

Eastern Illinois University

## The Keep

---

Masters Theses

Student Theses & Publications

---

Spring 2020

### Female Student Veteran's Transition to College

Doug Michaels

*Eastern Illinois University*

Follow this and additional works at: <https://thekeep.eiu.edu/theses>



Part of the [Higher Education Commons](#), and the [Student Counseling and Personnel Services Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Michaels, Doug, "Female Student Veteran's Transition to College" (2020). *Masters Theses*. 4775.  
<https://thekeep.eiu.edu/theses/4775>

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Theses & Publications at The Keep. It has been accepted for inclusion in Masters Theses by an authorized administrator of The Keep. For more information, please contact [tabruns@eiu.edu](mailto:tabruns@eiu.edu).

Female Student Veteran's Transition to College

Doug Michaels

Eastern Illinois University

**ABSTRACT**

This study was focused on learning more about the experiences female student veterans have while transitioning from the military to college as well as what types of resources they utilized during this time. Research on this population is very limited, but the number of relevant studies completed is increasing. A narrative qualitative approach was utilized for this study in order to give this population the platform to tell their stories and for their voices to be heard. There were four participants who have all served at least one year in the military and have completed at least one year of post-secondary education. The participants were interviewed one on one over the phone and their narratives are included as part of this study. This study found that no journey is the same as another and female student veterans have a unique set of needs that higher education institutions need to be aware of. Also, the findings shed light on a discriminative and sexist culture that exists within the military and with higher education institutions. Lastly, these students often face challenges such as connecting with others, learning relevant information, and completing relevant course work as they enter college.

*Keywords:* Female Student Veteran, Military, Transition, Support, Higher Education

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to take the time to thank the following individuals who made this research possible. First, I would like to thank my thesis advisor Dr. Timm. Her experience and insight helped turn the original and rough idea into a completed master's thesis. Also, her support and guidance made this process easier than I was expecting. Second, I would like to extend my thanks to my thesis committee. Dr. April Flood and Amanda Starwalt, thank you for your collaboration and sharing your knowledge on the topic. You both aided in the creation of this study. I would also like to thank my supervisor, Tanya Willard. You were a very helpful sounding board for me, and you helped me navigate various tricky situations throughout this process. Next, I would like to thank the participants of this study. The bravery to share your experiences with me is truly powerful and I am forever grateful that you trusted me with your stories. Also, I want to thank every veteran who has served and those who continue serve the United States of America. Thank you for your service. I would not have been able to do any of this without each one of you. Again, thank you!

Table of Contents

Abstract.....ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....iii

CHAPTER I.....1

Introduction.....1

    Purpose of the Study.....2

    Research Questions.....4

    Significance of the Study.....4

    Limitations.....4

    Definition of Terms.....6

    Summary.....8

CHAPTER II.....9

Review of Literature.....9

    History of Females in The United State Military.....9

    Veterans’ Access to Higher Education.....11

    Female’s Military Experience.....14

    Transition to College.....17

        Schlossberg’s Transition Theory.....17

        Gilligan.....24

    Summary.....26

CHAPTER III.....28

Methods.....28

    Design of the Study.....28

    Research Site.....28

    Participants.....29

    Instrumentation.....30

    Data Collection.....30

Data Analysis.....31

Treatment of Data.....32

Summary.....32

CHAPTER IV.....33

Narratives.....33

    Mary.....33

    Ann.....35

    Faith.....38

    Tina.....42

    Summary.....45

CHAPTER V.....46

Analysis.....46

    Female Student Veteran’s Transition to College.....46

        Situation.....46

        Self.....50

    Resources That Aid Female Veteran’s Transition to College.....53

        Support.....54

        Strategies.....58

    Summary.....61

CHAPTER VI.....62

Discussion.....62

    Female student veteran’s description of their transition to college.....63

    Resources that female student veterans utilize to aid in their transition to college.....65

    Implications for Higher Education.....70

    Further Research.....74

    Conclusion.....76

References.....78

Appendix A.....91

Appendix B.....92  
Appendix C.....93  
Appendix D.....97  
Appendix E.....98

## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

Currently, there are 370,085 females who are active members of the United States Military compared to the 1,739,551 males who actively serve in the United States Military (Center, 2017). According to the Department of Defense (2016), there are currently two million female veterans in the United States. In the United States there are more than 1,000,000 student veterans utilizing their educational benefits to attend some form of post-secondary education; only 27 percent of those student veterans are female (Nation Center for PTSD, 2014). Serving in the military as a female has always been challenging because they feel that they must conform to a male-based organization and don't have a voice and are misperceived (Diramio, Jarvis, Iverson, Seher, & Anderson, 2015).

Transitioning to student life is a different experience for everyone (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). For some they enter college straight out of high school, others take a few years between high school and college. For student veterans it can be either of those or, they could enter college out of high school, leave, and then come back. Students who have served in the military experience two different worlds. One being the structure and strict supervision world of the military (Derefinko, et al., 2018) and the other is the world more focused on cultivating independent thinking, personal development, and creativity in post-secondary education (McReynolds, 2014; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Once, student veterans leave one environment it is hard to enter or reenter the other. Individuals become so accustomed to and comfortable with their surroundings that they are unprepared for change. Change can be extremely difficult for people to endure (Ballard, 2016). More specifically, personnel who leave the military and enter the academic world are faced with struggles that civilians have a hard time

understanding unless they have gone through the same experiences (Gregg, Howell, & Shordike, 2016).

Pellegrino & Hoggan (2015) stated that identifying as a female can bring different challenges to the transition as well. There are struggles and circumstances that female student veterans are more likely to face (i.e. having a family to support, working full time while going to school, etc.) when transitioning than individuals who do not identify as a female (Pellegrino & Hoggan, 2015). Though there are similar circumstances for everyone who transitions out of the military no one's situation is the same. In many cases female student veterans have more responsibilities and put more value into different things that individuals who do not identify as female would not (Strong, Crow, & Lawson, 2018). This study is going to take a deeper look into the transition female student veterans make into the educational world as well look at the different challenges they face while doing so.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to look at the transition female student veterans make when going to college. The transition of male student veterans has been researched time and time again, but there is limited research on the population that includes female student veterans. This research is limited because cisgender men make up most of the United States military and the roles of females in the military has been limited although progress has been made in the past couple of decades. This study will examine struggles female student veterans face when entering or reentering a college setting. Also, this study will seek to find what resources female veteran students found helpful during their transition.

This research is extremely important for me because as a student affairs professional, I want to be knowledgeable about the underrepresented student populations that I will work with

throughout my career. Through the continuation of research, I have grown extremely interested in the study of the transition from military to college. Seeing how the transition potentially differs between each participant will give me the ability to draw multiple conclusions and gain more insight into what female veterans need to be successful on a college campus. This research has also been inspired by a person who has had a significant role in my life. She is a veteran currently enrolled in college.

Through her time in college I have seen different departments fail her and either be unable or unwilling to help her out. For example, when she found out she was going to deploy there was a month-long training that she had to attend, and two professors were completely unwilling to work with her schedule and made her drop the classes. The professors said that if she was not going to be able to physically be in class there was no way for her to pass the class and it would be an unfair advantage for her to complete her assignments online. As a member of the military she was used to structure and rigorous standards which she brought into the classroom. She often spoke about frustrations with seeing their education differently. For example, her interactions within a group project have been difficult because she was used to being prompt and getting things done, but her classmates were very lackadaisical in completing their assigned parts.

Before her deployment she was very involved on campus in different areas including residence life and new student orientation. In those roles, she learned a great deal about resources on campus as well as how to access them easily and without judgement. While transitioning back she utilized many of these resources. She also received support from new student orientation because they allowed her to return to the level of involvement she had before she left. This has

played a role in her successful transition back to school because she was able to reconnect to people on campus as well as different departments on campus.

### **Research Questions**

This study is seeking to understand the transition to college for those females who have served in the military and now identify as veterans. The following research questions guide this study.

1. How do female student veterans describe their transition to college?
2. What resources do female students utilize to aid in their transition to college?

### **Significance of the Study**

This study will shed light on an under researched group. In the academic year of 2011-2012 22% of student veterans identified as female (Radford, Bentz, Dekker, & Paslov, 2016). Thirty percent of female veterans have a bachelor's degree compared to the twenty percent of male veterans that hold a bachelor's degree (Heitzman & Comers, 2015). This research will fill a gap that exists because much of the previous research on veterans focused on military men.

Transitioning in general can be different but transitioning out of the military and into a classroom can be a strenuous process (Heineman, 2017). Through this research a better understanding of those challenges will be brought to light. It is important for higher education institutions to understand what their students go through and how to be inclusive to their needs. This study will help colleges and universities understand what female student veterans face when transitioning to college and allow them to potentially alter the resources they offer, making them more effective and useful.

### **Limitations**

There are a few limitations of this study. First, the researcher is not a veteran and has no actual experience with the military. This could create a limitation because the researcher may not

have been able to create a good rapport with the participants because the researcher may be viewed as an outsider. Secondly, the researcher does not identify as female and due to this the researcher cannot fully understand the different experiences or expectations of female student veterans. However, the researcher worked to develop an interview protocol that allowed for the building of respect and comfort during the interview that allows the interviewer to move toward asking more personal questions as the interview progresses. The researcher shared that they are not military themselves and will work to keep the participants identities private. Through recruiting of participants from various institutions without asking the participant to disclose their institution. The researcher also made it clear with the participants that they may withdraw their participation at any point in the study where they feel uncomfortable.

Another limitation was that the researcher used multiple participants from multiple institutions. This may be viewed as a limitation because the responses that are given during the interviews could drastically vary and not provide a clear understanding of the proposed research questions. On the contrary, this was not a limitation because the alternative option of having the participants attend the same institution could have created very closed off answers that do not allow for further research to be conducted. Lastly, due to this being a qualitative study, a personal bias could lead to the researcher disregarding valuable findings because they do not support the belief held by the researcher. However, the researcher created an interview protocol that keeps the questions open and non-leading which allowed the questions to remain unbiased. Also, due to the researcher's lack of experience with this population, the researcher had an open mind that mitigated any potential bias by not searching for an answer but allowing all outcomes to be accepted.

## Definition of Terms

**Active Duty Service Member.** An individual who serves in the military full time. They may live on a military base and can be deployed at any time (National Center for PTSD, 2012).

**Enlisted Service Member.** An individual who enters the military with a high school diploma or GED and these individuals earn college credit while learning a job related to their chosen military branch (Office of People Analytics, 2019).

**National Guard.** Members serve part time while working or attending school full time. They train to be ready to respond to local emergencies, natural disasters, and overseas missions (United States Army, 2019).

**Noncommissioned Officer.** A subordinate office in the army, air force, or marine corps appointed from among enlisted personnel (noncommissioned officer, 2019).

**Officer.** An individual who earns a college degree and then joins the military (Office of People Analytics, 2019).

**Reserve.** Members serve part time while working or attending school full time. Each branch of the military has a Reserve component. They can serve either overseas or stateside. The primary function is to fill gaps in service positions while active duty soldiers are deployed overseas. The Reserves also provide and maintain trained units that are available for active duty and can be used during times of war, national emergencies, or on a as needed basis (National Center for PTSD, 2012).

**Student Veteran.** Any student who is a current or former member of the active duty military, the National Guard, or Reserves regardless of deployment status, combat experience, legal veteran status, or GI Bill use participating in higher education (Vacchi, 2012).

**Veteran.** A veteran is someone who has served in the active military, naval or air service. These individuals were also discharged or released under conditions that were not dishonorable (United States Federal Government, 2018).

**Female/Woman.** The researcher recognizes that these terms hold different meanings. The military has become a binary system and due to this the researcher will be using these terms interchangeably. The researcher will be looking to have female participants in this study.

One's gender in the military is something that affects them daily. Gender isn't defined by one's anatomy, it is a psychological construct where one chooses to identify however they want to (George & Stoke, 2018). There are numerous gender identities recognized beyond men and women (White, Moeller, Ivecevic, & Brackett, 2018). The formation of gender identity is extremely important for individuals. It plays a key role in different things like how they feel about themselves, how they act, and how they interact with the people around them (Schimmel-Bristow, et al., 2018). It is important to understand that someone's gender identity may or may not be the same as their sex that was assigned at birth. Also, gender identity is not to be confused for sexual orientation. They are deeply different from one another (Kirkup, 2018). Someone who identifies as trans or non-binary faces copious amounts of discrimination throughout their life. Most of the time this is because people who do not identify as trans or non-binary refuse to accept or understand people's personal characteristics if they differ from their own (Picard, 2018). In *Resisting Reality*, a book authored by Sally Haslanger, the definition of gender lies in the "normal" behaviors of men and women (Haslanger, 2012). This is a problem because it does not include those individuals who identify as women, but do not want to follow the societal norms of feminine behavior (Jenkins, 2016).

**Summary**

This study focuses on female student veterans and how they transition to a college setting. Different aspects such as the challenges they face while leaving the military and during their transition into college will also be studied. Recognizing that the transition from the military is full of different experiences and challenges is the first step to understanding that these students' experiences are unique to them and different from other populations within a college or university. This study will also fill a gap in the research that exists due to the majority of the previous research focusing on student veterans who identify as men.

## **Chapter II**

### **Review of Literature**

This chapter provides a review of the literature, specifically literature that relates to the history of female in the military, female's military experience, their access to higher education, and their transition to college. These four subsections are used as the backbone of this study. Previous research has provided a historical overview of the intended topic as well as a direction for this study.

#### **History of Females in The United States Military**

Females and the United States military have a unique history. Since the beginning of the original colonies, females have played a role within the military (Kamarck, 2016). Through the Civil War females were indirectly a part of the military, they were not allowed to enlist or formally be a part of the military.

Deborah Sampson and Margaret Cochran Corbin are two of the first females recognized for their service in the military (Hiltner, 1999; Kamarck, 2006). Sampson impersonated a male soldier for 18 months during the Revolutionary War (Hiltner, 1999). Corbin sustained an injury while defending Fort Washington from British soldiers and due to that was the first female to receive a military pension from Congress (Kamarck, 2016). Following that conflict, females started to be utilized as unofficially medical staff for the military. During the Civil War the Union army established a civilian nursing core that was run by females and created an opportunity for females to serve their country (Iskra, 2010).

Females were finally recognized for their role as well as given a permanent place in the United States military in the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Iskra, 2010). Kamarck identified that before the Women's Armed Service Integration Act was signed, Congress established different reserve

corps for the Navy, Army, Marines, and Air Force. This was done due to the dire need of individuals to fill different roles. By the completion of World War II more than 400,000 females had served the military in some capacity (Kamarck, 2016). These females held various roles in different areas including nurses, reserves, the American Red Cross, the United Services Organization, and the Civil Air Patrol (Kamarck, 2016). Boyd (1998) reported that in 1948 President Harry Truman signed the Women's Armed Service Integration Act which gave females a solidified role in the military. However, restrictions were developed. None of the branches allowed females to hold combat positions and the percentage that females could make up the military was capped at two percent (Devilbiss, 1990). The rank females could achieve was capped at officer, females could not hold authority over men, and finally females were not assigned to aircraft and most naval ships to prevent their participation in combat (Devilbiss, 1990). Over the next three decades the presence of females in the military grew. In the 1950s and 1960s females became eligible for higher ranking positions as well as officer promotions with higher pay. Also, the cap on how many females could enlist was lifted (Baker II, 2006).

The 1970's found females being admitted into Airborne and Air Assault School, Field Artillery, Air Defense, and the service academies; positions from which they were previously banned. Females were also allowed to fly noncombat aircraft as well as serve on noncombat ships (Baker II, 2006). Females were still held back from live combat and this continued in 1988 when the Department of Defense passed what was known as the "Risk Rule." According to Gebicke (1998), the Risk Rule excluded females from noncombat units or missions that had certain levels of risk of direct combat, being captured, or facing hostile return fire.

As time has progressed rules and roles have changed. In 1992 and 1993 females could be assigned to combat aircraft in the Navy, Air Force, and Marines Corp due to the National

Defense Authorization Act (Gebicke, 1998). In 1994 the “Risk Rule” was rescinded allowing service members to be assigned to all positions for which they qualified, with the exception being units that have the primary purpose to engage in direct ground combat (Baker II, 2006). There was recognition that a new definition of ground combat was needed thus, a new definition was instituted. The definition stated that “direct ground combat is engaging an enemy on the ground...while being exposed to hostile fire and to a high probability of direct physical contact with the hostile forces’ personnel” (Kamarck, 2016, p. 6). Kamarck (2016) identified this combination of the new rule and definition as the Direct Combat Exclusion Rule. This rule stood until 2013 and once removed it opened the door for more than 250,000 positions for females in the military (“Security”, 2017).

Kamarck (2016) reported that even though females were not allowed to serve in ground combat positions, a 2007 report noted that hundreds of female soldiers received the Combat Action Badge. The U.S. Army provides this badge to recognize soldiers who “personally engaged or are engaged by the enemy” (Directorate, 2018, p. 1). According to a fact sheet prepared by the Department of Veterans Affairs (2017) there are approximately two million female veterans in the United States and Puerto Rico; in 2015 females represented about 9.4 percent of all veterans.

### **Veterans’ Access to Higher Education**

Of those two million twelve percent were enrolled in some form of higher education in 2016 (Statistics, 2016). The creation of the student veteran population can be credited in large part to the GI Bill (Higgerson, 2017; Smole & Loane, 2008). The GI Bill, or The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act, was created in 1944 and has been updated periodically to continue allowing military members and veterans to receive finance-based educational benefits (Zhang, 2018).

Most recently updates were made for Post-9/11 veterans. Since the Post 9/11 GI Bill was passed in 2008, over 790,000 veterans received benefits (“Affairs”, 2017). When the GI Bill was first created it did a few very important things. First, it allowed for millions of individuals to attend college which in turn changed the public’s perception of college and who went there; prior to the GI Bill college was mainly a place for people who were wealthy (Mettler, 2012). Secondly, there has been a lot of credit given to the GI Bill for creating and establishing the middle class. The original GI Bill gave financial assistance to numerous individuals who went on to be doctors, engineers, authors, business owners, and teachers (O’Herrin, 2011). The original GI Bill was so successful that it has continued and is still present today. The GI Bill has undergone updates since its inception (Jolly, 2013).

Following the original GI Bill, the Veterans’ Readjustment Assistance Act of 1952 was passed and was known as the Korean GI Bill (Smole & Loane, 2008). This was passed to help veterans re-enter civilian life as well as aid the socio-economic status for veterans in adulthood (Vabke, et al., 2016). This bill provided up to \$110 a month for educational expenses (Smole & Loane, 2008). The Post-Korea and Vietnam-Era GI Bill was implemented next and this bill provided benefits for members of the armed forces while they were serving on active duty (Smole & Loane, 2008). This was the first GI Bill to do so and the benefit amounts of this bill were also increased to as high as \$376 a month (Smole & Loane, 2008).

Even though there was a GI Bill enacted after Korea and Vietnam war era, this was not the only form of education-based aid for veterans of the Vietnam era. Two years after the Vietnam war ended in 1975 the Post-Vietnam Era Veterans Educational Assistance Program (VEAP) was established (Smole & Loane, 2008). This program provided benefits for veterans who served after December 31, 1976 and before July 1, 1985 (Angrist, 1993). VEAP was

established for an all-volunteer force serving during the peace time and required participants to contribute to the fund during their service in the military (Smole & Loane, 2008). The maximum contribution that the government could make under this program was \$5,400 (Angrist, 1993). The soldiers enrolled in the program could contribute up to \$2,700 and the government would match the total contribution made by the soldiers, for every dollar contributed by the veteran, the government would contribute two. (Angrist, 1993). Higgerson (2017) identified this as the period where the U.S. Government also used the benefits as incentives to recruit males and females into the different branches of the military.

In 1984 the GI Bill was revamped again by congressman Gillespie V. Montgomery and was known as the Montgomery GI Bill due to his contribution (History and Timeline, 2013). The Montgomery GI Bill was broken up into two different sections, the Montgomery GI Bill – Selected Reserve and Montgomery GI Bill – Active Duty (Dortch, 2017). Dortch (2017) stated the Montgomery GI Bill – Selective Reserve was established so the benefit would be used as an incentive to stay in the Reserves and it was established because most states offer educational assistance to reservists. For active duty service members this bill was originally a three-year pilot program and the main purposes were to provide educational readjustment assistance and help with the recruitment of both active service and reserve components of the military (Dortch, 2017). Full time student veterans who qualified for the Montgomery GI Bill were allocated \$1,101 a month (Walton Radford, Bentz, Dekker, & Paslov, 2016).

Most recently, the Post-9/11 GI Bill replaced the Montgomery GI Bill. Veterans who served at least 90 days after September 11, 2001 or are still on active duty are eligible for benefits (Higgerson, 2017; “Affairs U. S.”, 2017). As of 2018 this GI Bill covers all tuition and

fees for in state students at public institutions and up to \$23,671.94 per year at private or foreign institutions (“Veterans Benefits Administration: Education and Training”, 2018).

The different types of benefits that are available are broken up into different chapters. For example, the Post 9/11 GI Bill is also known as the Ch. 33 GI Bill. Other types of benefits include Ch. 1606 and Ch. 30 (Stout, 2019). These are two different areas of the Montgomery GI Bill that are still able to be utilized today. Another potential educational benefit Ch. 35, focuses on survivors and dependents of United States Veterans (Stout, 2019). There are also programs such as the Yellow Ribbon Program. The Yellow Ribbon Program is a part of the Post 9/11 GI Bill that allows approved institutions to partially or fully cover tuition and fees that exceed what the Post 9/11 GI Bill offers (Affairs U. D., 2019). These are all national benefits, there are also educational benefits that differ from state to state (Stout, 2019). For example, a state located in the Mid-West offers six educational benefits for student veterans and their dependents. One of these benefits is specifically for dependents of individuals who are missing in action or were a prisoner of war (Stout, 2019). Another program is a grant that covers up to a specific amount of credit hours at state institutions (Illinois Veteran's Benefits, 2019).

### **Female’s Military Experience**

There are currently two million female veterans (Statistics, 2016). Currently female make up 16 percent of enlisted United States forces and 18 percent of the officer corps (Reynolds & Shendruk, 2018). Females provide a wide range of racial diversity in the military. 53 percent of females identify as White, 31 percent identify as Black, 4 percent identify as Asian, and 7 percent identify as Mixed/Other (Patten & Parker, nd.). They also are spread out among the different branches. In 2016, 471,271 females were active duty in the Army, 320,101 were active duty in the Navy, 313,723 were active in the Air Force, and there were 183,501 females who

served active duty in the Marines (Reynolds & Shendruk, 2018). Most individuals in the military are 20 years of age to 25 years of age (Defense, 2016). According to Patten and Parker, females tend to be more critical of the recent conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan compared to their male counterparts.

Females who join the military must change different characteristics of themselves. For example, Sonia Kendrick, who was deployed in both South Korea and Afghanistan responded to a survey conducted by the New York Times stated that “I learned to blend in with the guys. I changed the way I talk and eliminated many so-called feminine characteristics so as not to draw attention to myself” (Minsberg, 2015, p. A10). When attending boot camp for the Marine Corps, a drill instructor told a female that the other men would look at her as one of three potential stereotypes “A bitch; you’re a whore or you’re a lesbian” (Schogol, 2017, <https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/your-marine-corps/2017/04/05/women-taught-at-boot-camp-to-endure-sexual-harassment-from-male-marines-veteran-says/>). Females are faced with different issues when in the military and lots of times these issues are not taken seriously (Diramio, et al. 2015). Some of the blaring issues lie within sexual harrassment and assault. A participant of a study stated “So, sexually assaulted, sexually harrassed, you feel like you’re being, you feel like you’re being biased against... you’re told, for the most part, to make it go away.” (Diramio, et al. 2015, p. 58). One female recounted a time where she “was assaulted by a superior officer with a bunch of other noncommissioned officers (NCO) around watching, and no one lifted a finger to help me” (Mills & Wolff, 2016, p. 843).

Females in the military also face pressure to act a certain way but ran into a double standard that was hard to navigate. Another female veteran in the study discussed this “I learned that no emotions, you know, you got to be tough... But, then again, if I’m too tough, you have

attitude problem. But, you know, if he is tough, you know, he's a great soldier." (Diramio, et al. 2015, p. 56). Another example of this double standard was expressed by a female veteran like this "my male counterparts were deemed competent and capable until they proved otherwise, where on the other hand it was often assumed that I was incompetent until I proved I was not" (Minsberg, 2015, p. A10).

Due to their experience and exposure to the difficult situations they experienced and the consistent harassment one might think that females would band together and be supportive of one another however this is not always the case. According to Diramio et al. (2015), female service members tend to be competitive with one another; competing to prove themselves to avoid appearing to be weak (Diramio et al. 2015). A participant in this study said that often times the male officers would suggest asking for help and were more encouraging about it than females were. The same participant in Diramio's et als. stated that a female officer stated that she had grown close to told her "... you do everything you can do, you don't get help unless you absolutely have to have it and literally cannot move it... because you need to prove that you can do it." (Diramio et al. 2015, p. 58). Even though females did compete in order to show strength and their ability to complete tasks, they would also utilize the females around them and spend much of their time with one another.

Females soldiers would confide in other female soldiers and they would act as their support group (Thorpe, 2014). They would also utilize different activities and bring trinkets that mean something to them along during their deployment (Thorpe, 2014). Thorpe wrote a book of three narratives about female's experiences in the military.

### **Transition to College**

Higher education institutions can play a crucial role in the transition of female student veterans if they create an inclusive environment by allowing these females to utilize the strengths, they bring with them (ASHE Higher Education Report, 2011).

**Schlossberg's Transition Theory.** Through Schlossberg's Transition Theory it is understood that the individual and their surroundings heavily influence the impact transitions have on their experience (as cited by Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). This can be translated to the transition that veterans go through when entering a higher education institution; regardless of whether it's when they are officially discharged or started and left for a deployment or training, and then came back, or are still active. The transition from the military to college can be a significant life change (Griffin & Giber, 2015). Schlossberg (1984) stated that transitions are events or nonevents that occur producing change in one's relationships, patterns, conventions, or roles, such as graduation, marriage, or not getting a promotion that was expected. The interesting part about the transition process is that the significance of the transition lies in the perception of the individual who is going through the transition (Schlossberg, 1984).

Schlossberg's (1984) theory includes a framework that considers transition from four perspectives which are the situation, self, support, and strategies. Situation refers to the situation the individual is in at the time of transition. Self is focused on an individual's inner strength for dealing with the situation. Support is crucial when determining a person's sense of well-being. A high level of support is great, but a low level of support could be detrimental. Lastly, strategies are used to try and change or reframe the situation. There isn't one coping strategy that works for every situation (Schlossberg, 2011).

*Situation.* According to Schlossberg's (1984) transition theory there are a few factors that surround one's situation including timing, trigger, and role change. In this part of the transition different questions need to be answered; for example, what caused the transition, is the transition on time, is the transition within the individual's control, is this transition permanent, etc. (Schlossberg, 1984). Different situations student veterans experience while in the military include the decision to join the military, going through basic training, and being deployed to other parts of the world. Taking a closer look, when student veterans first join the military and go through basic training, they experience a drastic role change from civilian to soldier and are bestowed a brand-new set of responsibilities, rules, and regulations. Veteran students face a role change when entering a college campus. They have transformed from soldiers to students (Pellegrino & Hoggan, 2015). They also have all this freedom and different forms of responsibility. For example, they structure their own schedule, they oversee their day to day life, and they are encouraged to challenge their professors (Elliott, Gonzalez, & Larsen, 2011).

Different issues tend to arise from different areas during this transition. Ackerman, DiRamio, & Garza Mitchell (2009) interviewed a total of twenty-five student veterans who were enrolled at four different institutions and found some intriguing results. Veteran students tend to clash with the Veterans Administration (VA), campus support services, and re-entering civilian life (Ackerman et al., 2009). DiRamio (2015) conducted another study that investigated female student veterans and help seeking. During the interview phase of this study, female student veterans were asked about their transition to college. Within this study some of the female student veterans gave examples of the struggles they faced DiRamio et al., (2015). For example, one of the participants stated, "In the first week of classes, I got called a murderer in one of my online forums by a gay (male student) ..." and another participant stated that "I'm in the military

(and) I need you to be very specific. Please tell me exactly what you want, and I will give it to you.” (DiRamio et al., p. 60 (2015). Participants in DiRamio’s study identified that they are misperceived by their peers and that they struggle with the amount of intellectual freedom that they are given (Diramio et al., 2015).

*Self.* In this framework of the transition personal demographics as well as psychological resources are very important to consider (Schlossberg, 1984). Under personal and demographic characteristics, one would consider gender, age, socio economic status, state of health, and ethnicity (as cited by Patton et al., 2016). Ego development, personality, and outlook fall under psychological resources (Schiafone & Gentry, 2014). Even though all aspects of the self are important to consider when looking at the theory, the researcher is only focused on gender and gender identity for this study.

Gender Identity in the military is a complicated idea. The military is an institution where gender identity is extremely prevalent, and there is a lack of acceptance toward individuals who identify outside of a binary ideology. In the military cultural images of gender are invented and reproduced (Acker, 1990; Demers,2013). The military follows a binary system, strictly male or female, but there has been some change in this perception recently. For females, the emphasis that the military puts on gender differences simply allows the hegemonic masculinity to continue to exist because it keeps females in subordinate positions (Doan & Portillo, 2017; Enloe, 1983). During their time in the military males are viewed as the protectors and females have been viewed as the protected and have been limited in what they are able to do (Elshtain, 1987). Females have used many different strategies to combat the environment they have to operate in while serving in the military. One study found that females would take on the mannerisms that were present while downplaying sexual abuse (Sasson-Levy, 2003). Kimmel (2000) stated that

females also adopted strategies where they would try to physically compete with men; while also distancing themselves from the other females. Based on previous research females seem to be unable to be their true selves while in the military. Through a focus group, Doan & Portillo (2017), were able to find more evidence that supports the hypothesis of gender hierarchies present in the military. One of the female veterans stated that even though she was a higher rank and had more experience than her fellow soldiers she had to continually prove her ability to do her job and was often times overlooked because she is a female (Doan & Portillo, 2017).

Females have often had to resort to a method called “blending” in order to fit in and earn even a shred of respect from their men peers. Blending is when someone acts masculine enough in order to fit in, but not masculine to the point of being labeled as a lesbian (Demers, 2013).

Outside of the military, gender plays a role in their career as a student and their roles in life in general. As a student they are encouraged to embrace their gender identity and explore it more. This is a stark contrast to what happens during their military experience. However, there are potential similarities between the military and the college setting because sometimes ability to express their gender identity can be suppressed on a college campus. In terms of life roles females can take the role of spouse, parent, care giver, employee, etc. Once females leave the military their identity changes and can encompass many other things than just soldier.

**Support.** According to Patton et al., (2016), support is made up of three different facets. They include types, functions, and measurements. In Schlossberg’s theory, support is also referred to as “social support” and the four types are intimate relationships, family units, network of friends, and institutions/communities (as cited by Patton et al., 2016). There are also four functions of support; they include affect, affirmation, aid, and honest feedback (as cited by Patton et al., 2016).

For intimate relationships military personal often times have to leave their significant other behind which is difficult for both parties. When returning home from either a deployment or a long-term training being there for one another and picking up where they left off is key to having the proper amount of support. Similar to intimate relationships the support given from family members is crucial in the success of student veterans transitioning to college (Ryan, Carlstrom, Hughey, & Harris, 2011). However, this can be easier said than done because there are times that it is difficult for family members to visit and physically be there for the student veteran (Ryan, Carlstrom, Hughey, & Harris, 2011). Ryan et al., (2011) stated that this is due to student veterans attending school close to their last duty installation, or military base.

At times the transition to college can be difficult for student veterans because they have to leave the friends they made on their deployment and the students who are already at the university have a difficult time understanding what they have gone through (Ryan, Carlstrom, Hughey, & Harris, 2011). Being able to communicate with other veterans is extremely important because they, the student veterans in transition, have someone who understands their experiences (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Garza Mitchell, 2009; Glasser, Powers, & Zywiak, 2009). There are multiple resources that higher education institutions offer that are useful to veterans, but how they are presented can sometimes be a problem and hurt more than they help. Student veterans prefer to talk with other student veterans about scheduling courses, financial aid, housing, and other important topics instead of utilizing the professionals in roles that aid in the areas mentioned (Osborne, 2014).

This area of the transition from the military to college is extremely important for veterans, but often times they feel as though the college they choose to attend fails them (Cook & Kim, 2009). They feel unsupported and that their institution doesn't know the military (Cook &

Kim, 2009). It is important to have these resources be inclusive of all populations. Each one can serve as a useful tool if they are presented properly. Orientation for example focuses on bringing new students campus so they can familiarize themselves with the different regulations the institution has as well as getting to know the different offices and resources on campus and orientation serves to help develop the skills needed to be successful on campus (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Financial aid is another resource that is vital to a student's success. In 2015, over 790,000 student veterans utilized financial aid in the form of the benefits in the Post-9/11 GI Bill (United State Department of Veteran Affairs, 2016).

**Strategy.** There are three categories of strategies, also known as coping responses. The three are those that modify the situation, those that control the meaning of the problem, and those that aid in managing the stress in the aftermath (Pearlin & Schloer, 1978). Along with these three responses, there are four different coping modes someone can employ: information seeking, direct action, inhibition of action, and intrapsychic behavior (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012; Griffin & Giber, 2015). One study claims that universities often offer assistance that allow student veterans to implement these strategies in order to cope with the transition to college (Griffin & Gilbert, 2016). Their study focused on how institutions can properly facilitate transitions into higher education for student veterans and they found three main themes. First, veterans and institutional agents described the importance of the support services and they understood that student veterans present unique issues and concerns (Griffin & Gilbert, 2016). Second, the need for policies and procedures to be in place for handling their benefits were highlighted (Griffin & Giber, 2015). Lastly, the importance of having student veterans representation in the student body, the quality of relationships student veterans have with their peers and other personnel, and having specific groups for student veterans to be a part of (Griffin

and Giber, 2015). However, according to Cook & Kim (2009), there is a sizeable population of student veterans that would beg to differ and claim that these institutions are not capable of adequately helping student veterans in their transition. This study looked at the availability of services and programs specifically for veterans as well as currently enlisted members of the armed forces (Cook & Kim, 2009). They utilized both surveys as well as national focus groups to gather data and found that higher education were adequately meeting the needs of students in areas including acknowledging the importance of working military service members, offering programming, recognizing prior service in forms of college credits, and a couple others (Cook & Kim, 2009). They also found that there are several areas where higher education needed to improve. For example, assisting in the transition to college, educating faculty and staff on the transitional needs of student veterans, and providing opportunities for veterans to connect with their peers (Cook & Kim, 2009).

Student veterans can modify the situation by utilizing the assistance that institutions offer to them (Griffin & Gilbert, 2016). For example, utilizing a military student assistance center or working with a point of contact when first transitioning back is found to be very useful (Griffin & Gilbert, 2016). They can also utilize the skills they gained in the military and use them to their advantage (Pellegrino & Hoggan, 2015). In a study conducted by Pellegrino and Hogan (2015), their participants noted that they utilized their time management and organizational skills to make their courseload easier to handle.

A major struggle that these students face is an information barrier. They have the ability to control this problem through an executive order that was instituted by President Obama which prevents them from attending schools that only want their money, helps them navigate the different support services available to them, and indicates that having relevant information helps

veterans make decisions regarding their benefits (Executive Order No. 13,607, 2012). They also can deal with this issue as well as the many others they encounter by maintaining contact with whomever is deemed as the point person for veterans because they will hold the key to all of the offices and resources on campus (Griffin & Gilbert, 2016).

There are multiple ways for students to manage the stress of the transition to college, sometimes they have to think critically and creatively. One major strategy student veterans use is repurposing military experience for life as a student veteran (Gregg, Howell, & Shordike, 2016). According to Gregg et al., (2016), there was a lot of reflection on the different experiences these students went through. Also, the participants of their study stated that principles based on accountability and discipline were most applicable to their educational experience (Gregg et al., 2016). A few other participants talked about how they forced themselves to be involved on campus. They would bounce around from different organizations until they found one that fit (Gregg et al., 2016). Based on the individuals who participated Gregg et al., (2016) concluded that as veterans interacted with individuals with similar life circumstances they felt more connected to their institution.

### **Gilligan**

Females share a unique and challenging history in the military as well as in the college setting. Understanding their perspective as females is important. Gilligan's (1993) theory of women's moral development helps to understand the mindset of the participants and what they are going through. Originally Gilligan developed her theory through interviewing females who are considering moral dilemmas, primarily abortion; however, her theory has been taken and applied in different settings including higher education. Gilligan's theory identifies three levels and two transitions that occur for females related to their moral decision making in their

interactions with others in their lives. The three levels are orientation to individual survival, goodness as self-sacrifice, and the morality of nonviolence (Gilligan 1993). The two transitions that occur during development tie her theory together because they provide an explanation for what goes on between the three levels. The first transition focuses on connection with others around them and that working through moral dilemmas shifts to responsibility and connection from selfishness (Gilligan 1982). During the second transition females question why they put others before themselves and they start to examine their own needs (Gilligan, 1993).

In the first level, individuals are very self-centered and are not concerned about anything other than surviving (Gilligan, 1982). For example, Gilligan (1993) identifies that the decisions made are the individuals own. In a book written by Thorpe (2014) a female made the decision to join the national guard because she wanted a way out of her current situation and made the choice on their own. The choice was not influenced by anyone else in her life and is an example of Gilligan's first level. The only way other people have a hand in it is if they can influence the consequences of the decision.

After completing the first level they go through their first transition and then move onto level two. If the individual used as an example above had been challenged by those around her regarding the decision to join the military and pressure to be responsible to several different parties in her life she may find herself in this transition from level one to two. Level two focuses on a world view that includes a richer engagement and a higher reliance on the people around them (Gilligan, 1982). According to Gilligan (1982) the individual may go as far to move her own judgement to the side, so they can please others and remain connected to them. For example, Demers (2013) spoke with seventeen different female soldiers and when discussing their transition to become a soldier, one participant talked about how in order to gain respect

from the people around them she needed to act like a soldier and not a female. "...if you play the role like, I'm a soldier, and I'm here to do my job, and then you do it, then along with that comes respect." (Demers, 2013, p. 499).

A shift happens for female student veterans after their involvement in the military that aligns with Gilligan's (1982) second transition. For student veterans there is such a disconnect with the other students that they were more focused on their classes, their friends who are also veterans, and their families (Gregg, Howell, & Shordike, 2016). It is during this transition that the female begins to understand that there are competing parties for their attention and they begin to recognize their own voice as important as well as others (Gilligan, 1982).

When individuals move through the final level, which is known as the morality of nonviolence, the individual is able to bring a moral equality between their self and others (Gilligan, 1982). Females at this level are aware of their own needs and those around them and have to work to find balance in maintaining both. For example, in Pellegrino and Hoggan's (2015) study one of the participants had to deal with her children's needs of being cared for as well as the participant pursuing an associate degree at a community college. Also, care becomes an obligation and reconstructs the dilemma at hand (Gilligan, 1982). A participant in a study conducted by Gregg, Howell, & Shordike (2016) stated that her leadership role in military would put her in situations where she would have to drop what she was doing and attend to the needs of her subordinates and make sure they were okay. In this stage, Gilligan states that they find a way to balance their own needs with those of others in a way that aligns with their own moral values.

### **Summary**

The review in the relevant research has shown that there are different challenges female student veterans face compared to those who do not identify as a female. The challenges they

face by identifying as a female are different from the challenges they face when serving in the military. Understanding the transition female student veterans go through on their way into college will go a long way in determining the best way for colleges and universities to support them.

## **Chapter III**

### **Methods**

This chapter talks in detail on how this qualitative study was steered. This study took the form of a narrative qualitative study. This study was conducted because of the lack of research that has taken place regarding female student veterans. Also, as a student affairs professional the researcher is concerned with all student populations and wants to be able to be knowledgeable of underrepresented populations including this one. The methodological framework is designed to draw conclusions that align with the topic of female veteran students, their transition to college, and the campus resources that are utilized during their transition.

#### **Design of the Study**

For this study a narrative qualitative design was used. The data was collected through individual interviews from a small sample of female student veterans. A narrative qualitative study was chosen because this type looks at the world from the viewpoint of the participants, specifically allowing them to share their unique perspectives and experiences (Krefting, 1991; Schmid, 1981). The type of interviews that were conducted were semi-structured. The researcher made this decision because semi-structured interviews use key questions to set the guidelines for the main topics that are to be covered, but this approach allowed the researcher to leave the original structure of the interview and pursue different ideas that were presented in the responses to the main questions (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008).

#### **Research Site**

The recruitment of participants took place online, so due to this the interviews occurred by phone call. Therefore, there was not a specific site that the research took place. The researcher notified the participants to find somewhere comfortable and quiet to conduct the interview. The

intention of this research was not to look at a specific institution, but the experiences of this population.

### **Participants**

Four student veterans who identify as female and are currently enrolled in a four-year institution and have completed at least one year in the military were chosen to participate in this study. Due to the researcher focusing on the transition to college that female student veterans go through it was imperative that these veterans were enrolled in classes. Participants were initially recruited via online social media groups dedicated to those who have served in the military and through reaching out to various campuses with a larger student veteran population. However, this was not successful, so the researcher emailed student veteran assistance centers around the United States asking them to forward a call for participants (Appendix A) to all potential participants. The researcher's contact information was provided so those interested could reach out to the researcher directly. Following the initial contact, the student received a follow-up email (Appendix B) further explaining their participation along with the Informed Consent document (Appendix C). All participants who agreed to individual interviews were given a form of consent which they completed and emailed back to the researcher. They were informed that participation was voluntary and had the ability to withdraw at any time. At the beginning of each interview the participant was read the consent form and asked for a verbal statement regarding their understanding of the document and their agreement to proceed with the interview.

Participation was open to students who represent any of the branches of the military. There were four participants Mary, Ann, Faith, and Tina. Mary currently attends a four-year mid-sized public institution in the Southeast United States and studies both mathematics and aerospace technology. She served in the Navy. Ann is currently attending a public mid-sized

institution in the Midwest region of the United States studying criminal justice. She currently serves in the Army Reserves. Faith is a junior at a public state institution in the Northeast United States. Faith served in the Navy. Tina is studying education at a public mid-sized institution in the rural Midwest United States. She served in the Army for eight years. A more in-depth look at these participants takes place in chapter four.

### **Instrumentation**

The proposed research project had a total of four individual interviews conducted between the researcher and the participants. Once participants completed the Informed Consent document (Appendix C) and submitted it to the researcher an interview time was selected. The interview protocol (Appendix D) was utilized with each participant to maintain consistency from participant to participant. The researcher designed the instrument to include primary questions to ask each participant and identified secondary questions they may need to ask to follow up. The interview protocol began with demographics in order to collect information regarding age, gender, race, major, year in school, and branch of military. The institution they are attending was not addressed to help maintain anonymity, however they were asked about the size and type of institution (i.e. midsize, public). Open questions were then utilized to lead into a more discussion type interview. The interview prompts covered different topics including the transition to college, resources utilized during the transition, resources utilized after the transition, challenges faced by female students while leaving the military and transitioning to college, and what higher education institutions can do better for veteran students.

### **Data Collection**

In order to find the participants, the Military Student Assistance Centers at the different institutions were contacted in search of all female student veterans at the four-year institutions.

The military student assistance centers were forwarded a call for participants and were asked to send out this information to female student veterans on their respected campuses. The original plan was to reach out to potential participants via social media, but that was ineffective, so the researcher changed course. Once the female student veterans agreed to participate in the research, they were assigned a number and a pseudonym to protect their identity. As the Informed Consent documents were received the student's number was placed on the document and kept only by the researcher. Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher. On the transcript the participant's number was used to identify them. The transcripts were sent back to participants for a member check. A member check is when the participants are given a chance to review the transcript of the interview they were a part of (Thomas, 2017). Thomas (2017) states, that they are able to look it over, make comments, and make corrections to any mistakes they find. These are completed in order to establish accuracy and credibility of the research (Bradshaw, 2001). Only the participants pseudonyms are shared in the thesis.

### **Data Analysis**

Once the data was collected and transcribed, the researcher used inductive content analysis in order to analyze the data. Inductive content analysis is used when the amount of previous data is limited (Elo & Kyngas, 2008). Inductive content analysis starts with open coding where notes and headings found within the data are written in the margins. The headings were then moved from the margins of the transcription to coding sheets and from there categories were generated. The created categories were then placed under higher order headings (Elo & Kyngas, 2008; Burnard, 1991; McCain, 1988). The researcher determined the appropriate categories and moved onto abstraction. Using the categories that have been created the

researcher began to create a description of the research topic (Elo & Kyngas, 2008; Burnard, 1996; Robson, 1993; Polit & Beck, 2004). Through this process the data has been analyzed.

### **Treatment of Data**

The collected data was transcribed and coded in a word document, which is kept on both a password protected USB drive and a password protected hard drive. The original audio recordings are being kept on the password protected flash drive. A copy of the created word document has been sent to the participants for their review because the interviews have been transcribed. After three years the audio recordings, videos, and word documents will be destroyed.

### **Summary**

This study used a qualitative approach with a semi-structured interview. This method was used because it provided the best opportunity to get the participant's views on their transition out of the military and into school. These interviews have the ability to not only help colleges and universities, but other female student veterans know that they are not alone on their journey from the military to higher education.

## Chapter IV

### Narratives

This chapter dives into the narratives of the participants and takes a closer look at their time in the military and their time in college. Each of the participant's stories are broken down into four subthemes. First, they start off with a brief of introduction that gives some background information on the participants. Following that their narratives were broken up into their experience in the military, their transition into college, and the student services they utilized. Again, this chapter is designed to tell the participants' story and shed light on this specific population.

#### Mary

Mary is 28 years old and identifies as white. She is currently a senior at a public institution in the Southeast. She is double major in Mathematics and Aerospace Technology with an Engineering Technology minor. Mary grew up in Alabama and she currently lives in Tennessee. She lives with her boyfriend who also served in the military. Mary enlisted right after high school. After she graduated her father said that she needed to do something, so she talked with her friend and ending up talking with a Navy recruiter. "We drove up to the one recruiting office and we were standing there looking at all the branches and she was like, let's just talk to the Navy people."

**Military Experience.** Mary ended up serving in the Navy for five years. She was deployed to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) twice. The deployments were roughly four months in length, and she was on a ship for different lengths of each one. She finished her time in the Navy at the rank of E5 or Petty Officer Second Class. Overall her experience was positive, but she spoke about being aware of different stereotypes that surrounded woman in the Navy. "I

mean there's like the stereotype people who, like want things handed to them and don't really work hard. Then there's ones that are really respected and work really hard." She described how she often felt as though she was grouped into the stereotype of wanting everything handed to her. She shared how it was a tough environment to be in especially when she was working hard to get away from that stereotype. Mary's position within the Navy was very hands on, as an aviation technician.

She had a lot of support through her time in the military. "My family was all like, supportive, and they were all for it. They were all so proud." Mary also made a lot of friendships in the Navy; people she says she will be friends with forever. There was a time where she ran into some trouble during her tenure in the military, but her friends were there to back her up and she was able to avoid some potential punishment. Her family came to visit her when she wasn't allowed to go home for the holidays due to the trouble she experienced. Mary served her initial contract and then extended for an additional year to save money for when she was done. Overall, she had a good experience and is thankful for her time in the Navy.

**Transition to College.** Once Mary made the decision to not reenlist in the military she quickly enrolled in college. "I got out in May and I went to school in August." She decided to enroll in community college for a year and then transfer to her current institution. During her transition to college Mary discussed that she felt as though her biggest issue was working with Veteran Affairs (VA) and learning to navigate the system. She experienced issues with filling out the paperwork properly and getting her benefits on time. She had to reassure the institution she was attending that she was receiving benefits and that everything would be coming in soon.

Mary also talked about how she has faced some challenges when connecting with others at school. Mary shared how she has not been able to find other older females in school and the

other students don't have the same life experiences as she does. Mary identified that she continues to feel as though she is in a world dominated by males similar to the military experience, the major she has chosen is also male dominated.

In terms of support, her boyfriend has been a huge positive. "He'd been to college before, so he was more familiar with how to apply and who to talk to...he definitely influenced me to go, because we were kind of doing it together." For three years they went to school together, so they relied on each other and held each other accountable for their assignments. She has also had some high-quality professors and advisors. Mary talked about how she is able to go them for anything. She evens feels as though she can pursue a PhD after talking with them.

**Student Service Utilization.** Mary shared how she has utilized different resources on more of a surface level. For example, she doesn't go to the Veteran Resource Center on campus but uses their services to make sure she gets her financial aid on time. They have made that process very easy, "I don't even think about the GI Bill anymore." She did recognize that she may have made more connections if she would go into the student veteran center and spend more time there. Mary stated that she did not attend the orientation but now recognizes that it might have been beneficial for her to. She was unable to attend because of the timing of her starting school. Mary applied and was admitted late, so she felt very unfamiliar with campus and had to use a map the first couple of days on campus.

### **Ann**

Ann is 20 years old and identifies as white. Currently Ann is a junior studying Criminology and Sociology at a midsized regional public institution in the Midwest. Ann grew up in Illinois and currently resides in the same state. When asked about her decision to enroll in college she shared "My Dad ultimately, kind of made me enroll in college. My parents both

served in the military and my Dad always said that he would go back to college after serving, but he never did. So, when I was in high school, I wanted to go active duty initially and he said, no, you are going to college first, you will get a degree.”

**Military Experience.** Ann enlisted when she was 17 and did an entry delay program for the Army reserves. She has been serving for three and a half years, is currently a specialist, and her position is in supply. Once her contract ends, she has two years of active duty. She said this about her experience overall, “My experience, in total, it’s not really been negative, but I have had a couple experiences where I’ve been a little bit like, not discriminated against, but they didn’t look at me in the same respect because I am female.” Ann noted that she is in a mostly male platoon and often times she feels that she is left out of everything. “They don’t really communicate with me a whole lot or include me in platoon events.” She shared that this leaves her feeling a little frustrated.

Ann did share how she has been able to find support within the military, specifically from another female. When asked about that Ann said “I have, from my direct supervisor. She was a lot of support for me and stood up for me in a lot of circumstances.” Ann identified how this individual has even stepped in and yelled at non-commissioned officers (NCOs) after Ann was passed by individuals with less experience than her. When looking at support outside of the military she hasn’t had nearly as much. Ann stated, “my friends, they don’t really get it or understand [military commitments] when I tell my friends I have to miss class, they’re like, why can’t you just tell them you have class?” Ann shared that sometimes it feels as though the only people who really understands what she goes through are military personnel.

**Transition to College.** Ann had wanted to go to college, just not right away. Her college search focused on three schools all three in the same geographic region. She chose her current

institution due to the feeling she had when she stepped on campus. Ann mentioned that “I just fell in love with it.” She has struggled to balance both the military and school. “They treat me like full time staff and expect a lot more of me even though I am an hour away and I am a full-time college student.”

Along with the struggle to balance the military and school she faced some gender discrimination during her time in ROTC. Ann talked about how there were multiple times where she would be questioned and treated as a joke, but men with the same experience as her would be respected and listened too. There was also, a time where she had to have ankle surgery and was given a hard time and told that she was fine by members of the ROTC program, but a male who had a back injury was never questioned or given a hard time about his injury. When asked directly if she felt she was being treated differently based on her being female she responded with a solid “yes” for both the military and ROTC.

Ann specifically identified receiving support from two different people at her current institution. One is a professional and the other was a graduate student. The professional helped Ann out with communicating with professors when she missed a month of class due to military training. The professional also helped Ann determine what resources were available to her when she first got started at college. This is where she met the graduate student who is a veteran, both of these people really helped Ann get on her feet when she first arrived on campus. Ann did not identify her friend groups as helpful; they do not understand why she is stressed about the military. She said, “they try to understand, but ultimately when it comes down to it, when I’m stressed out about things they’re like, why are you so stressed out about this?” Ann’s response to her friends is “because I have an obligation to fill. I can’t call off or just not show up.”

**Student Service Utilization.** Ann was unable to attend orientation due to military obligations, but she definitely felt as though she would have benefitted from attending. Ann arrived at school right at the beginning of the semester and had no idea where to go or what to do and talked about this as being frustrating. She talked about how as she got comfortable she began to increase her utilization of campus resources. She joined a sorority and utilized the veteran resource center on campus, and she identified how both have been very beneficial for her. She has met some great friends in her sorority and was able to gain a better understanding of campus and the resources available to her through the utilization of the veteran resource center.

### **Faith**

Faith is a 28-year-old white woman who is originally from New Jersey, but now lives in Pennsylvania with her husband and two-year-old daughter. She also has five dogs. Faith currently attends a mid-sized public state institution in the Northeast and is studying exercise science. Her entrance into the military was an interesting one. She was 23 and working three jobs at the time and told her Mom that she was joining the military. According to Faith her Mom was not pleased “I said, I’m joining the military and she was like, if you join the military, I would be so pissed at you.” Faith ended up joining the Navy.

**Military Experience.** Faith quickly entered the military upon making the decision. She went in for her military placement exams and the next thing she knew she was choosing what job she wanted. Faith ended up going with aviation electronics because her initial interest was in medical, but they didn’t have any openings there. The military actually called her on Valentine’s Day and told her that they had an opening for her, and she needed to leave the following week. She then relayed that information to her then fiancé; they ended things because of that and so Faith left for her new career a single woman. Overall, Faith spoke about how she loved her time

in the military. When talking with her she said that “I’m a very structured kind of person. I like waking up in the morning, not knowing what I need to wear, not knowing what I need to do because it’s routine.”

In terms of support, Faith had her family, her mom came around and supported her enlistment. Other important individuals that provided support were her younger brother and later her husband who she met while in the military. Faith went into more detail about her family support: “it was more of like a hey, if you need me, I’m here kind of thing.” When looking at the military for support Faith talked about the difficulty she faced in that department “I have some friends, but with the military you can’t really, you build connections with people, but then those connections get severed after a certain time because either you leave or someone else leaves or something like that.” She was speaking about the turnover of people she was exposed to and worked with and how this was a constantly changing entity.

**Transition to College.** Faith wanted to go to college because she wanted to do better for herself and she was often told that she either had too much experience or not enough. Motivating Faith was also the educational benefits, “the VA offered to pay for the college, so it’s definitely a plus.” She continued with “If I couldn’t have my college paid for, I probably wouldn’t be going to college, it’s too expensive.” Faith felt as though the process of applying to college and receiving military benefits was very hectic, but she felt as though she got out of the military at the right time. When asked about it, Faith stated “I was injured...they were making cutbacks in the military. So, they said I can either leave with or without my severance. So, I said, okay, I’ll leave with severance.”

Coming to college as an older woman, it was apparent from her comments that Faith’s age made it difficult for her to connect to the other students; “I felt like I had to compete with

people who are 10 years younger than I am.” Faith talked about how she had more life experiences and is more seasoned, and had to make more difficult decisions than most of the students around her. She specifically used an example about how students would complain about getting up early. “So, all the people complain, oh, I have to wake up so early and go exercise and everything else. I’m like yeah, okay, tell me about your problems one more time.” When trying to determine what school she would attend it came down to the program and the opportunities she would have afterward. She mentioned that her current institution has a great exercise science program, so that’s how she based her search. Faith started at a local community college and moved into a four-year institution after that.

When looking at her entrance into her current institution, a four-year university, she described how she ran into a slight hiccup. She had issues with the credits she earned in the military transferring to college. When asked about that she said “I did have to retake a few classes that I learned and had taken three times...” She did not attend orientation at the four-year university, but she did attend the one at the community college she went to first. Overall, Faith was underwhelmed by the orientation program. She shared “it missed the mark pretty bad. They relate everything to these younger students, and they had to go over how to be responsible and how to study...” Faith talked about how she had already developed these skills and talked about how she felt as though her time was wasted in the space with traditionally aged students.

Faith has found some success in her classes. As an exercise science major who wants to go into orthopedic surgery someday she is required to take a number of courses in the math and sciences. She identified that she is good in this area and excels in these types of classes. In fact, she was able to quickly complete her math classes; she finished her one class by the halfway point of the semester, so they let her double up and take another class. She also shared that she

made President's and Dean's list almost every semester. Faith also has a professor that's served as her counselor. Faith stated that "She's a blunt person, and she has been amazingly helpful."

Getting involved with the student veteran's organization was one-way Faith connected to other students on campus. Faith is also the treasurer of the student veteran's organization on her current campus and has helped raise over \$50,000 for a program that donates service dogs to local veterans.

In the transition to college Faith has experienced a variety of challenges. She listed these challenges off like a checklist wanting to specifically mention each; going through a miscarriage, buying a house, having a daughter, and her husband also starting school. She identified that most of her support has come from her husband. "My grandmother also helps out, my Dad helps out and everything, but the main person is my husband and he's been very supportive."

**Student Service Utilization.** Her main utilization of campus resources has been being the treasurer of the student veteran's organization. She joined this organization on campus because it seemed like the only organization on campus she identified with. At one of the first meetings in this organization she has learned about various resources on campus that are available to her and other students, however she shared that she has not taken advantage of any of these.

Outside of her involvement with the Veteran's group. She identified that she has taken care of things on her own without the assistance from the institution. Faith mentioned dealing with challenges that are both physical and mental. She had a physical injury from her military experience and was treated while still in the military. She also shared that she is battling post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and anxiety. She talked about only utilizing one of

her professors as a counselor instead of going to the counseling center on campus when she is struggling with PTSD.

### **Tina**

Tina is 31 years old with two children, a boy and a girl. She had her daughter while in the military and her son shortly after she got out of the military. As a child she moved around a lot due to her father. Her Dad served in the military, so they bounced around a lot when Tina was growing up. They lived in Colorado, then Florida, then back to Colorado, and finally back to Florida. Currently Tina lives in Illinois. She is attending a mid-sized public school in the rural Midwest and is studying education with hopes of becoming a teacher. Tina enlisted in the Army and served both with the Army and the Army Reserves.

**Military Experience.** Tina had a difficult time growing up and ran into some trouble that left her with the choice of joining the military or continuing down the path she was on. She dropped out of high school, got her GED, and enlisted all while she was 16. Shortly after turning 17 she left for basic training. Tina shared how being in the military is more difficult than people think it is, but how it also provides you with loads of opportunities. When asked about her experiences she said “You can travel around the world a little bit, so I mean overall I wouldn’t have traded it plus the benefits are amazing. I mean without the military I wouldn’t have had my school paid for by the GI Bill, so that’s a pretty great deal.” Tina also talked about the perception that surrounds woman in the military; “They [enlisted men] didn’t think that women could do a lot of the similar things a man could or feel like they were strong enough in battle.” Tina also talked about how even though women were held to the same standards as men they weren’t given the same respect.

When asked about the support she had during her time in the Army, Tina mentioned that it was mainly other military personnel. She stated, “you kind of create family without realizing it because you’re so close to people and you’re with them 24/7 and they become family.” She had a small group of friends she relied on and when looking back on her experience she stated that her roommates, who were women, also were some of her main support systems. Tina did not have a ton of family support, she noted that her family was in Florida, so it was difficult for them to be there for her.

**Transition to College.** Tina decided to enroll in college because she wanted something that would allow her to spend time with her kids and enjoy watching them grow up. It was really her mentality that sparked her to go into higher education; “Just knowing that I wanted something better and I wanted more stability for them.” She felt as though it was fairly easy to adjust to the college lifestyle. She shared how having a syllabus and knowing what was happening each day made it easy to adapt to.

As Tina talked about the transition to college, she identified that she struggled connecting with the other students and that she saw age was a major reason why. Tina said, “I was a nontraditional student going into college and typically you know kids that are 18-19 straight out of high school and that definitely was not me.” Tina also mentioned how big of an impact receiving federal aid had on her decision to go to college; “Financial aid and the GI Bill and stuff if it wasn’t for that I don’t know if I would have made the same decision.”

When considering what school to go to she was focused on location and where her credits would transfer. Tina had attended a community college and received her associate degree. Tina found some major success right off the bat when she got started at her current institution. “I made dean’s list close to every semester; which as a single mom, raising two kids with a crazy

schedule and just trying to adapt to the routine and stuff.” Tina also had a major success when she was inducted into Kappa Delta Pi, which is an international honors society for education majors. Again, she identified that the biggest challenge she faced was the difference in age. “I didn’t really get to meet or make a lot of friends because you know like I said I’m 31 and a lot of my peers were just hitting their 20s or early 20s.”

Tina talked about another challenge she struggled with as she transitioned to a four-year institution, an accident. She was in a severe car wreck and lost use of one of her dominant fingers. At the time Tina was a nursing major, but she had to change direction because she needed full use of her hands.

As Tina talked about where her support comes from, she identified her previous partner as being very supportive. He inspired her to go to college and supported her throughout. “He was basically my rock.” She also talked about how she gained two faculty mentors while in school and how they have provided her with guidance and have been there for her when she needed them. She cited one example of how these two faculty members took her in and helped her study for the standardized tests she has to take to complete her licensure. She also talked about having the support of her family now that she is closer to them. Her mom is her best friend and she really uses her for support whenever needed. Tina also identified her friend group that she can reach out to if needed and spoke about them as very reliable. Both her friends and family have been there to pick up her kids if need be or if she needed a night out her friends were always there.

**Student Service Utilization.** When Tina was going through the admissions process, she said that everything was very smooth. When asked why she stated “Simply because I was a transfer student. So, when I transferred, they had already sent everything for me.” She also felt as

though financial aid and the orientation process was overall helpful. Tina stated several times in the interview that the different financial benefits that she has access to were one of the main reasons she enrolled in college. Also, she felt as though orientation and admissions did a great job of explaining everything right off the bat and she felt prepared to get started at her current university.

### **Summary**

Each participant had the opportunity for their story to be told. Learning about their experiences is extremely important and beneficial in understanding what their life is like in the military, their transition out of the military, their transition to school, and their time in higher education. Now, not everything they shared was applicable to the research questions, but that does not discount their experiences.

## Chapter V

### Analysis

The analysis is broken down into two parts. First, the participants' transition to college is analyzed followed by resources that aided in their transition. Schlossberg's (1984) transition theory is used in both parts of the analysis. Situation and self are utilized to analyze their transition to college. The support and strategy realms of her theory are applied to the resources these participants used during their transition to college. Within each area of the theory there are multiple subthemes that showed themselves during coding.

#### Female Student Veteran's Transition to College

The participants in this study were asked questions about both their time in the military and their time in college, along with how they personally transitioned from one to the other. The questions were designed using Schlossberg's (1984) transition theory. To gain insight into the students transition to college specifically the self and the situation are analyzed below.

**Situation.** Schlossberg's (1984) transition theory talks about one's situation is focused on timing, trigger, and role change. She also explains how different questions focused on the cause and timing of the transition need to be answered (Schlossberg, 1984). In this study understanding the different areas that these student veterans have a role in was very important. It helped show what all they had going on in their lives and how they balanced the different roles. The participants were asked to talk about their experiences on campus, but also their life outside of college. Each participant lives a life that differs from one another. They ran into different things on campus like a difference in age, managing relationships with professors, working with the financial aid office, and balancing their military identity with their student identity. Each

participant has a different home life as well, they each have different people to worry about. Each participant talked about being involved and making connections on campus as well.

*Classroom.* Three of the participants talked about how the hardest part of attending class is the difference between them and the other students. Mary shared “I don’t really relate to a lot of people I go to school with. So, I mean, I guess this is a good thing I mentioned that I don’t really meet a lot of older females in school.” Tina also shared about the difference in age.

Yeah, I think the challenge would be the difference in ages. I didn’t really get to meet or make a lot of friends. Because you know I’m 31 and a lot of my peers were just hitting their 20s or early 20s. So, I didn’t really get to bond or connect with them, but I mean it was fine I have my home life which is pretty crazy anyway.

Faith also discussed her difference in age; “I would say age was the main factor in everything. I felt like I had to compete with people who are 10 years younger than I am.” She also shared “No, that’s absolutely it. I have more life experiences. And I have more, and I am more seasoned, I had to go through a lot of stuff.” Faith also faced struggles with her actual classes.

A lot of credits from the military didn’t seem to transfer over into the civilian side to my schooling, in particular. So, I did have to retake a few classes that I learned and had taken three times, because I had my LPN because I did all this other medical stuff in my life.

Ann faces a struggle between balancing class and the military.

I just try to communicate with my professors as much as I can. First, day of class I always get them my drill schedule. Even if it does change 12 times within the semester. I do try to like give them a heads up.

*Military Life.* Three of the participants generally enjoyed their military experience. Mary talked about how she misses certain parts of the military. “I never thought about reenlisting, but I

do, I still miss it. And I still, you know, have felt like, maybe I should have stayed.” Faith loved having the amount of structure she had in the military. “I actually really excelled in that aspect [structured environment]. Which leads me to my job, I was the youngest person to become the clinic manager. I ran their other enlisted and I made schedules, and I did all that other fun stuff.” Tina enjoyed her experience because of the different things she could see and do. These three also brought the military lifestyle with them after leaving the military. Faith joined the student veteran group on campus. “Yeah, their theory is that if it ain’t broke, don’t fix it. It’s a whole bunch of veterans.” Tina found it easy to blend her military life with her current life.

It wasn’t really difficult. I think it kind of played hand in hand to be honest with you.

Because it’s routine and that’s really what you’re used to coming from the military.

You’re used to knowing what you’re doing every day and just having a set schedule.

Ann talked about how she is constantly trying to manage the military life with the campus life and blend the two;

For me, it is a very hard balance to make, because as my role was my Military

Occupational Specialty (MOS), I’m in high demand. And oftentimes, I’m given phone calls on the daily pertaining to like, my job. I’m supply so I am the only person left in my unit, I don’t have a full time NCO anymore.

She also explained the importance of communication within the military and on campus.

Communication with sorority sisters, with my organizations, professors. Just being very transparent with them from the start. That I am my own person, but also at the same time I am in a contract, I am under obligation to the military.

Two participants brought health problems from the military to their civilian life. Ann shared “I had ankle surgery before I joined the military. During my time, I tore more tendons in my ankle, so I had to have another surgery.” Faith shared that she has a disability.

The reason for my disability is I have physical injuries, but I also have a lot of PTSD. I have depression, anxiety and things like that. So that definitely, I should have added that into probably a barrier, also. But I just think that people that have these mental issues, it is harder for them to push themselves so much.

Each shared how their situation in the military relates to or is similar to the life as a student.

*Home.* Three participants talked about their home life. Mary talked about how she and her boyfriend got out of the military at the same time and moved together and started school together;

So as far as like academically, we’ve [her and her boyfriend] helped each other start, you know, I was better at some of the math stuff. He’s a lot better at the engineering stuff for me. So, we kind of helped each other out a lot through stuff.

Faith shared “My husband helps me out with the house and with our daughter. So, he gives me the time to study.” Tina shared

Honestly, it’s me and my kids, so anytime I make a decision it’s always going to be in the best interest for them and I tend to try and involve them in decisions. They’re old enough not that if they don’t like something it is really going to weigh on my decision to do it or go to it. So, they’re basically my go to if I ever have to make a decision.

Each of these three women was stressing the importance of their relationships with family members as having an influence on their life.

*Involvement.* Three of the participants were involved on campus in some way shape or form. Mary was the only one who is not directly involved with a student organization on campus. Ann is involved with a couple of organizations on her campus. “I joined a sorority, my spring semester, I was able to get a position pretty fast. So, that was rewarding. I’m also the treasurer of our criminal justice club here at school.” Tina is involved with an honors-based organization for her major named Kappa Delta Pi. In fact, Tina shared “The Kappa Delta Pi, I enjoyed that, and it was an honor to be able to be a part of that. I just wish I would have been able to have done it longer.” Faith is involved with the student veteran association on her campus,

My very first meeting, I walked in there, and she said, we need a treasurer and they look at me. I was the new one. And I said, alright, I’ll do it. So, I’ve been treasurer for two years now.

It was evident that these three individuals had meaningful experiences with the organization they are involved with.

**Self.** For self, Schlossberg (1984) discussed how there is a focus on demographic characteristics as well as psychological resources. In this study on female student veterans, it was necessary to hear from them on how they see themselves and how they describe who they are and what influences their perception of identity. It is also important to gain an understanding about how they perceive society’s description of them. The participants were asked to talk about themselves and how they see their identity in various settings. Each participant used different characteristics to describe themselves and what shapes their identity. For example, some discussed being from a military home, while another talked about being a part of the ROTC program at their school. All of them described how they see their role in society from their unique perspective. All four participants recognized their military service and talked about how

they were viewed in the military, they shared how their family of origin had an influence on who they became and the choices they made, they discussed their experiences while being a student, and they described how their societal role has had an impact of their identity. All of these different elements are used to describe who these women are and aid in telling their story.

*Military Identity.* After interviewing the participants, it was evident that they each had a different path into the military, no two stories were exactly the same. Mary, Faith, and Tina all went into the military before entering college and Ann went to college and enlisted at roughly the same time. Mary entered the military because she didn't feel like she was smart enough for college and she faced pressure from her father to do something. Faith joined the military because she was working three jobs and was tired of not getting anywhere with what she was doing. Tina said that she joined because she was given the choice to clean up her act and grow up or continue down what she called a troublesome path. Ann was inspired by her parents who had both served in the military to join, but her father would not allow her to go into active duty right out of high school.

Mary, Faith, and Tina have all been discharged from the military, however Ann's contract ends in December of 2021. Three participants stated that overall, they enjoyed their experience with the military. Faith shared that "I'm a very structured kind of person. I like waking up in the morning, not knowing what I need to wear, not knowing what I need to do, because it's routine." Tina shared this perspective about what she enjoyed "You can travel around the world a little bit, so I mean overall, I wouldn't have traded it plus the benefits are amazing."

Ann and Tina served in the Army. Ann is currently in the reserves and Tina spent some of her time in the reserves when she was serving. Ann was also involved with ROTC. She joined

the ROTC program at her current institution after already having served some time with the Army and was a part of the ROTC program as well as the Army Reserves at the same time. Ann shared how she had a terrible experience with the ROTC program. She spoke about how she has dealt with the same issues in the ROTC program as she did while in the actual Army. Ann faced discrimination based on her biological sex in both instances. Three of the participants spoke about discrimination they faced within the military. When asked to go into more detail Ann said that “I’m in a mostly male platoon and a lot of times I get left out of everything.” Tina shared that “Men in the military were the strong people and they didn’t think that women could do a lot of the similar things a man could or feel like they were strong enough in battle.” Mary discussed how she sees the perception of women in the military; “I mean there’s like the stereotype people [women] who like, want things to be handed to them and like, don’t really work hard.” She went on to say,

But I think a lot of times I kind of get grouped in with the larger group of people [women] who want things to be done for them, so I feel like, a lot of times you’re looked at as, like, not as hard of a worker.

This military persona, and the idea of being a woman in the military was a part of each of their personal descriptions.

*Student Veteran.* Identifying as a veteran was prevalent in how these students talked about themselves and how they interact with different areas of the college campus. All four of the participants talk about how previous experience in the military has affected their current experience. Mary stated that “If you just kind of like methodically, just do everything you can make it straightforward, I think. So, if you just go to class every day, listen, over prepare over stuff, it is kind of like the same thing.” Tina shared

You're used to knowing what you're doing every day and just having a set schedule. So, I kind of feel like with having a syllabus and knowing what I'm going to be doing tomorrow it was really easy to kind of adapt to.

Ann shared how her military experience has negatively impacted her experience as a student veteran. Ann has had some struggles with the military and what is expected of her. "They [the military] kind of treat me like full time staff and expect a lot more of me even though I am an hour away and I am a full-time college student." Faith shared that

In the military, it's a speak when spoken to, you don't really get to voice your opinions too often. So, whenever something would upset me, I would start internalizing it and it kind of just, that took the most for me to realize that, hey, I can say what I want to say.

Ann was very used to the military lifestyle and it translated to her time in the classroom.

*Partner/Life Role.* Each of the four participants had separate roles outside of the military. Two participants talked about being a mom. Tina is a mother of two and she credited them with impacting her decision to go to college; "I decided that I needed a better work stability for my children." She went on to express how she wanted to have the summers off with her kids, so she can watch them grow up. Faith is also a mother and when asked about who she takes into consideration when making a decision she very quickly shared that her daughter is one of her top priorities. Three of the participants also identified themselves as being in a romantic relationship. Faith is married, Tina recently got out of a long-term relationship, and Mary is living with her boyfriend.

### **Resources That Aid Female Veteran's Transition to College.**

The participants in this study were asked questions about both their time in the military and their time in college, along with how they personally transitioned from one to the other. The

questions were designed using Schlossberg's (1984) transition theory. To gain insight about what resources aid the transition to college specifically the strategies and the support are analyzed below.

**Support.** This area of the transition theory is also referred to as "social support" and there are four types that fall into this category (Schlossberg, 1984). They include intimate relationships, family units, network of friends, and institutions/communities (Schlossberg, 1984). It was important to find out what and who specifically these participants were utilizing for support throughout their transition to college. This also shed light on the different resources that these benefitted from during their transition to college and what they still use. The participants discussed their family, friends, faculty members, and other university resources such as student organizations and financial aid. Some of them also discussed a lack of support and how certain campus resources were not effective. Overall though, the majority of their support came from other females.

*Faculty.* All four participants mention that faculty have been a part of their support systems while at school. Mary shared

My faculty math advisor, he's always kind of been there, he listens like about problems or questions, and he's helped me like scheduling wise and with, he's helped me with, you know the classes I had really bad professors like I always go to him and he gives me like supplemental material or books or whatever.

She also mentioned that her aerospace faculty advisor and her student advisor also have been very impactful on her.

Being able to identify with the instructors was important, Ann, who is in the National Guard has a professor who is also a veteran.

I've had multiple classes with him. So, he knows the drill, every semester that I have him, I'm like you know that I might have to randomly go do an inventory one day and he's just really worked with me very well.

Faith also talked about a specific faculty member on her campus; "My one professor, she has been amazing. She's also my counselor. She's a blunt and direct person, and she has been amazingly helpful." When asked about members of the university that have been impactful, Tina shared "Yeah, I actually have had two major ones that I will probably stay in contact with through my life." These two are specifically members of the faculty on her campus. Having understanding faculty members was a topic the participants addressed.

*Family.* Three participants talked about having received support from their family members. Faith and Tina talked about a few family members who have supported each of them. For Faith, the first person she mentioned getting support from was her husband. She then followed up with members of her extended family, sharing "Yeah, he [her husband], my grandmother also helps out, and my Dad helps out and everything else. But the main person is my husband and he is very supportive." Tina's family lives very close to her and she shared "Yeah, now that I am more local to my family I have, my entire family lives almost within an hour from me. So, my Mom is my best friend and I really use her as my social support whenever needed."

Mary's boyfriend has been her main source of support throughout her transition to college.

We took the summer off and we both started school at the same time. And he'd been to college before he was more familiar with like how to apply and like who to talk to and stuff. And he actually went to school for a while before he went to the Navy. So, he

definitely influenced me to go, because we were kind of doing it together. And we both had our GI bills, and we're splitting bills and had our like housing allowance.

Family members were discussed as a big area of support for these student veterans.

*Friends.* Ann and Tina shared that they both have a group of friends at the different institutions they attend. Of those two only Tina has found her friends to understand her situation and be supportive. She shared "I have a really good friend support system too if I ever need anything I can reach out to my friends and they would be there." She later shared "Oh definitely like if I ever needed, if we had a late class or anything you know my friends or family were there to either pick up my kids or take them to their games or practices or whatever they had or I am the kind of person who can get really stressed out sometimes because I procrastinated and so there have been instances where you know I'll just go out to dinner with a friend because they've realized the stress is there and they take my mind off it." Ann hasn't had the same luck. She shared

Yeah, they try to understand, but ultimately, when it comes down to it, when I'm stressed out about things, they're like, why are you so stressed out about this? Because I have an obligation to fulfill. I can't call off or just not show up.

Having friends that understand the situation student veterans are in can make a difference.

*Financial Aid.* It is common knowledge that college is not cheap and to attend students need financial support from somewhere. All of the participants mentioned that the financial benefits they receive is one of the main reasons they are attending college. Without the assistance college would not be possible in a lot of cases. Three participants discussed their interaction with the Financial Aid office and each of them shared that it was a positive experience on their respective campuses. Mary had an issue when she first enrolled in college

Well, it took them a while to pay the VA for all the paperwork to go through. And then to confirm everything, I think it took like three months or so for that; like when I was in school, obviously they paid back pay and paid the school, but the school is really good. However, it is very different at this point of her college career, and Mary said “I don’t even think about the GI Bill anymore. Like, it’s just kind of like it pays it and then I get paid on time.” Ann developed a great relationship with the VA rep on her campus;

And I had no resources whatsoever at my unit on what my benefits were. Nobody was giving me answers, because apparently nobody in my unit goes to college. So, Rachel [VA Rep] and Gideon we’re able to help me find the resources that I need and figure out what assistance I had available to me.

Tina did not have any issues with the financial aid process when applying to her current institution and when explaining why she shared “Simply because I was a transfer student. So, when I transferred, they had already sent everything to college for me. I didn’t have any problems with it.”

*Lack of Support.* Support can come from many places on a college campus, but the participants did not speak of support system that they utilized other than those mentioned above. One form of support that can be found on almost every campus is an orientation program, however not all received that benefit. Two participants shared that they had lack luster experiences with the orientation programs they have gone through. Tina shared

When I first started at a community college it wasn’t a great orientation. They didn’t walk you through the college or ask where you were going or set the expectations and so with my current institution, they did that, and they did it as a whole.

Faith also felt as though her initial orientation at a different community college was not great. “It missed the mark pretty, pretty bad. They relate everything to, like I said, these younger students, and they had to go over how to be responsible, and how to study and everything else.”

Two of the participants were unable to attend orientation at all. Mary shared that “I applied and got in and started classes really, really quick like right at the deadline. And so, I didn’t, you know, I think they told me I was supposed to [attend orientation], but I didn’t.” For Ann it was out of her control to attend orientation, “Um, actually, I didn’t get to go to orientation because I was at advanced individual training at Fort Lee. I missed out on all of that.”

**Strategies.** The last part of the theory focuses on three categories of coping responses; those that modify the situation, those that control the meaning of the problem, and those that aid in managing the stress in the aftermath (Schlossberg, 1984). The participants were asked about strategies that they used as well as strategies that they have utilized while enrolled in higher education. This provided an understanding of what they personally brought into their education from their time in the military and what the institutions have provided for them. All four participants discuss their military experience and how it differs from school, but some of the participants were able to utilize that experience while at school.

*Routine/Structure.* Each participant discussed the military lifestyle that included structure and routine, compared to college. Ann and Faith talked about the structure differences between the military and higher education. Ann shared

So, it’s just a completely different lifestyle. You know, when I, I came to college, straight out of AIT, where I had complete structure, like we get this time, we do PT, we go get breakfast. Just complete structures compared to being at college where it’s not so much like that.

Faith echoed similar struggles; “The one thing was breaking myself out of that military habit. And that was, the hardest thing for me to do.” Mary focused on the types of challenges she faced in both settings. She shared “I think school is more mentally challenging, the Navy was probably more physically challenging.” Tina felt as though the two complimented each other. Tina shared

You kind of just adapt the mindset that you have to do something, and quitting is not an option. So, having that mindset in the military really transferred over to college. I mean I was never going to quit on myself and I was never going to let myself not finish and so with that I feel like that kind of what had me moving daily.

The participants identified that the structure from one area carried over and could be utilized in the academic environment.

*Involvement.* Three of the participants discussed their interaction with the Student Veteran Assistance Center on their campus. Each of them has utilized them in some capacity. Mary uses them for attaining their benefits. Faith is heavily involved with the student veteran assistance center on their campus. She is the treasurer for the student veteran association and have made multiple connections through this office. Ann utilized the student veteran’s assistance center on her campus heavily and it helped her feel connected to campus and it gave her a better understanding of the different resources (financial aid, academic, and involvement) available to her.

*Financial.* All four of the participants shared that one of the main reasons they attended college was because of the financial assistance given through the military. Mary shared “Um, well, it’s free, and you get a housing allowance. And that made it really great.” Faith echoed similar thoughts “100% if I couldn’t have my college paid for, I probably wouldn’t be going to college, college is too expensive.” Tina talked about the impact it had on her decision “It had, I

mean a big influence, Financial Aid and the GI Bill and stuff if it wasn't for that I don't know if I would have made the same decision." Ann agreed that it had a big influence on her decision, but she also expressed some anger about the situation.

For the Army Reserves, I actually did just blow up on the recruiters lately. Because when you join, they tell you college is going to be 100% paid for, you're not going to have to worry about it. So, I only looked into the Army Reserves, I never even looked at the National Guard, signed my contract all happy giddy as a 17-year-old, they write a nice fat check to present that awards, you know, she's going to get all this money for college. But what it really boiled down to is that I would only be getting \$4,000 per fiscal year, which fiscal year for the military is starting October.

Ann shared that there were some details left out that would have helped her better understand how much the Army actually covers.

*Pursuing Assistance.* The participants were split in terms of pursuing support from the campus support services. Two of them Mary and Tina did not really pursue support from pre-established areas on campus. Mary feels as though it might have been beneficial for her to utilize at least one of them though. She shared "We have like this big fancy Vet Center sponsored by [politician and his wife] and so I don't really go there much, maybe if I went there I probably you know meet some friends or like relate to people, but that's beside the point." Tina on the other hand didn't really go into much detail. When asked about utilizing campus resources she responded with a quick "No." On the other hand, Ann and Faith talked about how utilizing campus resources was a big part of their experience. Ann shared "Yeah, the student veterans' resource was available to me and that's how I met Gideon [a graduate student who offered her assistance]." She also shared that she would recommend other student veterans get involved with

the student veteran resource center on their campus. Faith utilizes the student veteran center as well. She is involved with the student organization within that office and has been on the exec board for a couple of years now.

### **Summary**

The data collected in the interviews was coded and analyzed based on the two proposed research questions as well as Schlossberg's (1984) transition theory. In order to answer the first question, the data was split into the situation and self frames of the transition theory. For the second research questions the other two frames of the theory, strategies and support, were used to analyze the data. Several subthemes emerged from this analysis and were further explained in this chapter.

## **Chapter VI**

### **Discussion**

This chapter focuses on how the findings of this research tie into previously conducted research and vice versa. It looks to draw connections between preexisting literature and experiences of the female student veterans who participated in this research. The findings have been used to answer the two different research questions that were posed at the beginning of this research project. Future research opportunities as well as the implications of this research are presented in this chapter.

### **Discussion**

The discussion answers the research questions through looking at three different areas. These include previous research, conclusions drawn from the interviews completed, and specific examples given by the participants. Both research questions are broken down into subthemes that came from the interviews and each subtheme contains information that helps to answer the research questions. When looking at the focal point of this research, which was the transition female student veterans go through when entering college there were some major subthemes that were apparent throughout the interviews that were conducted. They include military identity, age difference, life roles, and discrimination they faced. These students struggled to let go of their military identity as they left the military and entered college. However, the most successful transitions occur when these students are able to take the best parts of their military identity and utilize it during their schooling. The difference in age between these veterans and the students in their classes was stark. This added to the difficulty they already faced at school by making it hard to connect to other students and feel welcome. Once they left the military other areas of their life

have become a focal point. These participants found their roles are different based on the people in their lives including their partners and children. Lastly, a negative part of their military experience was the discrimination they dealt with. Each participant faced it in some form and some even dealt with it during their time in higher education.

**Female student veteran's description of their transition to college.**

*Military Identity.* The research on student veterans often talks about how difficult it is for them to leave their military identity when they are no longer in that role (Grimell, 2019; Williams, Allen-Collinson, Hockey, & Evans, 2018). It was clear in talking with each of the women in this study that they are still holding on to that identity even after they have exited the military, whether they specifically stated it, or it was implied through the examples they provided. However, it was also evident that these women are using the skills and lifestyle from the military to make themselves successful students. Mary discussed how she could make her schedule straightforward by overpreparing and going to class every day creating her routine. Tina talked about it in similar ways, she focused on how having a syllabus brought in the structure that she was used to in the military. Throughout the interviews it was evident that each participant wanted to take the positives aspects of their military identity and implement that into their college student life.

*Age difference.* These students coming into college would be considered non-traditional or adult learners (Auguste, Packard, & Keep, 2018; Minichiello, 2018). Three participants in this study saw themselves as different from the traditionally aged students, but they also did not identify as non-traditional or as adult learners. They recognized the age difference and how their priorities were not aligned, but that did not seem to impact their ability to transition, it was just something they were acutely aware of as they spoke. It was almost like they saw it but were not

going to let it impact their experience/success. Mary, Faith, and Tina all shared similar feelings. Mary and Faith are 28 and Tina is 31. Mary discussed how she had a difficult time finding older female students and that connecting with the younger students was difficult because they don't share similar life experiences with her. Faith felt as though she was competing with these younger students and that left her at a disadvantage. She also had difficulty connecting with them because the younger students would complain about getting up early and that was not something she could understand. Faith is very much used to getting started early and having lots of responsibilities on a daily basis. Similar to the other two, Tina struggled connecting with the younger students and very adamantly suggested that she was not one of them. Two of these three participants do not identify as a nontraditional student, but yet they acknowledge that there is a significant age difference present.

*Life Roles.* Research suggests that civilian life is very different from the military and brings on different tasks and roles (Bowes, Ferreira, & Henderson, 2018). Each of the participants discussed how their life had changed from the military to college and specifically discussed the different roles they took on as well as being a student. Mary now lives with her boyfriend while attending school and she has found that they have been holding each other accountable and being in this situation has helped her through her transition to college. Faith is a wife and a mother, so her roles have changed dramatically since leaving the military. These two roles dominate her life outside of attending college. Her focus has shifted to not only caring for herself, but her husband and daughter have taken priority. Tina is in a similar situation. She is a mother and her decisions are solely based on what's best for her kids. Being a mother is what inspired her to pursue her college education in the first place.

*Discrimination.* Facing discrimination in some way shape or form is overly common for females in the military (Diramio et al., 2015; McSally, 2011; O'Hara, et al., 1998; Torres-Reyna & Shapiro, 2002). They are often looked down upon and not viewed in the same light as males (Diramio et al., 2015). It is common for NCOs and other members of the military to view females as weak or not strong enough to actually be a soldier. Three of the participants discussed experiencing something along the lines of discrimination during their time in the military and one of them even faced it on her college campus in the ROTC program. Mary talked specifically about how there was a stereotype surrounding females in the military that they want things handed to them and that they don't work very hard. She also shared that she felt as though she was grouped in with this stereotype. Ann faced discrimination in both the military and on her college campus. She feels as though she is not respected by her male counterparts and is often times left out of platoon activities. This translated to her experience in the ROTC program at the college campus she is attending. She was often questioned and treated as a joke, but the males would be highly respected. This occurred even though she has more actual military experience than the members of the ROTC program and she is currently serving in the military. Tina expressed how males in the military were looked at as the strong ones and that females could not do the same tasks that the males were assigned and completed. She also talked about how it was expressed that women were looked at as not strong enough in battle. These participants do not label any of these actions as discrimination, which suggests that they have become desensitized to this type of behavior.

#### **Resources that female student veterans utilize to aid in their transition to college.**

Understanding what resources these students utilize while transitioning along with why is important to student affairs professionals in providing the best support possible. When looking at

the personal life of the participants, they have relied on their family members as well as their friends as resources. On the higher education end different resources that played a role in their transition were the friends they made while on campus, different student organizations or clubs that provided them with the opportunity to get involved on campus, the different members of the institutions that have served as mentors or influential connections on campus, and campus resources such as financial aid or orientation. Family members have stepped in and provided guidance as well as just been there for the participants when they needed them. The same can be said for their friends, in most cases that is. Getting involved on campus aided in these student veterans in making connections and meeting other students. Having faculty or student affairs professionals serve as mentors has been beneficial for these students because often times it helps with the age difference and these individuals have a similar world view as the participants. Lastly, the campus resources are preestablished and were created to support students on their entrance to college and beyond.

*Family.* Research says that having support from one's family members has a positive impact on veterans (Romero, Riggs, & Ruggero, 2015). It was clear that for most of the participants that their families played a crucial role of support when these student veterans left the military and entered college. There were plenty of examples where the participants were grateful for the role their family members have played in their life. Also, it was common to see the participants move closer to their families after exiting the military. Mary talked about how her family supported her both during and after her time in the military. They would visit her during the holidays while she was serving and after she left the military, she continues to talk with her family members. Faith shared that at first her Mom was upset with her for joining the military, but she quickly came around and now they have great relationship. Her husband has

also been a huge area of support and was very supportive about her starting school. Faith's grandmother and her Dad also help out. Tina shared that her Mom is her best friend and is able to support her whenever it is needed. She said the same about other members of family. Tina is very happy to have moved closer to them so she can spend more time with her family and lean on them if needed. Clearly family members are a major part of these women's lives and it impacts not only their military experience but also their collegiate experience.

*Friends.* According to previously conducted research, having relationships with other peers has shown to have a positive impact on student veteran's ability to reintegrate into civilian life (Ryan, Carlstrom, Hughey, & Harris, 2011; Williston & Roemer, 2017). In the case of these participants they referred to friends at their college as well as outside of the college world. When talking with these participants, there were some mixed reactions about friends, but overall there was a positive attitude towards the efforts their friends make to be supportive. Ann talked about how she was appreciative of her friends in college, because they would try to understand what she was going through and the struggles she faced when trying to balance the Army and school. However, Ann also got frustrated because her friends were not always there for her and there were times, they would not understand what she was doing and just ask silly questions about why she had to miss class or could not hang out with them. On the flip side of that Tina had very supportive friends in her personal life who were very reliable and would help out with her kids as well as taking her out for dinner if she needed to talk or just a break from school.

*Student Involvement.* Being involved with student organizations on campus has been proven to have multiple benefits, including being able to meet and connect with other students as well as providing leadership opportunities (Dugan, 2011; Kirchner, 2015). Three of the participants got involved on campus and all of them had positive experiences. It allowed them to

form connections with other students and feel better connected to campus. Ann joined a sorority as well as the criminal justice student organization. She also talked about how she made great connections in each organization. Faith joined the student veteran organization on her campus to connect with other students who understood her situation and immediately was voted onto the executive board. She has served multiple terms as the treasurer and has huge success in that role. Tina was inducted into an honor society for her major and wishes she could have more time with that organization, because she understands and had first-hand experience with the benefits of being involved on campus. These three have really enjoyed this part of their college experience and have found it to be very beneficial in making their time at college successful. These meaningful connections to the institution help the student veterans feel like they play a bigger role than just being a student.

*Members of the institution.* Student veterans can play a unique role on the college campus; however, they need to feel valued and like they belong, and this comes through interactions with staff and faculty as well as other students (Heineman, 2017). Through talking with these student veterans, it was obvious that there were individuals who work for the institutions that these individuals attend that have lent a hand and support these students during their transition and beyond. They also spoke about how important it was to connect with those who understood and respected their student veteran status. Some of these connections were not made until after the female student veterans had been on campus for an extended period of time. Each participant has connected with members of the campus and they have served as lasting mentors for them.

Mary received great support from her professors as well as her advisors. She mentioned how they have pushed her to be successful and she has no problem talking with them about

anything that comes up from both a mentoring and collegial perspective. Ann has found both faculty members and student affairs professionals to be areas of support for her. Her one professor is a veteran, so he can relate to her struggles. She has also found support from a former graduate student who understands the student experience as well as the veteran experience. Additionally, she spoke about the financial aid representative on her campus, who was able to help her make sense of her benefits and financial concerns. Both were focused on veteran affairs, so there was plenty of common ground between them all. Faith has found a professor that has served as a huge area of support for her. Faith mentioned that this individual serves as her unofficial counselor and has a personality similar to hers and has been a great help. Lastly, Tina discussed how there have two faculty members that have served as mentors for her and have supported her through her academic endeavors. Finding members of their institutions to talk with and form connections has proven to help the participants feel connected to campus.

*On campus resources.* Griffin and Gilbert (2016) identified that student veterans often feel unsupported because college campuses do not understand them; however, having properly prepared and dedicated campus resources are a crucial part to welcoming student veterans to campus. These individuals had to rely on certain campus resources during their transition to college. Overall, there was a positive reaction toward the financial aid office, and this was important to them because they needed their benefits to attend college and having someone in the office who understands this process was important to them. Mary, Ann, and Tina all had positive experiences with the financial aid office on their campuses. They all talked about how it was easy to navigate, and it was an overall quick as well as painless process. Each of the participants utilize the student veteran resource center on their campuses and these have played a crucial role for most of them, providing them with resources, mentors, and peers who understand their

background from a unique perspective. Ann found a mentor through the student veteran resource center on her campus. Faith got involved with the student organization that is run through the student veteran resource center on her campus. It was evident that the participants did not need a lot to be successful in college, but they did identify having financial assistance as the most important; and then having individuals who personally connected with them and assisted them in attaining their goals as secondary.

Orientation programs are designed with the purpose of introducing students to campus, give them the resources they need to be successful, and help them connect with other students (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). However, these programs tend to be a one size fits all and do not address the needs of specific populations such as student veterans. Faith and Tina shared that they had issues with the orientation programs they went through. They felt the programs had missed the mark and were focused on the traditional college aged student instead of providing the resources that would have been supported them. However, Tina said that the orientation at her current institution was very beneficial and she was treated a lot differently than the one she attended at the community college she attended. These participants would have benefitted similar to Tina if the orientation program was geared towards them and their needs were met.

### **Implications for Higher Education**

It is very important for higher education professionals to pay attention to each student and each student population and understand that everyone has different needs. Female student veterans are a very important student population on college campuses and often go unnoticed for a number of reasons. Being aware of their needs and how to support them on their pathway to success is crucial in aiding them during their tenure in higher education.

It was evident that these students did not see themselves as nontraditional students or adult learners, but they did recognize that the age difference between these participants and their fellow students was significant to them. These women came with a different level of maturity than they saw in their traditionally aged classmates as they entered their respective institution. Student Affairs professionals need to recognize what this population brings to the institution and understand what they need to provide for this population. This population of students are extremely responsible, mainly because of their time in the military, and can advocate for themselves and student affairs professional can best support them by tailoring the resources with specific focus on this population that goes beyond the student veteran assistance center. This needs to extend into the classroom and more formal resources such as financial aid and orientation programs. All student affairs professionals as well as faculty members should go through a training program that gives them the tools and knowledge needed to support student veterans as they return to school.

Based on what was shared, the participant's life roles outside of being a student are extremely important. Often times they are more important than almost everything else. The participants recognized that they are there to learn and get a degree. With their roles outside of the institution these students look for support on campus to create balance in their hectic lives. For example, providing the option of childcare. Another idea to consider would be to offer a wider variety of instruction types. More of a hybrid instead of holding class on campus all of the time. Offering more online classes or more online options for degree completion.

It was also clear that student veteran's assistance centers were extremely beneficial for the participants. The participants had multiple points of contact with this office with varying levels of interaction. It definitely helped that their interaction was not forced, and they were

allowed to approach however they wanted to. If institutions want to commit to providing a supportive environment for student veterans they would need to consider how they staff this type of center. This means the student veteran assistance center would have a full-time director, a graduate assistant, and at least one student worker. Also, within the office there would be a financial aid professional who would specialize in the different forms of financial aid available for student veterans. It would also be helpful to have academic advisors and clinical counselors available at different times in this space to provide additional support. Attached to the office would be a full student lounge with both study and social areas.

The major reason why the participants attend college or even consider college is because the military offers financial assistance they received. It plays a massive role in the participant's experience; some had an easier time with it than others. Not everyone had a positive experience with the getting their financial benefits. It would be helpful to cross train the individuals within the student veteran assistance center with financial aid, so they can be effective in providing assistance to the student veterans and answering their financially based questions.

It was evident that all four of these women have faced some type of discrimination during their time in the military both on and off campus. It is important for student affairs professionals as well as faculty to understand that discrimination is part of the female student veteran experience in the military. There needs to be a better awareness and proactive collaboration with different areas of campus is imperative, specifically ROTC. This happens to the majority of females in the military and even though that is out of a college or university's control they should in no way contribute to it on their campus (Diramio et al., 2015). Instead, administrators and faculty need to work to eliminate this culture on their campus. Student affairs professionals can provide opportunities to empower these women through providing women's leadership

opportunities specifically for female student veterans. They may also create a female student veteran group within the veteran's assistance center where they are free to talk about their experiences and seek out mentors. Offering counseling within the student veteran's assistance center is another great way to support female student veterans.

Some of the participants echoed that their experience with orientation at one of the institutions they attended was subpar and was focused on what is considered a traditional college student instead of catering to their needs. In order to fix this, institutions should offer an orientation program that caters to the specific needs of student veterans. This could be done by offering sessions that focus strictly on financial benefits along with having financial aid administrators on site to answer questions and help with paperwork. Also, shift the focus of academic advising so that student veterans are given an honest evaluation and plan on how to graduate and make the most of the credits, if any, that they are bringing to the institution. Offering tours that showcase where specific resources are located as well as their classrooms or academic buildings. Having these students connect with other student veterans would allow them to meet people that have similar backgrounds and help foster quicker connections between the incoming students and the campus. Another possibility would be to open up this type of orientation to both student veterans and adult learners because even though they come from different backgrounds there are still some similarities between the two populations. Having a resource fair along with an involvement fair would also be beneficial for these students, so that they are made aware of everything that is on campus and do not feel as though they have nothing in common with other students or that the other student veterans are the only people, they can spend time with. Lastly, having the student veteran assistance center on campus come and speak

would also be beneficial in showing that these student matter and will be supported during their time in college.

Academically, there are certain rules that go with the different forms of financial aid available to student veterans and financial aid departments along with the different academic departments needs to understand that once these students choose a major, they are stuck in it. Also, there are issues that exist when transferring credits over to the institution from the military and student veterans have to retake classes even though they are well versed in the information already. The transfer requirements need to recognize the credits these students earn in the military and not hinder them by making them take classes over again.

### **Further Research**

This was a small qualitative study, and by no means should it be considered all-encompassing on the topic of female student veterans. As identified earlier in this paper, there is research lacking on this population and more needs to be studied. This study was based on four female student veterans who served in differing branches of the military and they are from different institutions in different areas of the United States of America. When looking ahead, there are a few opportunities to conduct similar research.

The participants in this study all identify as White, which was not intentionally done, but needs to be accounted for. Conducting a study with the same premise as this one, but with an intentional focus on cultural diversity may provide new insights. We know that minority populations in the United States continue to experience issues of oppression and marginalization and understanding how this impacts these women's experience transitioning from the military to college would provide important information on their college life. For example, conducting a qualitative study on Black female student veterans.

Another research opportunity would be to recreate this study at a singular institution instead of focusing on students and not their institutions. The focus for this research was to look at the female student veteran's transition, not at the resources provided by the institution but how the student approached and used those resources. Conducting a qualitative study at a singular institution would provide clear and concise findings regarding the specific experiences and services and would give student affairs professionals as well as other members of the university a better understanding of what needs to be done to support this population. This could be at an institution with a large student veteran population, a military institution where students are still active members of the military, or at an institution with few student veterans. Each would provide insightful findings that would further develop student veteran's services on college campuses.

A focus could also be put on a certain geographic region. As participants were sought for this study, it just naturally led to the participants coming from a less geographically broad area of the United States. This may account for different findings than if the study was much broader. None of the participants in this study are from the western part of the United States, so conducting research on female student veterans in this area may have different findings.

In this present study, there were three participants who served active duty in the military and one who served in an ROTC program on campus. It would be beneficial to study just the experiences of women in ROTC programs to understand what this looks like from their perspective. There is also the opportunity to research discrimination within ROTC programs on college campuses. This could include a mixed methods study to determine what percentage of student veterans face discrimination within their respected ROTC program and then following

that up with individual interviews with a few of the survey participants to hear firsthand accounts of the experiences they faced.

Focusing this research on specific branches of the military, could provide new insights. Not every branch is the same, so comparing the experiences female student veterans have when transitioning from specific branches of the military may show more specific needs that need to be addressed by higher education institutions. Having this insight would help make experiences of female veteran's in the military find success in higher education institutions.

### **Conclusion**

This population has a set of needs that is particular to them and requires further examination by higher education institutions around the country. This research has provided numerous findings and takeaways. Most importantly, these students bring their military identity with them to campus, whether they share it openly or not it is what guides them through this experience and in most cases is what brings them to college. This will impact the work of student affairs professionals because we need to be aware of the skills that these students gain in the military and stop treating them as what is considered a traditionally aged student. Each of the participants experienced discrimination yet they did not acknowledge it as discrimination and it was not just in the military, higher education institutions need to be aware of this and find ways to change this culture. Female student veterans experience support in a variety of different forms and colleges can better serve this population as well as many others by taking a critical look at the various ways they serve and support their various student populations. To go along with that, college campuses need to provide adequate counseling resources for these students to express what they are feeling and going through. It is easy to just stick incoming student veterans with other traditional and adult student populations and call it a day because that might appear to be

the easiest way to do our job but recognizing the unique differences will lead us to better serving this population and paying them back for the service they have made to our country.

### References

- Acker, J. (1990). Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: A theory of gendered organizations. *Gender & Society*, 139-158.
- Ackerman, R., DiRamio, D., & Garza Mitchell, R. (2009). Transitions: Combat veterans as college students. *New Directions for Student Services*, 5-14.
- Affairs, U. D. (2017). *Department of Veterans Affairs Education Program Beneficiaries: FY2000 to FY 2016*.
- Affairs, U. D. (2019, September 9). *Post 9/11 GI Bill Yellow Ribbon*. Retrieved from VA Education and Training:  
<https://www.benefits.va.gov/GIBILL/docs/factsheets/Yellow%20Ribbon%20Program.pdf>
- Affairs, U. S. (2017, March 31). *Education and Training*. Retrieved from  
[https://www.benefits.va.gov/GIBILL/resources/benefits\\_resources/rates/ch33/ch33rates080117.asp](https://www.benefits.va.gov/GIBILL/resources/benefits_resources/rates/ch33/ch33rates080117.asp)
- Anderson, M., Goodman, J., & Schlossberg, N. (2012). *Counseling adults in transition: Linking Schlossberg's theory with practice in a diverse world*. New York: Springer.
- Angrist, J. (1993). The effect of veterans benefits on education and earnings. *Industrial and Labor Relations Review*, 637-652.
- ASHE Higher Education Report. (2011). Women warriors: Supporting female student veterans. *ASHE Higher Education Report*, 69-80.

- Auguste, E., Packard, B. W.-L., & Keep, A. (2018). Nontraditional women students' experiences of identity recognition and marginalization during advising. *NACADA Journal*, 45-60.
- Baker II, L. C. (2006). *Women in Combat: A Culture Issue?* Carlisle: U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks.
- Ballard, S. (2016, August 8). *Why is Change So Hard?* Retrieved from Psychology Today: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-truth-about-exercise-addiction/201608/why-is-change-so-hard>
- Bowes, M., Ferreira, N., & Henderson, M. (2018). The influence of psychosocial factors in veteran adjustment to civilian life. *Clinical Psychology & Psychotherapy*, 583-600.
- Boyd, C. (1998). Women in the military. *Black Collegian*, 129.
- Bradshaw, M. (2001). Contracts and member checks in qualitative research in human geography: Reason for caution? *Area*, 202-211.
- Burnard, P. (1991). A method of analysing interview transcripts in qualitative research. *Nurse Education Today*, 461-466.
- Burnard, P. (1996). Teaching the analysis of textual data: an experiential approach. *Nurse Education Today*, 278-281.
- Cartwright, A., Hussy, I., Roche, B., Dunne, J., & Muphy, C. (2017). An investigation into the relationship between the gender binary and occupational discrimination using the implicit relational assessment procedure. *Psychological Record*, 121-130.
- Center, D. M. (2017). *2017 demographics: Profile of the military community*. Washington D.C.: Department of Defense.

- Cook, B., & Kim, Y. (2009). *From soldier to student: Easing the transition of service members on campus*. Washington DC: American Council on Education.
- Defense, D. o. (2016). *Profile of the Military Community*. Department of Defense.
- Demers, A. L. (2013). From death to life: Female veterans, identity negotiation, and reintegration into society. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 489-515.
- Derefinko, K. J., Hallsell, T. A., Isaacs, M. B., Colvin, L. W., Salgado Garcia, F. I., & Bursac, Z. (2018). Perceived needs of veterans transitioning from the military to civilian life. *Journal of Mental Health Administration*.
- Devilbiss, M. C. (1990). *Women and military service: A history, analysis, nd overview of key issues*. Maxwell Air Force Base: Air University Press.
- Diramio, D., Jarvis, K., Iverson, S., Seher, C., & Anderson, R. (2015). Out from the shadows: Female student veterans and help-seeking. *College Student Journal*, 49-68.
- Directorate, T. A. (2018, December 26). *Combat Action Badge CAB*. Retrieved from HRC U.S. Army: <https://www.hrc.army.mil/TAGD/Combat%20Action%20Badge%20CAB>
- Doan, A. E., & Portillo, S. (2017). Not a woman, but a soldier: Exploring identity through translocationals positionality. *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research*, 236-249.
- Dortch, C. (2017). *GI bills enacted prior to 2008 and related veterans' educational assistance programs: a primer*. Congressional Research Service.
- Dugan, J. (2011). Students' involvement in group experiences and connections to leadership development. *New Directions for Institutional Research*, 17-32.

Education, U. N. (2018). *Eastern Illinois University*. Retrieved from U.S. News:

<https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/eastern-illinois-university-1674>

Elliott, M., Gonzalez, C., & Larsen, B. (2011). U.S. Military veterans transition to college:

Combat, PTSD, and alienation on campus. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 279-296.

Elo, S., & Kyngas, H. (2008). The qualitative content analysis process. *Journal of Advanced*

*Nursing*, 107-115.

Elshtain, J. B. (1987). *Women & War*. New York: Basic Books.

Enloe, C. (1983). *Does khaki become you? The militarisation of women's lives*. London: Pluto

Press.

Evans, N., Forney, D., Guido, F., Patton, L., & Renn, K. (2010). *Student development in college:*

*theory, research, and practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Gebicke, M. (1998). *Gender issues: Information on DOD's assignment policy and direct ground*

*combat definition*. Washington, D.C.: United States General Accounting Office.

George, R., & Stoke, M. A. (2018). Gender identity and sexual orientation in autism spectrum

disorder. *Autism: The International Journal of Research & Practice*, 970-982.

Gill, P., Stewart, K., Treasure, E., & Chadwick, B. (2008). Methods of data collection in

qualitative research: interviews and focus groups. *British Dental Journal*, 291-295.

Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development*.

Harvard.

- Glasser, I., Powers, J., & Zywiak, W. (2009, May). Military veterans at universities: A case of culture clash. *Anthropology News*, p. 33.
- Gregg, B., Howell, D., & Shordike, A. (2016). Experiences of veterans transitioning to postsecondary education. *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 1-8.
- Griffin, K., & Gilbert, C. (2016). Better Transitions for Troops: An Application of Schlossberg's Transition Framework to Analyses of Barrier and Institutional support structures for student veterans. *Journal of Higher Education*, 71-97.
- Grimell, J. (2019). Revisiting living in limbo to illustrate a pastoral psychological understanding of transition from military to civilian. *Pastoral Psychology*, 393-405.
- Haslanger, S. (2012). *Resisting Reality*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Heineman, J. (2017). From boots to suits: Women veterans transitioning to community college students. *New Directions for Community Colleges*, 77-88.
- Heitzman, A. C., & Comers, P. (2015). The disappeared ones: Female student veterans at a four-year college. *College and University*.
- Helmich, E., Boerebach, B. C., Arah, O. A., & Lingard, L. (2015). Beyond limitations: Improving how we handle uncertainty in health professions education research. *Medical Teacher*, 1043-1050.
- Higgerson, P. (2017). *Student veterans and their transition to becoming a college student*. Charleston: Eastern Illinois University.
- Hiltner, J. (1999). 'She Bled in Secret'. *Early American Literature*, 190-220.

- History and Timeline*. (2013, November 21). Retrieved from U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs: <https://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/history.asp>
- Illinois Veteran's Benefits*. (2019, September 9). Retrieved from Military Benefits.info: <https://militarybenefits.info/illinois-veterans-benefits/>
- Iskra, D. (2010). *Women in the United States Armed Forces: A Guide to the Issues*. Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO.
- Jenkins, K. (2016). Amerlioration and inclusion: Gender identity and the concept of women. *Ethics*, 394-421.
- Jolly, J. (2013). Historical perspectives: The servicemen's readjustment act of 1944. *Gifted Child Today*, 266-268\.
- Kamarck, K. (2016). *Women in Combat: Issues for Congress*. Congressional Research Service.
- Kimmel, M. (2000). Saving the males: The sociological implications of the virginia military institute and the citadel. *Gender & Society*, 494-516.
- Kirchner, M. (2015). Supporting student veteran transition to college and academic success. *Adult Learning*, 116-123.
- Kirkup, K. (2018). The origins of gender identity and gender expepression in angli-american legal discours. *University of Toronto Law Journal*, 80-117.
- Kramer, D. (2015, May 24). Women describe their struggles with gender roles in military. (T. Minsberg, Interviewer)
- Krefting, L. (1991). Rigor in qualitative research: The assessmnet of trustworthiness. *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, 214-222.

- McCain, G. (1988). Content analysis: a method for studying for studying clinical nursing problems. *Applied Nursing Research*, 146-150.
- McNamara, C. (2009). *Guidelines for Conducting Research Interviews*. Retrieved from <https://managementhelp.org/businessresearch/interviews.htm>
- McReynolds, J. (2014, March). *Lessening the culture shock: military life vs. student life*. Retrieved from Voices of Global Community: <https://www.nacada.ksu.edu/Resources/Academic-Advising-Today/View-Articles/Lessening-the-Culture-Shock-Military-Life-vs-Student-Life.aspx>
- McSally, M. (2011). US military's last barrier to equality: Ban on women in combat. *Christian Science Monitor*.
- Mettler, S. (2012, January 1). *How The GI Bill Built The Middle Class and Enhanced Democracy*. Retrieved from Scholars Strategy Network: <https://scholars.org/brief/how-gi-bill-built-middle-class-and-enhanced-democracy>
- Minichiello, A. (2018). From deficit thinking to counter storytelling: A narrative inquiry of nontraditional student experience within undergraduate engineering education. *International Journal of Education in Mathematics, Science, and Technology*, 266-284.
- Minsberg, T. (2015, May 24). *Women describe their struggles with gender roles in military*. Retrieved from The New York Times: <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/25/health/women-describe-their-struggles-with-gender-roles-in-military.html>

Nation Center for PTSD. (2014, April 22). *Characteristics of student veterans*. Retrieved from VA campus toolkit handout:

[https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/studentveteran/docs/ed\\_todaysStudentVets.html](https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/studentveteran/docs/ed_todaysStudentVets.html)

National Center for PTSD. (2012, April 6). *Active Duty vs. Reserve or National Guard*.

Retrieved from Veterans Employment Toolkit:

[https://www.va.gov/vetsinworkplace/docs/em\\_activereserve.html](https://www.va.gov/vetsinworkplace/docs/em_activereserve.html)

*noncommissioned officer*. (2019, December 18). Retrieved from Merriam-Webster:

<https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/noncommissioned%20officer>

Office of People Analytics. (2019, April 13). *Learn About Your Options*. Retrieved from Careers

In the Military: <https://www.careersinthemilitary.com/options-enlisted-vs-officer>

O'Hara, J., Bergman, B., Geddes, J., Branswell, B., Deziel, S., Nolen, S., & Harnett, C. (1998, June 1). Speaking out. *Maclean's*, p. 14.

O'Herrin, E. (2011). Enhancing veteran success in higher education. *Peer Review*, 15-18.

Osborne, N. (2014). Veteran ally: Practical strategies for closing the military-civilian gap on campus. *Innovative Higher Education*, 247-260.

Pascarella, E., & Terenzini, P. (2005). *How College Affects Students*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Pascarells, E., & Terenzini, P. (1991). *How college affects students*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

Patten, E., & Parker, K. (n.d.). *Women in the U.S. military: Growing share, distinctive profile*.

- Patton, L., Renn, K., Guido, F., & Quaye, S. (2016). *Student Development In College: Theory, Research, and Practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Pearlin, L., & Schloer, C. (1978). The structure of coping. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 2-21.
- Pellegrino, L., & Hoggan, C. (2015). A tale of two transitions: Female military veterans during their first year at community college. *Adult Learning*, 124-131.
- Picard, B. (2018). Gender Identity: Developments in the law and human rights protections. *University of New Brunswick Law Journal*, 126-159.
- Polit, B., & Beck, C. (2004). *Nursing Research. Principles and Methods*. Philadelphia: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.
- Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*. (2010). Washington D.C.: American Psychological Association.
- Reynolds, G., & Shendruk, A. (2018, April 24). *Demographics of the U.S. Military*. Retrieved from Council on Foreign Relations: <https://www.cfr.org/article/demographics-us-military>
- Robson, C. (1993). *Real World Research. A Resource for Social Scientists and Practitioner-Researchers*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.
- Romero, D., Riggs, S., & Ruggero, C. (2015). Coping, family social support, and psychological symptoms among student veterans. *Journal of Counseling Psychology*, 242-252.
- Ryan, S., Carlstrom, A., Hughey, K., & Harris, B. (2011). From boots to books: Applying Schlossberg's model to transitioning American veterans. *NACADA*, 55-63.

- Sasson-Levy, O. (2003). Feminism and military gender practices: Israeli women soldiers in "masculine" roles. *Sociological Inquiry*, 440-465.
- Schiavone, V., & Gentry, D. (2014). Veteran-Students in transition at a midwestern university. *Journal of Continuing Higher Education*, 29-38.
- Schimmel-Bristow, A., Haley, S. G., Crouch, J. M., Evans, Y. N., Ahrens, K. R., McCarty, C. A., & Inwards-Breland, D. J. (2018). Youth and caregiver experiences of gender identity transition: a qualitative study. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, 273-281.
- Schlossberg, N. (2011). The challenge of change: the transition model. *Journal of Employment Counseling*, 159-162.
- Schlossberg, N. K. (1984). *Counseling adults in transition*. New York: Springer Publishing Company.
- Schmid, H. (1981). American occupational therapy foundation - Qualitative research and occupational therapy. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy* , 105-106.
- Schogol, J. (2017, April 5). *Women taught at boot camp to endure sexual harassment from male Marines, veteran says*. Retrieved from Marine Corps Times:  
<https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/your-marine-corps/2017/04/05/women-taught-at-boot-camp-to-endure-sexual-harassment-from-male-marines-veteran-says/>
- Security, W. I. (2017, February 1). *Women in Ground Combat: Facts and Figures*. Retrieved from Service Women's Action Network: <http://www.servicewomen.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/Women-in-Ground-Combat-Arms-Fact-Sheet-2-1-17.pdf>

*Shippensburg University of Pennsylvania*. (2018). Retrieved from U.S. News:

<https://www.usnews.com/best-colleges/shippensburg-university-3326>

Smole, D., & Loane, S. (2008). *A Brief History of Veteran's Education Benefits and Their Value*.

Congressional Research Service.

Statistics, N. C. (2016). *Profile of Women Veterans: 2015*. Nation Center for Veteran Analysis and Statistics.

Stout, J. (2019, May 29). Forms of Financial Assistance for Student Veterans On College Campuses. (D. Michaels, Interviewer)

Strong, J., Crow, B., & Lawson, S. (2018). Female veterans: Navigating two identities. *Clinical Social Work Journal*, 92-99.

Thomas, D. (2017). Feedback from research participants: Are member checks useful in qualitative research? *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 23-41.

Thorpe, H. (2014). *Soldier Girls*. New York: Scribner.

Torres-Reyna, O., & Shapiro, R. (2002). The polls--Trends. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 618-632.

*United State Department of Veteran Affairs*. (2016). Retrieved from Benefits for veterans education: <http://www.benefits.va.gov/REPORTS/abr/ABR-Education-FY15-02032016.pdf>

United States Army. (2019, April 13). *About The Army*. Retrieved from U.S. Army:

<https://www.goarmy.com/about/serving-in-the-army.html>

United States Federal Government. (2018). *Code of Federal Regulations*. Washington D.C.

- Vabke, A., Kawchi, I., Canning, D., Glymour, M., Jimenez, M., & Subramanian, V. (2016). Are the spillover effects from the GI bill? The mental health of wives of Korean War veterans. *PLoS ONE*, 1-13.
- Vacchi, D. T. (2012). Considering student veterans on the twenty-first-century college campus. *About Campus*, 15-21.
- Veterans Benefits Administration: Education and Training*. (2018, October 4). Retrieved from U.S Department of Veterans Affairs:  
[https://www.benefits.va.gov/GIBILL/resources/benefits\\_resources/rates/ch33/ch33rates080118.asp#TUITION](https://www.benefits.va.gov/GIBILL/resources/benefits_resources/rates/ch33/ch33rates080118.asp#TUITION)
- Walton Radford, A., Bentz, A., Dekker, R., & Paslov, J. (2016). *Stats in brief*. Retrieved from <https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2016/2016435.pdf>
- White, A. E., Moeller, J., Ivecevic, Z., & Brackett, M. A. (2018). Gender identity and sexual identity labels used by U.S. high school students: A co-occurrence network analysis. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity*, 243-252.
- Williams, R., Allen-Collinson, J., Hockey, J., & Evans, A. (2018). 'You're just chopped off at the end': Retired servicemen's identity work struggles in the military to civilian transition. *Journal of Drug Issues*, 812-829.
- Williston, S. K., & Roemer, L. (2017). Predictors of well-being in the lives of student service members and veterans. *Journal of American College Health*, 404-412.

Wolff, K., & Mills, P. (2016). Reporting military sexual trauma: A mixed-methods study of women veterans' experiences who served from World War II to the war in Afghanistan.

*Military Medicine*, 840-848.

Zhang, L. (2018). Veterans going to college: Evaluating the impact of the post-9/11 GI Bill on

college environment. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 82-102.

## Appendix A

### Invitation to Participate

Dear Student Veteran Community,

My name is Doug Michaels and I am conducting research on college females who served in the military to understand the transition you went through when entering college. I am currently a graduate student pursuing a master's degree in College Student Affairs at Eastern Illinois University. This research topic is the subject of the thesis I am writing under the direction of Dr. Timm. If you have completed at least one year of schooling and have served at least one year in the United States military, you are invited to participate in this research. Participants can be a member of any of the service branches. You will be asked to complete an interview that would take roughly an hour in length. If you are interested in participating in this research project, please contact me via email ([dmichaels@eiu.edu](mailto:dmichaels@eiu.edu)).

Thank you,

Doug Michaels  
[dmichaels@eiu.edu](mailto:dmichaels@eiu.edu)

## Appendix B

### Follow Up Email

Dear (Insert name here),

Thank you for your interest in participating in this research. In order to collect the necessary data, I am looking to complete an interview with you. Due to us being in different parts of the country this interview will need to be completed either via Skype, FaceTime or over the phone. Other important information for you to know is there is a demographics sheet that is attached to this email that you will need to complete, and the interview questions are also attached. With your permission these interviews will be audio recorded and after the interviews are completed and transcribed they will be sent back to you for your review. Finally, if you are still interested in participating an informed consent form is attached and you will need to be completed before the interview takes place. All necessary documentation can be submitted via email to [dmichaels@eiu.edu](mailto:dmichaels@eiu.edu). Please send me dates and times over the next week that would work best for you, including the time zone you reside in.

Best,

Doug Michaels  
[dmichaels@eiu.edu](mailto:dmichaels@eiu.edu)

## Appendix C

### CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

#### *Female Student Veteran's Transition to College.*

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Doug Michaels under the direction of Dr. Dianne Timm, from the Department of Counseling and Higher Education at Eastern Illinois University.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Please ask questions about anything you do not understand, before deciding whether or not to participate.

You have been asked to participate in this study because you are a female student veteran who has completed at least one year of school. In total there will be six participants.

#### • **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to look at the transition women student veterans make when entering and attending college. This study is also aimed to determine what resources are used by women student veterans.

#### • **PROCEDURES**

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to:

- Complete this consent form. This will be completed by signing at the bottom of the page after thoroughly reading this document.
- Complete a demographics questionnaire. There will be questions regarding your gender, age, ethnicity, etc. This will be referred to as the demographics sheet.
- Schedule an interview time within a week of completing the demographics sheet.
- Confirm the interview within 24 hours of the assigned time. You will receive the interview questions at this time.

Following that the interview will be completed. This interview will be taking place in one of two ways, either over the phone or by electronic video conferencing.

At the conclusion of the interviews you will receive the transcript. I will ask you to review and check your transcript for accuracy.

The interview should take roughly an hour to complete. You may be contacted with some follow up questions after the completion of the interview if necessary. Due to the interview not taking place in person, you will be asked to find somewhere quiet and private to complete the interview.

With your permission, this interview will be audio recorded. This will take place by using both a voice recorder on my phone and a separate voice recorder as a backup. Two different devices are using in case there is an issue with either of the recording devices.

- **POTENTIAL RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

Some of the questions asked during the interview may cause discomfort. They may bring back memories you wish to forget. If that is the case, you do not need to answer the question. We will move on to a different question if this discomfort arises. Also, finding a quiet and comfortable place to conduct the interview may cause a potential risk. Your answers may be overheard by others, if this occurs we will postpone the interview until you are able to find a more secure location.

This study may be terminated if I leave Eastern Illinois University. If this happens the study will cease to exist, but your confidentiality will remain intact. I will still go through the necessary precautions to maintain the confidentiality of you and the other participants.

There is not any compensation or treatment available to you if you get hurt during this process.

- **POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SUBJECTS AND/OR TO SOCIETY**

The potential benefit is being able to tell your story as well as potentially assisting other female veterans with their transition to college.

The potential benefits to society include a better knowledge of the transition female student veterans experience when entering and attending college. Also, it will give society a better understanding of the needs associated with this student population. Lastly, it will shed light on a underrepresent population and show how female veterans have different experiences than their male counterparts.

- **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Confidentiality will be maintained by means assigning a code name to each participant. The information collected through the demographics sheet will be kept separate from the interview recordings and transcriptions. The data will be kept in different safe, locked, password-protected locations. The data will be deleted three years after the completion of the study. The principal researcher will be the only one who has access to the collected data. This study requires the collection of private identifiers. These identifiers might be removed from the identifiable private information or biospecimens and that, after such removal, the information or biospecimens could be used for future research studies or distributed to another principal investigator for future research studies without additional informed consent from the subject.

- **PARTICIPATION AND WITHDRAWAL**

Participation in this research study is voluntary and not a requirement or a condition for being the recipient of benefits or services from Eastern Illinois University or any other organization sponsoring the research project. If you volunteer to be in this study, you may withdraw at any time without consequences of any kind or loss of benefits or services to which you are otherwise entitled.

There is no penalty if you withdraw from the study and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. You may also refuse to answer any questions you do not want to answer.

- **IDENTIFICATION OF INVESTIGATORS**

If you have any questions or concerns about this research, please contact:  
 Doug Michaels, Principal Investigator, (570) 259-7630, dmichaels@eiu.edu  
 Dr. Dianne Timm, Faculty Sponsor, (215) 581-5327, dtimm@eiu.edu

- **RIGHTS OF RESEARCH SUBJECTS**

If you have any questions or concerns about the treatment of human participants in this study, you may call or write:

Institutional Review Board  
 Eastern Illinois University  
 600 Lincoln Ave.  
 Charleston, IL 61920  
 Telephone: (217) 581-8576  
 E-mail: eiuirb@www.eiu.edu

You will be given the opportunity to discuss any questions about your rights as a research subject with a member of the IRB. The IRB is an independent committee composed of members of the University community, as well as lay members of the community not connected with EIU. The IRB has reviewed and approved this study.

---

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at any time. I have been given a copy of this form.

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Printed Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Signature of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
 Date

I hereby consent to the participation of \_\_\_\_\_, a minor/subject in the investigation herein described. I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my child's participation at any time.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Minor/Handicapped Subject's Parent or Guardian

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I, the undersigned, have defined and fully explained the investigation to the above subject.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Investigator

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

**Appendix D**  
**Demographics Sheet**

1. What is your gender?
  - a.
  
2. What is your age?
  - a.
  
3. What best describes your ethnicity?
  - a.
  
4. What year in school are you currently?
  - a.
  
5. What is your major?
  - a.
  
6. Are you currently enrolled in classes?
  - a.
  
7. What branch of the military have you served in?
  - a.
  
8. How long have you served in the military?
  - a.
  
9. What is your military rank?
  - a.

## Appendix E

### Interview Protocol

**Welcome and thank the participant. Make sure the participant is comfortable and in a quiet and private location. Review the informed consent document with them and answer and preliminary questions they may have.**

#### **Introductory Question**

1. Do I have permission to audio record this interview?

#### **Background Questions**

1. Tell me about yourself?
  - a. Where is home?
  - b. What was life like growing up?
2. Tell me about your decision to enlist in the military?
3. What would you like to tell me about your experiences in the military?
4. Tell me about your social support while you were in the military.
  - a. Other military personnel
  - b. Family/friends
5. How would you describe your experiences as a female in the military?
6. Why did you decide to enroll in college?

#### **Questions Regarding the Transition Out of The Military**

1. What triggered your transition out of the military?
  - a. Did you feel as though you were in control of the transition?
  - b. Was there anyone who helped you make this decision or influenced your decision?
2. Have do you balance an active military/student status?
3. How have your different demographic characteristics affected your transition out of the military? Who or what did you consider as you made your decision to transition out of the military?

#### **Questions Regarding the Transition into Higher Education**

1. What influenced your decision to go to college?
  - a. What influence did the military funding have?
  - b. Who influenced your decision? How?
  - c. How did you determine the institution you would attend?
2. Tell me about your initial experiences with your college?
  - a. Admission process – did you disclose your military status?
  - b. Financial aid process
  - c. Orientation process
3. Tell me about your transition to college?
  - a. What successes did you experience?
  - b. Tell me about your challenges?

- c. What things did you have to consider as you made the transition to college?
  - d. Who influenced you during your transition?
4. Tell me about your new role as a college student?
  - a. How are you adapting to the new role change?
  - b. How is this compared to the role you had in the military?
  - c. Are there specific things you did or do to be manage this new role?
  - d. Are there people you utilize to help you? Tell me about them?
5. How have your different demographic characteristics affected your transition into higher education?
6. Can you describe your social support system that you currently have as a college student? Who does it include and how do they support you?
  - a. If I were to describe social support as intimate relationships, family units, network of friends, and institutions/communities. Have any of these supported you during your transition to college? If so, in what ways?
  - b. In what ways have your different social supports supported you during your transition to higher education?
7. Have you experienced any challenging experiences while transitioning or as a student? Tell me about those?
8. Which campus resources have supported you on your journey in college?
  - a. Which ones would you recommend to others?
  - b. Which ones did help you in the way you expected?
9. How do you consider other's in your life as you make decisions?

**Closing:** Is there anything about your transition to college that I did not ask about that you think I should know? Is there anything else that you want to share?

Thank you for your time and for taking the time to participate in this study.