,
ages 22 to 27,
which prevents
them from

College
perspective

VA
Perspective

Personal life
perspective
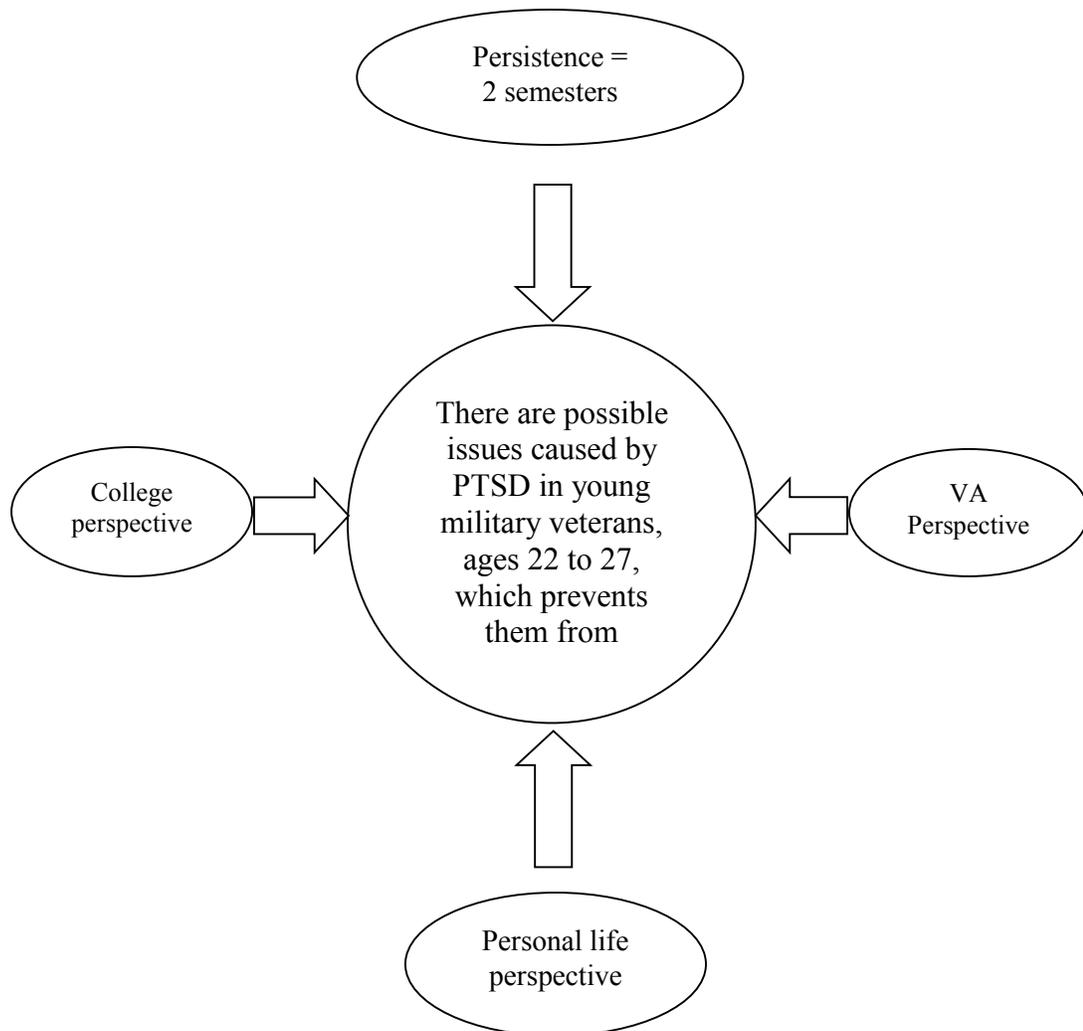
Appendix B

Theoretical Framework

Diagram: "Student Development Theory" branching to: Psychosocial, Cognitive Development, Maturity, Typology, Person-Environment Interaction
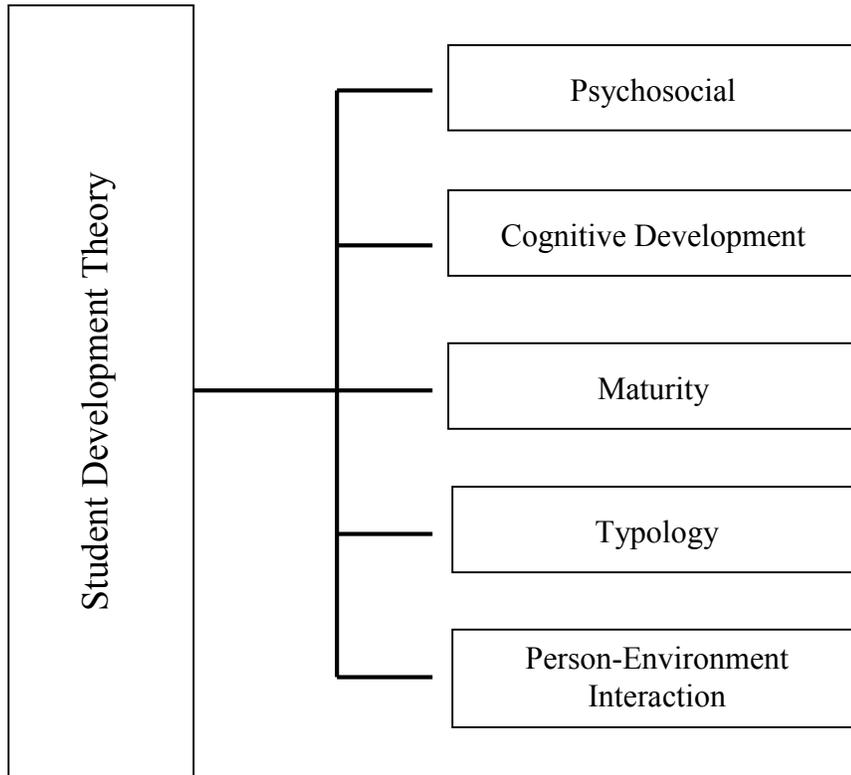
Appendix C

Letter of Introduction/Cover Letter

Date

Dear Participant:

Hello and thank you for your participation in the research study. The researcher is an Educational Doctorate (Ed. D) candidate at St. John Fisher College. I believe your input will be valuable to this research study. As part of the study, you will assist with uncovering the phenomena of why there are limited numbers of veterans with PTSD graduating from college.

The purpose of the research study is to identify issues that exist for young military veterans with PTSD to persist in college. The issues the researcher is looking for include from the veteran's personal life, from the college, and from the VA. Studies have shown veterans are either not using their benefits or they are not completing a college degree. If the issues can be identified, then veterans can increase their chances of graduating with a college degree. Currently there are limited research articles that discuss the issues young military veterans face with regard to persistence in college.

In this study you will be asked semi-structured questions in the interview. The interview will last approximately 60 minutes. The interview will be recorded so that I can collect the results of each interview and combine for analysis. There are no risks to you from participating in the interview. If you decide to end the interview early, there will be no repercussions to you. To encourage a quality conversation, I have the option to ask follow up or clarifying questions related to the research questions. This will elicit valuable data to use in the study.

All interviews will be confidential and you will decide on a false name to be called during the interview. All notes and recordings of the interviews will be locked and stored at the researcher's home for three years.

If you have questions or concerns, please feel free to email the researcher, Rhonda Butler, at ███████████, or my dissertation chair, Dr. C. Michael Robinson, at ███████████ The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of St. John Fisher College has approved the research study for the completion of the dissertation.

Best regards,

Rhonda M. Butler
Ed. D. Candidate and Researcher
St. John Fisher College

Appendix D

St. John Fisher College
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title of study: College Persistence: Young Military Veterans with PTSD

Name(s) of researcher(s):   Rhonda M. Butler

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Michael Robinson   Phone for further information: 315-498-7237

Purpose of study: From the veteran's perspective, what do they perceive to be issues

  to persisting in college and how might they be an issue.

Place of study: Researcher will conduct recorded interviews via   Length of participation: 60 minutes
    telephone.
Risks and benefits: The expected risks and benefits of participation in this study are explained below:

  Risks – could trigger negative experiences while enrolled in college. If you have any problems
  during or after the interview, you can call 1-800-273-8255, The Veterans Crisis Line.

  Benefits – assist other veterans, college staff, and government officials in better assisting
  veterans with graduating from college.

Method for protecting confidentiality/privacy: Use of pseudo names for participant's privacy. All recorded
        interviews will be saved and protected by the researcher
        and not shared with outside sources.
Your rights: As a research participant, you have the right to;

  1.   Have the purpose of the study, and the expected risks and benefits fully explained to you
    before you choose to participate.
  2.   Withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.
  3.   Refuse to answer a particular question without penalty.
  4.   Be informed of appropriate alternative procedures or courses of treatment, if any, that
    might be advantageous to you.
  5.   Be informed of the results of the study.

I have read the above, received a copy of this form, and I agree to participate in the above-named study.

_____   _____   _____
Print name (Participant)   Signature   Date

_____   _____   _____
Print name (Investigator)   Signature   Date

If you have any further questions regarding this study, please contact the researcher listed above. If you
experience emotional or physical discomfort due to participation in this study, please contact the Office of
Academic Affairs at 385-8034 or the Health & Wellness Center at 385-8280 for appropriate referrals.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of St. John Fisher College has reviewed this project. For any
concerns regarding confidentiality, please call Jill Rathbun 585-385-8012. She will direct your call to a
member of the IRB at St. John Fisher College.

Revised 9/01

Interview Sheet

Consent form received:

Pseudo-name   Date
Start time: End time:

Name: Email: Phone #:

Information: Male/Female	Single/Married	Branch of service:
Age	Attend college P/T or F/T	
Race	How many semesters completed?	
	Previously attended college before military? Y / N	
In college now? Y / N		
How many deployments have you had?		
Major		
Current college attending		
		Self reported persistence: Yes/No
Self reported PTSD: Yes/No		

Interview Question #1 - Why did you decide to attend college?

Interview Question #2 - Tell me about your experiences as a college student

Interview Question #3 - What are you hoping to do with the degree?

Interview Question #4 - What are some negatives you've experienced at college?

Interview Question #5 - Did you overcome barrier/issue. What was it and how?

Interview Question #6 - Would you consider your negative experience in college an issue to your persistence?

Interview Question #7 - Can you tell me how this is an issue to you persisting in college? From your personal life perspective?

Interview Question #8 - Can you tell me what the negative experiences are from the college perspective?

Interview Question #9 - Can you tell me how this negative experience is an issue from the college perspective?

Interview Question #10 - Can you tell me what the negative experiences are from the VA perspective? What are you finding difficult?

Interview Question #11 - Can you tell me how this negative experience is an issue from the VA perspective?

Would you like me to share the results of the study with you after the research is completed?

Appendix F

Interview Questions

1. Why did you decide to attend college?

2. How many semesters of college have you completed?

3. Tell me about your experiences as a college student.

4. What are some highlights from your college experience?

5. What are you hoping to do with the degree?

6. What are some negatives you've experienced at college?

7. Would you consider your negative experience in college an issue to your persistence?

8. Can you tell me how this is an issue to you persisting in college?

Appendix G

Demographics for veterans with PTSD

Pseudonym	Joseph	Robert	Jose	Lemar	Rachel
Age	26	30	26	27	31
Gender	Male	Male	Male	Male	Female
Race	European American	European American	Hispanic	African American	European American
Deployments	2	3	3	1	0
Graduated from post-secondary institution	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
*Single/married	Married	Single	Single	Single	Married
Branch of service	Marine	Marine	Marine	Army	Army

Demographics for veterans without PTSD

Pseudonym	John	Baldrick	Vincent	Jodi	Mike
Age	25	28	29	29	23
Gender	Male	Male	Male	Male	Male
Race	Asian	European American	Hispanic	African American	European American
Deployments	1	0	0	0	0
Graduated from post-secondary institution	No	Yes	No	No	No
*Single/married	Single	Single	Single	Single	Single
Branch of service	Army	Air Force	Marine	Marine	Air Force

*Single or married at the time of the interview.