Veterans on Campus: Uncovering the Experiences of Student Veterans at a Midsized
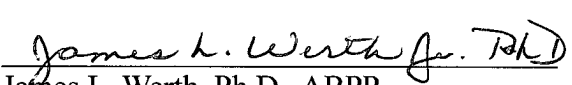
Liberal Arts University

by

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A dissertation submitted to the faculty of Radford University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
Doctor of Psychology in the Department of Psychology

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ABSTRACT

Veterans on Campus: Uncovering the Experiences of Student Veterans at a Midsized

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Many veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom

(OIF) are starting or returning to college after active military service. According to a

survey of soldiers in the 1/34 Brigade Combat Team, 79.8% were interested in starting or

returning to college (Pfeffer, 2007). However, veterans' experiences are vastly different

than those of typical college students; consequently, military service members have needs

that are not met in new student orientations. Additionally, student veterans have strengths

and assets that most college students do not possess. There are a limited number of

studies examining the experiences of veterans entering or re-entering college and the

existing studies looked at veterans attending large universities or community colleges,

which leaves a gap in the research of what happens for veterans attending midsized

liberal arts universities (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009; Rumann & Hamrick,

2010). The present study used the qualitative method of grounded theory to uncover the

themes of service members' experiences on a midsized liberal arts campus and develop

an understanding of what supports would be beneficial to veterans entering or re-entering

post-secondary education and what strengths veterans believe they have developed

through their military experience. Some of the themes that were revealed include student

veterans' perceptions of fellow students' and veterans not in college attitudes about

student veterans, and student veterans' attitudes toward other students, disclosure of their

veteran status to students and faculty, awareness of other student veterans, post-

graduation plans, and special services that student veterans believe would be helpful.

Keywords: student veterans, grounded theory, social support

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Finally, I offer my gratitude to my mentor and dissertation chair, Dr. Valerie Leake, whose guidance, optimism, and support have helped me to achieve great milestones in my academic journey from the University of Kentucky through Radford University. Your kindness, humor, and vision have been a stable ground for me throughout and I look forward to our future as colleagues and friends.

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CHAPTER I

SUMMARY OF THE ISSUES

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There are many advantages to achieving a college education, including the

potential for higher earnings, health insurance, pension plans, and greater job satisfaction

(Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2010; Hill, Hoffman, & Rex, 2005). Given the benefits of attaining

a college degree and the military educational benefits of the G.I. Bill, it is no surprise that

a large number of veterans plan to attend college after completing their time in the

military. A survey of soldiers in the 1/34 Brigade Combat Team reported that 79.8% were

interested in starting or returning to college (Pfeffer, 2007). In 2008, 21,493 Virginia

student veterans utilized their GI Bill benefits (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2009).

According to former Secretary of the Navy and former VA state Senator, Jim Webb

(2008), with the influx of veterans into post-secondary institutions, there is a critical need

to provide accommodations that will facilitate their success at college. Understanding the

experiences of student veterans will aid college administrators and college counseling

centers in providing the appropriate supports for veterans and encourage their strengths.

Some of the themes of students' experiences that were revealed in this study include the

student veterans' perceptions of fellow students' attitudes and veterans' not in college

attitudes about student veterans, and the student veterans' attitudes toward other students,

how student veterans disclose their veteran status to individuals on Radford University's

campus, if they know other veterans on campus, how student veterans cope with stress,

what their plans are for after college, and special services that student veterans think would be helpful to have on Radford University's campus.

Operational Definitions

Certain terms have a variety of definitions; hence, in order to clarify key terms utilized in this paper the following are the operational definitions. In the current study veterans are defined as individuals who are not currently on active-duty, but once served on active duty in the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Reserves, or National Guard (USC 38 §101). Although the experiences of veterans in these branches of the military are often quite different, there are essential principles that span the military experience, including discipline, virtue, hierarchy, and sacrifice for one's country (Hsu, 2010). For the purposes of this study student veterans are military veterans enrolled at Radford University.

Unique Experiences of Student Veterans

Student veterans and their civilian classmates differ in terms of their personal experiences as well as many of the challenges they may encounter. Veterans may have been in combat situations as well as had long periods of separation from family and friends, thus relying on fellow service members for social support, whereas civilian college students are more likely to have lived with family and spent time with peers in high school and depended on fellow students for social support. The differences between the personal lived realities of student veterans and their civilian college peers may cause difficulties relating to each other, leading to isolation, which is just one of the hurdles student veterans often endure (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009). Some of the

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other challenges that veterans in general have post-deployment include difficulty with interpersonal conflict, loss of sense of belonging, poor social support, substance abuse, mental illness, physical disability, and difficulty understanding and obtaining military benefits (Hall, 2008; Hoge, 2010). Although some service members have relatively few problems when entering or re-entering college, many face one or more hurdles as they enter the higher education system (Ackerman et al., 2009). In addition to the possibility of experiencing these obstacles, service members experience a strong sense of community while in the military that they may not feel in the college setting (Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008).

Despite the difficulties many veterans face when entering college, most former service members will have developed strengths and skills such as leadership, teamwork, and organization during their deployments that will serve them well as they begin classes (Hassan, Jackson, Lindsay, McCabe, & Sanders, 2008). Ackerman and colleagues (2009) and Rumann and Hamrick (2010) examined the transition made by veterans to college-life; however, these studies focused on large universities, leaving a gap in the research on the experiences of veterans attending midsized liberal arts universities.

Advantages of College Education

Many student veterans joined the military in part in order to be able to pay for college and these veterans likely hope to reap the many advantages that having a college education can provide. A college education provides an individual with the potential for better financial outcomes and greater job satisfaction (Baum et al., 2010; Hill et al., 2005). The financial benefits of a college education include increased earning potential,

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decreased likelihood of unemployment, even during times of national recession, and better chances of having employer provided health insurance and pension plans (Baum et al., 2010; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). According to Baum et al. (2010), an individual with a bachelor's degree can expect to earn around 66% more over a 40-year working career than the typical high school graduate earns over the same time period. Baum et al.'s (2010) study found that 58% of individuals with some college education or an associate degree endorsed being very satisfied with their jobs; in contrast, only 50% of high school graduates reported being very satisfied with their jobs. Notably, job satisfaction is correlated with overall life satisfaction and happiness (Bowling, Eschleman, & Wang, 2010). The potential for lower risk of unemployment, higher earnings, health insurance, pension plans, and job satisfaction are persuasive reasons to pursue a college degree and the incentives are all the more compelling as veterans have the military educational benefit, the G.I. Bill, to cover the cost of much of the financial burden of attending college. Despite all of the advantages of attaining a college degree, there are issues that can act as barriers to attending and successfully completing college that confront many veterans.

Issues

Milliken, Auchterlonie, and Hoge (2007), Snell and Tusaie (2008), and Tanielian and Jaycox (2008) demonstrated that there are many different issues that affect significant numbers of veterans, including problems with social support, mental illness, substance abuse, and difficulty obtaining military benefits; however, it is unclear whether these same issues are relevant to the subset of veterans entering college. Similarly,

examining the literature on college students is valuable as student veterans may encounter matters that affect college students. Uncovering the themes of service members' experiences on campus was important in order to develop an understanding of what supports would benefit veterans as they transition from the military to college.

Military and Personal Development

Many veterans face difficulties when entering college; however, most former service members will have developed strengths and skills such as leadership, teamwork, and organization during their deployments that will serve them well as they begin college classes (Hassan, Jackson, Lindsay, McCabe, & Sanders, 2008). Furthermore, the military culture imbues service members with attitudes and core beliefs of positive work ethic, respect, responsibility, honor, and courage Hall (2008). A great benefit to military members and their dependents is the strong camaraderie and solid social support that the military can provide; however, when service members leave the military and separate from the military support system they may experience serious difficulty in reintegrating into civilian society (Hall, 2008; Zinger & Cohen, 2010). The loss of social support that confronts many veterans can be a barrier to attending and successfully completing college (Ackerman et al., 2009; Hall, 2008).

Social Support

The construct of social support has been studied widely over the past several decades, but the definition of social support still varies across different studies (Lin, Simeone, Ensel, & Kuo, 1979; Vaux, 1988). There are many types of social support and related constructs, but for the purposes of this study, social support was defined as "the

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existence or availability of people on whom we can rely" (Sarason, Levine, Basham, & Sarason, 1983, p.127). Social support is critical to veterans in part because it acts as a protective factor against issues that have been found to affect many veterans, such as mental illnesses like depression, anxiety, and Post Traumatic Stress (PTSD) (Banyard, 1999; Compton, Thompson, & Kaslow, 2005; McLarin & Chalis, 2009). Veterans and college students both benefit from the social support they gain from family and friends.

Social Support for College Students

Social support is often an important factor in succeeding in higher education (Lee, 2007; Wilcox, Winn, & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005). Wilcox and colleagues demonstrated that social support has a significant influence on students' decisions to stay in college. The researchers interviewed 34 first-year college students who had considered quitting college about the key issues that affected the decision to stay in college, finding that social support through friends was essential to student retention. Friends not only provided immediate emotional support, but also served as a supportive buffer during stressful periods.

Another study on the relationship between mental health and social support in college students reported that students with lower levels of social support were more likely to suffer from mental health issues (Hefner & Eisenberg, 2009). The researcher's conclusion that students with lower levels of social support were more likely to suffer from mental illness reinforces the findings of the Wilcox et al. (2005) study that found friends provided emotional support and served as a supportive buffer against the negative mental health effects of stress. Hefner and Eisenberg found that the students with lower

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levels of social support were six times more likely to report symptoms of depression than their peers with high levels of social support. Students with diverse characteristics such as international status, low socioeconomic status, and ethnic minority status were found to be at an increased risk for social isolation (Hefner & Eisenberg). Extrapolating from Hefner & Eisenberg, it follows that the differing characteristic of military status could increase a student veteran's risk for social isolation.

In addition to the individual differences that student veterans face in terms of their personal experiences as veterans and some of the obstacles they confront, they differ from the campus norm, as do some other groups of students such as students of diverse ethnicities or religions. A study on American Indians transitioning to large universities from smaller colleges also found that social support influenced mental health (Lee, 2007). American Indians who perceived support from the university they attended and social support from peers reported these supports to be a major factor in their success in higher education (Lee, 2007). Many American Indians who did not feel support from universities in the form of programs designed specifically for American Indians, reported feeling isolated and uncomfortable (Lee, 2007). Similarly, a study by Hausmann and Woods (2007) reported that although a sense of belonging decreased in both the sample and control groups over the course of a year, African American students who were provided with an intervention specifically designed by the university to improve sense of belonging were more likely to experience lower decreases in sense of belonging. The study examined the effects of sense of belonging on the students' continued enrollment in attending college and sense of belonging was found to be correlated with the decision to

persist in college. Service members, like American Indians and African Americans, have specific needs, and programs tailored to those needs will benefit them more than a one-size-fits-all non-traditional student program. In leaving close communities, such as the military or reservations, individuals lose a tightly knit support system that had helped them succeed and had given them a sense of belonging.

Sense of belonging. Sense of belonging is related to the concept of social support and was found to be linked to students' academic and personal states in a study by Freeman, Anderman, and Jensen (2007). Students who endorsed feeling a sense of belonging in the university were more likely to have endorsed a high level of social acceptance, greater self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation. Lee (2007) and Hefner and Eisenberg (2009) both found that students with different backgrounds, ethnically or experientially, were more likely to feel isolated. Overall, the need to engender a sense of belonging in students is clear, and because veterans may be more vulnerable to isolation, it is especially important that they are given resources to access social support.

Social Support in the Military

Service members become part of the unique culture of the military when they begin their training and over time are acclimated to the military way of life (Dunivin, 1994). The military culture includes attitudes and core beliefs of respect, responsibility, honor, and courage. The camaraderie among individuals from many different backgrounds is extremely strong (Hoge, 2010). Service members take part in specialized training exercises designed to develop and improve teamwork skills, which may also engender a sense of belonging. Working closely with each other, often under stressful

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conditions, compels members to develop tight bonds with one another (Hall, 2008).

According to Pfc. Anthony Poventud, a military policeman, speaking of combat outposts,

"there's nothing for us here, we have to build it up and make it liveable. It helps the

platoon get to know one another because we are building this together, we learn team-

work" (Stewart, 2009, p. 18). The close social support network that develops among

military units aids service members when they experience a traumatic event or suffer the

loss of a fellow unit member (Hall, 2008).

According to Collins and Kennedy (2008) veterans often feel comfort, security,

and support from the military culture. Collins and Kennedy found that many military

families find meaning and identity in the military culture. After separation from the

military, service members often lose their sense of purpose and a strong support network

(Hall, 2008). While grieving for that military network, student veterans may struggle to

develop a new social support network with civilian students and may withdraw from

friends and family who were not in the military (Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008). A 2008

study by Laffaye, Cavella, Drescher, and Rosen found that veterans consistently reported

fellow veterans as their strongest and least stressful support system, whereas marital

relationships were reported to be both interpersonally supportive as well as

interpersonally stressful and conflictual.

Literature on Student Veterans

When veterans transition from the military to campus they often face a variety of

challenges, which may include the loss of a strong support system, mental illness, alcohol

abuse, and difficulty obtaining military benefits. Several themes overlap many of the

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different studies of student veterans. Difficulties accessing educational benefits and struggles developing a social support system on campus were issues of student veterans that Ackerman et al. (2009), Wheeler (2012), and Whiteman, Barry, Mroczek, and Wadsworth (2013) each found. Barry, Whiteman, Wadsworth, and Hitt (2012) and Widome, Laska, Gulden, Fu and Lust (2011) reported finding that alcohol and drug abuse was a problem for many student veterans. Posttraumatic Stress Disorder was identified as an issue affecting many student veterans by Barry, Whiteman, and Wadsworth (2012), Persky and Oliver (2010), and Zinger & Cohen (2010). Three studies found that student veterans were interested in the development and ready access of special services designed for student veterans (Ackerman et al., 2009; Persky & Oliver, 2010; Zinger & Cohen, 2010).

Research Questions

The majority of Veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) have returned to the United States and many of them are entering or resuming college after active military service. There is limited research about the experiences of student veterans and how their time in the military influences their choices in activities, the manner in which they manage academics, and their future plans. In order to reveal the themes of veterans' experiences on campus and address the gap in the literature the following two research questions guided the current study: What are the social experiences of veterans attending Radford University? How have the military experiences of veterans attending Radford University affected their individual approaches to being a student and future plans? The current study utilized grounded theory as a

method to answer these research questions.

Methods

Grounded theory is a systematic qualitative research method that seeks to generate theory about individuals' felt realities about situations through the analysis of data related to that phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Grounded theory methodology details a process from the initial study design through the final generation of the theory (Patton, 2001). When individuals' experiences of a situation have been studied relatively little, it is particularly appropriate to use grounded theory because it allows for themes to emerge from the data, rather than blindly developing a hypothesis and then testing it against data. The grounded theory method meshed well with the study of veterans' experiences in college because the phenomenon has yet to be extensively studied, and grounded theory gave the current project a framework from which new ideas and themes emerged that may inform future quantitative research (Fassinger, 2005). Grounded theory analyses "provide the grounding, build the density, and develop the sensitivity and integration needed to generate a rich tightly woven, explanatory theory that closely approximates the reality it represents" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 57). Using the grounded theory method rich data was collected that revealed themes of veterans attending college.

Participants were recruited through flyers, purposive sampling, and referral from other participants. Each individual who participated in the study aided in reaching "saturation," which is the point at which no further themes emerged from interviews with additional participants and no further interviews are conducted (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Once 11 individuals participated in the current project, saturation was reached.

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Each participant attended an individual semi-structured interview lasting approximately 30 minutes. The interview questions were open ended in order to cultivate as many themes as possible. Each interview was transcribed, examined, and each concept was assigned a code. After being assigned a code, similar concepts were grouped together, and from these concepts core variables were derived. The third level of coding is selective coding, in which a core category emerges from the categories that developed; however, in this study the categories that emerged paralleled the semi-structured interview questions (Strauss & Coben, 1998). Because the categories in the study were associated with the interview questions, an overarching theme or substantive theory did not develop in the coding process. The categories were then re-examined for excess categories; however no superfluous categories were identified. The resulting themes of the coding analyses are reported in the following section.

Results

Themes included in these results were endorsed by at least four of the 11 participants (36%), unless otherwise noted. The data in this study revealed concepts that were strongly connected to the interview questions. As the themes rarely spanned across items, no overarching theory emerged from the data. Therefore, the results are organized by the frequency of emergent themes revealed by the interview questions in the order in which they were asked, from most to least endorsed. In order to provide rich data quotes are included and the number of the participant who is quoted is indicated by (P) and the number of the participant. Section headers are included for each interview question or the meaning behind a series of questions from which a concept emerged. Appendix B lists

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the interview questions, Table 1 delineates the demographic results and Table 2 outlines the themes according to the related question.

How would Faculty and Other Students Know Your Status as a Veteran?

Participants most frequently responded to the query regarding how they reveal their veteran status in three ways. The majority of student veterans reported that his veteran status was revealed during class (6), by wearing or using an item with military insignia (6) or in informing their professors of needing to miss class in order to fulfill military obligations (5).

Describe Fellow Students' Attitudes Toward You as a Student Veteran

Participants reported their perception of their civilian peers' attitudes as being supportive (6) or indifferent (5) to student veterans. One veteran said, "For the most part pretty much everyone I've met in college has been very supportive. A lot of people don't even know, but when I tell people I'm in the military and I deployed they're like 'well that's really cool'" (P1). Another participant stated, "I think they mostly don't think about it" (P10).

Describe Your Attitudes Toward Your Fellow Students

The overall theme that emerged from this query was that civilian students have had different experiences from student veterans, which made it difficult to relate to their civilian counterparts (9). Two subthemes were revealed from this overall theme, which were that student veterans' civilian peers' responses to stress were different than the student veterans' responses to stress (5) and that civilian students were immature (5). One participant explained his difficulty relating to his civilian classmates' responses to stress

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by stating, "sometimes it's a little difficult to relate to people who, well, they haven't been where I've been, you know? The stuff they get worked up about just doesn't matter to me" (P11). While the participants individually reported difficulty in relating to their civilian peers, the participants indicated a simultaneous change in their relationships with veterans not attending college.

How has Attending College Affected Your Relationships with Veterans Not in College?

Several participants reported that their attending college had produced feelings of resentment from veterans they knew who were not attending college (5). One participant stated, "I would get the reaction every once in a while, you know, 'what, you think you're better now because you went to college'" (P5). The same participant went on to state, "the longer a veteran goes without going to college they can become slightly embittered about the fact that they haven't gone and done something" (P5). Some participants commented that, ironically, some of the veterans they thought were resentful stated they do not even want to attend college. For example, one participant noted, "Even those who, like, they say they don't even want to be in college and are in a good field, feels like there's maybe a little bit of resentment, I think" (P10). Other participants indicated that some veterans they knew were not ready to attend college:

> I think there's always a little bit of resentment, I really do, because not everybody is really ready for college, after getting back from deployment, or even those not really wanting to do college, but there is a certain resentment too like 'hey, you're getting ahead.' (P9)

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I still get calls from some of the guys in my platoon and they tell me how they're

doing, I tell them how I'm doing, I mean obviously they want to be where I'm at,

but it's really hard for vets to actually come right out of their contract into school,

because they lose focus. I did a lot to prepare to come here. For some of them it's

a lot harder, because just getting through the day is hard for them, never mind

planning ahead so they are very happy for me, they have a slight, like 'I hate you'

undertone, because they're so jealous of that. (P8)

Some of the participants still in the military noted that they spent time with other

service members during military training, but rarely at other times. There were many

different reasons noted for not spending much time with other veterans, including lack of

interest, not enough free time, long distances, or limited finances. Although few of the

participants reported spending any time with veterans, some participants reported using

social media and texting to talk with other veterans. One participant talked about the

financial burden as well as distance involved in visiting veteran friends, but stated he uses

social media to maintain contact:

It's hard to go visit my friends who are stationed in like North Carolina and stuff

with gas prices and stuff like that. I feel like that has kind of put a strain up on

some of my friends' relationships, but with things like Facebook and stuff like

that, text messaging and stuff it's not that hard to keep in touch. (P4)

Participant 10 commented that meeting with many veteran friends simultaneously is

difficult as they are far away and spread out across the country: "I talk on Facebook and

stuff to a few guys from my unit probably three or four times a week, but we're so

scattered." Participant 11 also endorsed distance as a significant issue, stating, "but, I keep in touch with buddies from my platoon on Facebook and stuff. We're all over the world now, so it's not like I can just go visit."

Do You Know Other Veterans on Campus?

Despite the presence in the Fall of 2012 of approximately 200 veterans attending Radford University, a student veterans group, a student veterans research team, and a military resource center, the majority of participants reported not knowing any veterans attending Radford University (6). Two themes emerged in relation to participants knowing other veterans on campus, which were the participants' involvement in the Veterans Student Organization and residing off campus. The Veterans Student Organization (VSO) was the most significant way that participants reported having met other veterans attending Radford University (4). On the other hand, many of the participants explained that they live off campus and do not know veterans in part because they do not spend much time on campus when they are not in class (4). As several of the participants reported that their time on campus is spent predominantly in the classroom it is important to examine their experiences as student veterans of preparing and studying for classes.

How has Your Military Status Affected Your Preparation for Classes and Study Habits?

According to several participants, they utilize the techniques the military uses to teach personnel content and skills to study for their classes at Radford University (8).

One participant reported:

It's pretty much the same way that the military does it, the three ways of, at least the way that I learned it, you look at what you're going to learn, a broad overview, then in depth on what you're going to learn, and then the details. The first one is just to see what's going on get the lay of the land, the second is to see how things interact, and the third one is making all the pieces fit in your head. And that has really helped out. (P9)

Participants frequently endorsed the aid that military training has had on the ease with which they developed good study skills. Although many of the experiences described by the participants related to academics and also expressed having many activities they employ for enjoyment and to manage their stress.

What Do You Do to Cope with Stress and Have Fun?

All of the participants reported using at least one of the following strategies for coping with stress and having fun: spending time with friends (8), exercising (5), playing video games (5), participating in sports (5), engaging in outside activities (4), and reading (4). One participant noted he liked to "hang out with friends. I like to play sports, like to play volleyball a couple times a week and go hiking, [play] video games"(P1). The participants' descriptions of the activities time to have fun and cope with stress were so enthusiastic, that it is likely that while beginning their careers after graduation they will continue to engage in these pursuits.

Describe your Plans for After Graduation

The majority of the participants reported they intended to pursue a career in law

enforcement (5) or return to the military (4) after they graduate from Radford University. Another component to this theme is that all of the participants who reported having these career plans specified that their interests in these careers were related to their experiences in the military. Graduation is the ultimate goal for student veterans and many participants noted that there are different resources that would be very beneficial to student veterans.

Specific Services for Student Veterans

The query "Is there anything else you think I should know about being a student who is also a veteran?" elicited two themes regarding services that the campus should offer to assist student veterans. Some participants indicated that having ways to meet and become acquainted with other student veterans would be helpful (4): "Would help, I think to know others who've already been at RU awhile (P10). "I think, if there was a better way to connect veterans at Radford, like a webpage…" (P7). The participants' desire to have ways to meet other veterans on campus and that many of the participants reported that they do not know other veterans on campus makes it evident that veterans are unaware of on campus supports such as the Veterans Student Organization.

Several participants noted that the Quest Orientation and the University 100 class were very unhelpful and a "waste of time" and that one designed for student veterans would be preferable (4). One participant stated:

It would be nice to have an orientation or something just for veterans when they come in … just if there was like a 30 minute class for veterans just to be like these are the groups that you can be associated with, these are events we have for veterans, these are resources, you know tell people about the website, stuff like

that, I think that would be really helpful. (P4)

Discussion

Veterans are returning to the United States after finishing their time involved in wars overseas and many are utilizing the benefits they have earned to enter or return to college. In order to be prepared with appropriate services for the unique population of student veterans college administrators and college counseling centers need to understand the themes of student veterans' experiences. To further the information available to college administrators and college counseling centers the current study reveals the themes of student veterans attending a midsized liberal arts university. There are similarities and differences between this study and the available literature on student veterans, and comparisons among the studies are discussed.

To reach the goal of discovering the themes related to student veterans' experiences on campus the current study was guided by the following two research questions.

Research Question 1: What are the social experiences of veterans attending Radford University?

Six themes related to social experiences emerged from the data: disclosure of veteran status, perceptions of fellow students' attitudes, attitudes toward fellow students, social engagement with peers, relationships with peers, and knowledge of other student veterans on campus.

None of the currently available studies addressed the manner in which student veterans disclose their veteran status, thus discussion on this theme will be focused

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primarily on analysis of how revealing their veteran status may be related to veterans'

level of comfort with their peers. The ways in which student veterans disclosed their

veteran status included actively through class discussion, passively through military

insignia, or by necessity in informing their professors of the need to miss class because of

military obligations. The decision of the participants' to disclose their veteran status in

class or through military insignia is a choice made at the student veteran's discretion. The

student veterans' preferences in revealing their status may indicate their sense of comfort

e.g., social support, with their faculty and civilian peers and that informs the research

about the student veterans' experiences of social support, which is the existence and

accessibility of having friends who can be relied upon (Sarason, Levine, Basham, &

Sarason, 1983; Weisz & Wood, 2005). Developing social support is a key component to

student veterans' integration into campus life, which is important to their educational

achievement (Ellison et al., 2012).

Student veterans who had revealed their military status perceived their civilian

counterparts' attitudes about them as either supportive or inconsequential. Many of the

participants and other service members consider the military to be part of their identity, a

piece of their heritage of which they are proud (Hall, 2011). Support of the participant's

military status, as part of their identity, can encourage friendship and as a result also

bolster feelings of social support and a sense of belonging (Weisz & Wood, 2005).

However, as noted by Kirkland (1995) lack of recognition of a service member's military

service can impede reintegration into civilian society, which can increase the likelihood

of long-term mental illness. It is important to recognize that although the participants can

only articulate their estimation of their civilian peers' attitudes as supportive or unimportant, the student veterans' perceptions could help or hurt their ability to accomplish educational goals and appreciate social interactions with their civilian student peers.

Similar to many studies of student veterans, nearly all of the participants in the current study reported feeling that their experiences were very different from that of their civilian classmates, making it difficult for the participants to relate to their civilian peers (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008; Grimes et al., 2011; Wheeler, 2012; Zinger & Cohen, 2010). Some of the cultural experiences and attitudes that student veterans have had that civilians have not include living in a hierarchical society with a clear chain of command, a personal and external expectation of consistent excellence, unfailing respect for higher ups, strict structure of daily activities, and intense loyalty to their peers (Hall, 2008; Wheeler, 2012; Zinger & Cohen, 2010). These experiences of veterans are in sharp contrast with those of civilian students living with an ambiguous hierarchy, a lackadaisical attitude toward responsibilities, few time commitments, and no particular connection with many peers. Subthemes of stress and maturity were a part of the theme of different experiences.

Several participants reported feeling unstressed by issues that stressed their civilian peers and attributed this to service in the military. The challenges of basic training alone, much less deployments, create a disparity in the lived realities of the student veterans and civilian students, and likely cause a rift in their ability to relate to one another. One participant reported that compared to the daily stressors of being a

service member, the stressors of academic life were, "a vacation."

Student veterans often credited their military service to the difference in levels of maturity between themselves and their civilian counterparts and noted that this made it difficult to relate to them. The finding of more maturity in student veterans in this study is akin to Newby et. al's (2005) finding which indicated that service members gained an increased level of maturity from their military experience. Some participants noted that although they are more mature they did not appreciate their civilian counterparts expecting them to be the mature and responsible person in the group and the student veterans felt they had to make sure students who over imbibed alcohol got home safely. The participants' reported that taking care of their fellow students was not always enjoyable, and at times made the participants reluctant to take part in future outings with fellow students. The student veterans' disinclination to spending time with other students may cause them feelings of isolation, which is similar to Ackerman et al.'s (2009) finding that social isolation was a common theme among student veterans.

None of the students in the current study specifically noted feeling isolated; however, most stated they did not spend time with civilian peers or veterans not attending college and reported that they did not know other veterans attending Radford University. Although the participants in the current study reported low levels of social support in several facets of their lives, they may be receiving social support in other areas, such as through their family or community. The lack of a direct theme of feelings of isolation in the current study is in contrast with the student veterans in Ackerman et al.'s (2009) study who noted that they are having difficulty resuming their relationships with family and

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friends, resulting in lower levels of social support. Zinger & Cohen (2010) also found

that student veterans struggled to reconnect with family and loved ones after returning

from their military service. One participant in the Zinger and Cohen (2010) study stated

that although she recognized that her perception and world view were altered during her

time away, she did not anticipate the changes in her friends. The current study did not

specifically inquire about the participant's level of social support from family and loved

ones and therefore may not have identified weakness or strengths in this area of student

veterans' social support system. Regardless of the student veterans' current level of social

support, providing opportunities for student veterans to develop social support on campus

can only further the benefits they garner from it.

The sense of student veterans that having differences in their felt realities made

them more mature is similar to Jinkens' (2009) finding that what defines a nontraditional

student is not their age, but life changing events that color their approach to being a

student as well as everyday life. These life altering events in civilian nontraditional

students may include getting married, having children, and paying a mortgage, which are

all things that student veterans may be experiencing. Thus, services that are tailored

specifically to nontraditional students may also be of benefit to student veterans.

However, the military experiences of student veterans likely make some of their needs

different than civilian nontraditional students. DiRamio et al.'s (2008) study established

that as a result of experience of military service, student veterans are a special needs

population which could make essential some services designed to meet the specific needs

of student veterans. For example, understanding and obtaining military educational

benefits is a need that is unique to student veterans. Research has shown that student veterans find they relate better to other student veterans, so offering ways for student veterans to meet each other would also be a service specific to the student veteran population (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009).

The available literature on student veterans has not specifically addressed the feelings between student veterans and veterans not attending college; therefore, the current study has expanded the body of literature in this area. According to several participants in the current study, attending college has produced feelings of resentment from veterans they knew who were not attending college. All of the participants reported having no significant change in their attitudes toward those veterans not attending college; however, the participants' assessment of the feelings of resentment from these veterans demonstrates that attending college can have a negative effect on the participants' relationships with veterans not in college. Chhuon and Hudley (2008) noted that continuing relationships with the students' previous community and having a sense of belonging are both important for diverse students' successful transition to college, which indicates that some student veterans may need additional social support from other sources to compensate for their loss of some social support from their previous community. Given the difficulties participants reported in their interactions with civilian student and veterans not attending college, other student veterans may be the easiest individuals to which student veterans can relate and gain social support.

Another issue that suggests student veterans are experiencing low levels of social support is that many participants stated they do not know any student veterans attending

Radford University and most of the participants attributed this to living off campus; thus having limited social contact with students. Laffaye, Cavella, Drescher, and Rosen (2008) found that veterans consistently reported fellow veterans as their strongest support system. Without knowing other veterans on campus, student veterans are, in all likelihood, left wanting for a vital component of their overall support system. On a positive note, the participants who reported knowing other veterans at Radford University cited the VSO as the reason they are familiar with other student veterans. The mission of the VSO includes providing a social group to assist student veterans in integrating into college life, promoting continued veteran companionship, as well as conveying important information about available resources in the community and on campus.

Although the majority of the experiences portrayed by the participants related to academics, they also expressed having many activities they use to have fun and cope with stress. Colleges could provide valuable outlets for veterans to cope with stress, have fun, and develop social support systems by offering the activities endorsed by student veterans in this study on campus and making special efforts to encourage student veterans' involvement in the activities. Although a recreational program was not one of the special services that participants reported a need for, this type of program would complement other existing supports such as the VSO.

Several students reported the need for special services, like a veterans' group and an orientation designed for veterans, at Radford University; however, some of these services, such as the VSO and the Military Resource Center, already exist. Many of the veterans who reported not knowing other student veterans indicated that they were

unaware that Radford University has a veterans' group. Although part of the VSO's mission is to provide a social group for student veterans, the lack of knowledge of the VSO means a key resource for veterans to meet each other and gain social support is untapped. The need for social support has already been established and fostering groups that can provide opportunities to increase social support would be beneficial. In order to promote the VSO, the group could sponsor weekly events such as card writing campaigns for service members overseas, and fun runs with the proceeds going to programs for disabled veterans. The Military Resource Center at Radford University was created to offer student veterans assistance in their transition to college and seeks to accomplish that goal by presenting student veterans information about campus and community resources as well as linking student veterans to the VSO.

James Whorley, who is the current VSO president and transition coach with the MRC, reported that the MRC is underutilized and that the VSO has low levels of involvement. He agreed with the current study's results that many Radford University student veterans are not aware of the MRC and VSO and stated that increased advertising and other efforts to increase visibility could improve student veterans' awareness of these valuable services and the campus group and thus encourage greater utilization of the MRC and increase participation in the VSO. Mr. Whorley also stated that if there is enough interest and participation among the student veterans currently in the VSO, he hopes the group can hold weekly fundraisers and activities to raise awareness of the VSO.

Since the completion of the data collection for the current study two other veteran related groups have been established: Warriors of RU (WRU) and SALUTE National

Honor Society. The formation of these two new groups confirms the study's result that student veterans are looking for ways to connect with other student veterans. Warriors of RU's purpose is to give military-oriented students of Radford University the opportunity to physically advance themselves, develop camaraderie, and create a more military friendly campus at Radford University. SALUTE National Honor Society is a chapter of the larger organization, which was established in 2009 at Colorado State University. The organization is designed to develop camaraderie between like-minded academic scholars and provides recognition to those military and student veterans who achieve a 3.0 grade point average.

A service that participants noted would be helpful to start student veterans' academic career is a special orientation designed for student veterans. Participants indicated that the Quest orientation that is provided for new students at Radford University is unhelpful and a waste of time and this is similar to what participants in Wheeler's (2012) study reported about the orientation at their college. The Quest orientation at Radford University is focused on assisting new students in developing friendships with other new students; however, participants in the current study reported their interest in attending college is educational achievement and not socialization with their civilian peers to whom they feel they cannot relate.

Research Question 2: How have the military experiences of veterans attending Radford University affected their individual approaches to being a student and future plans?

Several participants stated utilizing the techniques the military uses to teach personnel content and skills to study for their classes at Radford University have been

very helpful.

Many participants indicated that the military has taught them responsibility and focus as well as a drive to complete their assignments in a timely manner and above satisfactory caliber. The above characteristic is similar to the study by Newby et al (2005), which reported that student veterans' approaches to college are purposeful and serious. Similarly, in this study the student veterans' goals for their careers tended to be focused and carefully laid out.

Law enforcement was the most commonly cited career choice for the participants (5). The participants' second most frequently named career preference was re-enlisting or requesting active duty in the military (4). Another component to this theme is that all of the participants who reported having these career plans specified that their interests in these careers were related to their experiences in the military. The return to military service or law enforcement, a career that many veterans choose, may indicate that student veterans are interested in regaining the feelings of social support they had while in the military.

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Limitations and Future Research

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Self-report and minimization may occur when individuals are queried about topics they are uncomfortable discussing and they lessen their involvement with the activity or situation they perceive as being negative. Minimization may have occurred in this study when participants were asked about what they do to cope with stress and have fun as well as whether alcohol relieves their stress. Both of these topics may touch on subjects such as alcohol use that are potentially uncomfortable for the student veteran and he may

choose to dismiss or minimize his use of alcohol or other activities he is embarrassed to disclose. Minimization is an obstacle that the majority of research studies face; however, there is some evidence that the use of focus groups may lessen the influence of minimization, so future studies may consider focus groups as part of their research (May & Foxcroft, 1995). Because research has shown veterans tend to relate more with other veterans it may be that focus groups would increase participants' comfort levels and decrease their feeling the need to minimize (Laffaye, Cavella, Drescher, & Rosen, 2008). Minimization can also be reduced through assessing mental health and substance abuse issues with confidential online surveys.

The current study's semi-structured interview did not include direct questions about some aspects of student veterans' experiences. Therefore some phenomenon found in other studies may also exist at Radford University, but did not emerge because of the lack of direct questions on those topics. Military benefits, such as health and education benefits, were not directly addressed and although the interviewer queried several of the participants regarding benefits, not all of the participants were asked about benefits, so the data gained from the queries could not be recorded in the Results section. It is important for future studies to address benefits as many participants did report thoughts and feelings about benefits. Mental illness also was not directly discussed in this study, but other studies have found this to be an issue among student veterans, so mental illness is an area for future research (Ackerman et al., 2009; Barry, 2012; Rudd, Goulding, & Bryan, 2011). Although some studies have indicated that student veterans struggle with reestablishing and maintaining their social support systems off campus, the current study

did not explore the topic of off campus social support systems in depth, so future research would benefit from examining how much social support is received off campus and from what aspects in the community (Wheeler, 2012; Whiteman, Barry, Mroczek, & Wadsworth, 2013). The current study did not probe for student veterans' perceptions of whether they see their age as a bigger factor in their experiences on campus than their military status and analyzing this in future research could assist researchers in understanding how veterans' experiences are influenced not only by their veterans status, but also by their status as non-traditional students in terms of age. Additionally, recognizing how student veterans' needs overlap those of non-traditional students could assist schools in avoiding duplicating services.

One limitation was that the amount of data gained from the semi-structured interviews was less than anticipated and this may be related to the design of the interview and the communication style of many service members. When the semi-structured interview was developed for this study, it was estimated that the interviews would last approximately 45 to 60 minutes; however, in the data gathering phase the researcher found that the interviews tended to be 30 minutes or less in length. The communication in the military is typically concise and to the point and many service members do not offer elaboration on answers unless prompted to do so (Pavlicin, 2003; Sayers, 2009). The participants' responses to the interview questions did not appear to be deliberately truncated; however, it is likely that future research would gain additional material from student veterans by providing the interviewer with additional prompts for each question in the semi-structured interview in order to elicit more information.

Conclusion

Ackerman, DiRamio, and Mitchell's (2009) qualitative study of student veterans attending a large university found that student veterans struggled with issues involving difficulty obtaining military educational benefits as well as with stigma and isolation; however, there is a gap in the literature regarding the experiences of student veterans attending midsized liberal arts universities. The purpose of this study was to fill the gap in the literature by uncovering service members' experiences at a midsized liberal arts university, thereby highlighting their needs and recognizing their strengths in order to inform counseling psychologists' work toward improving the social, emotional, and academic outcomes of veterans returning to or entering post-secondary education. The current study used grounded theory in order to identify the themes of veterans' experiences. Some of the themes that emerged include the student veterans' perceptions of fellow students' attitudes and veterans not attending college's attitudes, the student veterans' attitudes towards other students, student veterans' methods of disclosing their veteran status to individuals on Radford University's campus, student veterans' awareness of other veterans on campus, student veterans' ways of coping with stress, their plans for after college, and the student veterans' thoughts about what special services would be helpful to have on Radford University's campus.

Recommendations

The results of the current study, in the context of other available literature, suggest the following recommendations would improve the experiences of student veterans attending Radford University.

1. Student veterans would benefit from awareness of the MRC, VSO, and other veterans' supports and this could be accomplished through targeted advertising and marketing. Many student veterans are majoring in Criminal Justice, so using advertising designed to reach that group would increase the number of veterans aware of the veterans' supports on campus. Additionally, the MRC's visibility could be improved by working with the Registrar and Admissions offices that have direct contact with student veterans.

2. An orientation specifically designed for student veterans would be advantageous and far more valuable to student veterans than the current Quest orientation, which was developed for traditional students.

3. A University 100 course developed for student veterans would assist new student veterans in learning about and accessing student veteran campus resources.

4. Student veterans could gain valuable assistance from faculty, staff, and administrators receiving training about the issues that confront some student veterans and the resources that are available to student veterans.

The themes of student veterans' lived realities discovered in this study can inform future quantitative research on student veterans and apprise college administrators and college counseling centers of the needs and strengths of veterans so they may provide for the student veterans' needs and encourage their strengths.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

The current chapter operationally defines veterans, college students, and student veterans, examines the advantages of earning a college degree, and reviews the critical issues that previous research has found affects veterans, college students, and student veterans. Chapter Two briefly highlights issues affecting college students and veterans including social support, mental health, and alcohol abuse as well as stressors typically affecting only individuals within the service member population, such as stigma, isolation, and difficulty obtaining military benefits. Finally, this chapter analyzes the available research on student veterans. This review of the literature on veterans, college students, and student veterans provided a framework to examine how the experiences of student veterans on Radford University's campus are both similar as well as unique when compared with other, students', veterans', and student veterans' experiences.

Operational Definitions

Certain terms have a variety of definitions; hence, in order to clarify key terms utilized in this paper, the following are the operational definitions. In the current study, veterans are defined as individuals who are not currently on active-duty, but once served on active duty in the U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Reserves, or National Guard (USC 38 §101). Although the experiences of veterans in these branches of the military are often quite different, there are essential principles that span the military experience, including discipline, virtue, hierarchy, and sacrifice for one's country (Hsu, 2010). Additionally, for the purposes of this study students are individuals attending Radford

University and student veterans are military veterans enrolled at Radford University.

Military Service and Access to College Education

Student veterans are likely choosing to attend college because of the advantages a college education provides, such as the potential for higher earnings, pension plans, health insurance, and greater job satisfaction (Baum, Ma, & Payea, 2010; Hill, Hoffman, & Rex, 2005). The Servicemen's Readjustment Act also known as the G.I. Bill was written into law during World War II and assisted service members in obtaining these benefits of college by paying for the service members' college tuition. Additionally, the G.I. Bill provided veterans with home loan guarantees, which made the American dream of homeownership, once only possible for the rich, possible for returning service members. In 2008 and 2010 the G.I. Bill was updated and renamed the Post-9/11 Veterans Education Assistance Improvement Act of 2010. This act revised the G.I. Bill to meet the increased costs of college tuition and expanded to cover the full costs of any public college as well as provide a housing allowance and a $1000 a year stipend to help pay for books. In 2011, approximately one million veterans utilized their G.I. Bill benefits and because more service members are returning from deployments it is likely that many more veterans will soon be attending college and using the G.I. Bill (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, 2012).

Advantages of a College Education

Many student veterans joined the military in part in order to be able to pay for college and these veterans likely hope to reap the many advantages that having a college education can provide. A college education provides an individual with the potential for

better financial outcomes and greater job satisfaction (Baum et al., 2010; Hill et al., 2005). The financial benefits of a college education include increased earning potential, decreased likelihood of unemployment, even during times of national recession, and better chances of having employer provided health insurance and pension plans (Baum et al., 2010; Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). According to Baum et al. (2010), an individual with a bachelor's degree can expect to earn around 66% more over a 40-year working career than the typical high school graduate earns over the same time period. Baum et al.'s (2010) study found that 58% of individuals with some college education or an associate degree endorsed being very satisfied with their jobs; in contrast, only 50% of high school graduates reported being very satisfied with their jobs. Notably, job satisfaction is correlated with overall life satisfaction and happiness (Bowling, Eschleman, & Wang, 2010). The potential for lower risk of unemployment, higher earnings, health insurance, pension plans, and job satisfaction are persuasive reasons to pursue a college degree and the incentives are all the more compelling as veterans have the military educational benefit, the G.I. Bill, to cover the cost of much of the financial burden of attending college. Despite all of the advantages of attaining a college degree, there are issues that confront many veterans that can act as barriers to attending and successfully completing college.

Military and Personal Development

Many veterans may face difficulties when entering college, including problems with social support, substance use, mental illness, and trouble receiving military benefits; however most former service members will have developed strengths and skills such as

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leadership, teamwork, and organization during their deployments that will serve them well as they begin college classes (Hassan, Jackson, Lindsay, McCabe, & Sanders, 2008). The military culture has often been noted to imbue service members with attitudes and core beliefs of positive work ethic, respect, responsibility, honor, and courage (Hall, 2008). A great benefit to military members and their dependents is the strong camaraderie and solid social support that the military can provide; however, when service members leave the military and separate from the military support system they may experience serious difficulty in reintegrating into civilian society (Hall, 2008; Zinger & Cohen, 2010). Loss of social support can be a barrier to attending and successfully completing college that confronts many veterans (Ackerman et al., 2009; Hall, 2008).

Social Support

The construct of social support has been studied widely over the past several decades and the definition of social support still varies across different studies. Lin, Simeone, Ensel, and Kuo (1979) provided a broad definition, stating that social support is "support accessible to an individual through social ties to other individuals, groups, and the larger community" (p. 109). Vaux (1988) described social support as a metaconstruct that includes supportive network resources, supportive behavior, and self-perception of support.

A number of different types of social support have been studied, such as affective support, instrumental support, information support, and appraisal support. Positive interpersonal reactions that communicate respect, love, trust, and esteem are components of affective social support (Kahn & Antonucci, 1980). Instrumental support consists of

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tangible goods or concrete assistance (House & Kahn, 1985). Informational support

includes advice and suggestions for dealing with personal issues, while appraisal support

means providing affirmation and positive social comparison (House & Kahn, 1985).

Additionally, although many different types of social support have been identified, a

number of constructs have been found to be related to social support, including sense of

belonging and resilience. For the purposes of this study, social support is defined as the

existence or accessibility of having friends who can be relied upon (Sarason, Levine,

Basham, & Sarason, 1983). Social support is critical to veterans in part because social

support acts as a protective factor against issues such as mental illnesses and the acuity of

symptoms in mental illnesses such as depression, anxiety, and Post Traumatic Stress

Disorder (PTSD), which have been found to affect many veterans (Banyard, 1999;

Compton, Thompson, & Kaslow, 2005; McLarin & Chalis, 2009). Veterans and college

students both benefit from the social support they obtain from family and friends.

General Social Support

Research on social support has examined the protective nature of social support

against a variety of mental illnesses in many different populations. Individuals of all

socioeconomic statuses, ethnicities, genders, and employment have a similar need for

social support (Banyard, 1999; Compton et al., 2005). Compton et al. (2005) researched

the relationship between social support and suicide attempts in low-income African

Americans. The researchers found that lower levels of social support were strongly

related to the rate of suicide attempts in their sample, demonstrating social support to be a

protective factor. McLarin and Chalis (2009) examined Australian male farmers and

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found that those with higher levels of social support tended to have lower levels of

suicidal ideation and depression, further confirming that social support serves as a

protective factor against mental illness. Banyard 's 1999 study demonstrated similar

findings in that social support was shown to be a protective factor for 518 low-income

women who were victims of child abuse because higher levels of social support were

associated with lower numbers of depressive symptoms. The participants in the Compton

et al. (2005), McLarin and Chalis (2009), and Banyard (1999) studies likely, not only

were influenced by social support, but also by the supporting construct of sense of

belonging to a community or group.

Social support and sense of belonging. The concept of having a sense of

belonging to a community or group is a construct related to social support. In 1943,

Maslow stated that a person's need for belongingness is the longing for affectionate

relations with people in general and especially for a place in his or her social group.

Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsema, and Collier (1992) defined sense of

belonging as "the experience of personal involvement in a system or environment so that

persons feel themselves to be an integral part of that system or environment" (p. 173).

However, according to Bollen and Hoyle (1990), sense of belonging consists of both

cognitive and affective levels. At the cognitive level, the individual uses information to

judge her or his experiences with a group and its members, but at the affective level, the

individual incorporates her or his feelings about the experiences with a group and the

group's members. The above definitions are integrated for the purposes of this study so

that sense of belonging is defined as an individual's cognitive and affective experience of

being an important part of a group (Bollen & Hoyle, 1990; Hagerty et al., 1992). A sense

of belonging, similar to social support, serves to increase positive characteristics such as

self-efficacy, thus having a sense of belonging serves as a protective factor against mental

illness and lessen the intensity of symptoms in mental illnesses such as depression,

anxiety, and PTSD (Banyard, 1999; Compton et al., 2005; Freeman, Anderman, &

Jensen, 2007; Hagerty, & Willians, 1999; McLarin & Chalis, 2009).

Social Support for College Students

Social support is an important factor in succeeding in higher education (Lee,

2007; Wilcox, Winn, & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005). Wilcox et al. (2005) demonstrated that social

support has a significant influence on students' decisions to stay in college. The

researchers interviewed 34 first-year college students who had considered quitting

college about the key issues that affected their decision to stay in college. They found that

social support through friends was essential to student retention. The friends not only

provided immediate emotional support, but also provided a supportive buffer during

stressful periods (Wilcox et al.). A 2009 study by Hefner and Eisenberg concluded that

students with lower levels of social support were six times more likely to report

symptoms of depression than peers with higher levels of social support, which reinforces

the findings of the Wilcox et al. (2005) study.

Non-typical college students. Hefner and Eisenberg (2009) also found that

students with diverse characteristics such as international status, low socioeconomic

status, and ethnic minority status were found to be at an increased risk for social

isolation. The differing characteristic of military status could also increase a student's risk

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for social isolation and thus also increase the likelihood of mental health issues.

Although student veterans differ from other college students in terms of their personal experiences and some of the obstacles they face, they are similar to some other groups of students, such as students of diverse ethnicities or religions, in that their endeavors to transition to large universities from smaller colleges are difficult, and researchers have found that social support influenced these groups' mental health (Lee, 2007). American Indians who perceived support from the university they attended and social support from peers reported these supports to be a major factor in their success in higher education. Many American Indians who did not feel specific support from universities in the form of programs designed specifically for American Indians, reported feeling isolated and uncomfortable. Similarly, a study by Hausmann and Woods (2007) reported that although a sense of belonging decreased in both the sample and control groups over the course of a year, African American students who were provided with an intervention specifically designed by the university to improve sense of belonging were more likely to experience less of a decrease in their sense of belonging. The study examined the effects of sense of belonging on the students' continued enrollment in attending college and sense of belonging was found to be correlated with the decision to persist in college. Service members, like American Indians and African American, have specific needs, and programs tailored to those needs may benefit them in developing social support more than a one-size-fits-all non-traditional student program (Walters, Miller, & Chiauzzi, 2005).

Sense of belonging and college students. In a 2007 study by Freeman and

colleagues, sense of belonging was discovered to be a protective factor against low self-efficacy in college students. The authors' study found sense of belonging was linked to students' academic and personal states. Freeman et al. examined the relationship between feeling a part of a class cohort and academic motivation, class and campus-level sense of belonging, and class belonging and perceptions of the professor's characteristics. The participants who endorsed a high level of the sense of university-belonging were more likely to have endorsed a high level of social acceptance. There was a significant positive correlation between levels of class belonging and sense of the instructor's level of warmth, openness, encouragement of student participation, and organization. Freeman et al.'s study also found that individuals with a strong sense of belonging in their academic classes tended to have greater self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation.

Pittman and Richmond's (2007) research on sense of belonging in college students was similar to Freeman et al.'s (2007) in that their study of 266 college students found positive relationships between sense of belonging and self-worth. Additionally, Pittman and Richmond (2007) discovered that students who reported a strong sense of belonging tended to have higher grades and academic competence as well as better psychological adjustment than the students' college peers who reported lower levels of sense of belonging.

Sense of belonging may be particularly important for students of diverse backgrounds (Chhuon & Hudley, 2008; Hurtado & Carter, 1997). Chhuon and Hudley (2008) conducted a study of sense of belonging among culturally diverse students; however this study was qualitative and conducted with 10 Cambodian American students.

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The researchers discovered that a sense of belonging in the campus environment and continuing contact with the students' former community were both important for Cambodian American students' successful adjustment to university life. Therefore, student veterans may benefit from developing a sense of belonging with other college students as well maintaining contact with veterans. According to Chhuon and Hudley (2008), the formal academic support systems had a direct positive influence on the students' academic engagement and performance; however, students who had informal faculty contact endorsed a stronger sense of academic belonging. Professors, teaching assistants, and counselors who the students were able to name personally appeared to be the most helpful, suggesting that feelings of personal connection were closely correlated with the students' academic sense of belonging (Chhuon & Hudley, 2008).

Another study of sense of belonging was conducted by Hurtado and Carter (1997) on 272 Latino college students; the researchers found that the Latino college students felt a stronger sense of belonging when they had social interactions with students of other races regarding course content outside of class. Additionally, memberships in social-community groups and religious organizations also increased sense of belonging among the students (Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

Hurtado and Carter (1997) and Chhuon and Hudley (2008) demonstrated ways of supporting a sense of belonging among students, and Freeman et al. (2007) and Pittman and Richmond (2007) established the important benefits of sense of belonging. Overall, the need to engender a sense of belonging in students is clear and because veterans may be more vulnerable to isolation it is important that they are given resources to access

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social support.

Military Culture and Social Support

Service members become part of the special culture of the military when they begin their training and over time acclimate to the military way of life and the military social support system (Dunivin, 1994). Hall (2011) noted that there are many distinctive aspects to the military culture, such as the authoritarian structure; the isolation and alienation from civilians; the constant threat of deployment during wartime and the concomitant fear of injury or death of service members, the importance of the military mission; and the class system of enlisted service members, non-commissioned officers, and commissioned officers. Some of the aspects listed by Hall (2011) are negative; however, the military has many positive aspects as well. For example, service members have all of their needs met by the military, including housing, food, clothing, and medical care. As aforementioned, another positive is that the military culture generates a tightly knit social support system (Hall, 2011). One Army service member reported, "I know people from boot camp that I have not seen in years, but if they needed me I would be there. Whenever we talk it is like we pick back up right where we left off. I'm closer to my buddies than my own brother" (A. Coates, personal communication, December 8, 2009).

In order to meet the timelines outlined by superiors, military members quickly learn to work together. Service members take part in specialized training exercises designed to develop and improve teamwork skills. Working closely with each other, often under stressful conditions, compels members to develop tight bonds with one another

(Hall, 2008). According to Pfc. Anthony Poventud, speaking of combat outposts, "there's

nothing for us here, we have to build it up and make it liveable. It helps the platoon get to

know one another because we are building this together, we learn team-work" (Stewart,

2009, p. 19). The close social support network that develops among military units aids

service members when they experience a traumatic event or suffer the loss of a fellow

unit member (Hall, 2008).

     According to Collins and Kennedy (2008), veterans often feel comfort, security,

and support from the military culture. Collins and Kennedy (2008) examined the use of

family-systems therapy with combat veterans with a history of multiple traumas and

found that many military families find meaning and identity in the military culture. After

separation from the military, service members often lose their sense of purpose and a

strong support network (Hall, 2008). While grieving for that military network, service

members may struggle to develop a new social support network with civilian students

and may withdraw from friends and family who were not in the military (Tanielian, &

Jaycox, 2008). A 2008 study by Laffaye, Cavella, Drescher, and Rosen found that

veterans consistently reported fellow veterans as their strongest and least stressful support

system, whereas marital relationships were reported to be both interpersonally supportive

as well as interpersonally stressful and conflictual.

     Sense of belonging in service members. Although sense of belonging has been

well studied in college students, less is known about sense of belonging in service

members and veterans. One of the few studies on the subject was on veterans in the

United Kingdom, which found that UK veterans often gain a sense of belonging from

collective commemorations, including pilgrimages to memorial sites and services on annual days of remembrance (Barron, Davies, & Wiggins, 2008). The researchers reported that the comradeship and societal support felt during the commemorations contributed to a sense of belonging and social integration (Barron, Davies, & Wiggins, 2008).

Student Veterans and Civilian Nontraditional Students

Many student veterans entering or re-entering college will be over the age of 24, which some studies define as the cutoff point between traditional and nontraditional students (Hermon & Davis, 2004; Justice & Dornan, 2001). The sense of student veterans that having differences in their felt realities made them more mature is similar to Jinkens' (2009) finding that what defines a nontraditional student is not their age, but life changing events that color their approach to being a student as well as everyday life. These life-altering events in civilian nontraditional students may include getting married, having children and paying a mortgage, which are all things that student veterans may be experiencing. Thus, services that are tailored specifically to nontraditional students may also be of benefit to student veterans. However, the military experiences of student veterans likely make some of their needs different than civilian nontraditional students. DiRamio et al.'s (2008) study established that as a result of the experience of military service, student veterans are a special needs population makes some services designed to meet the specific needs of student veterans essential. For example, understanding and obtaining military educational benefits is a need that is unique to student veterans. Additionally, research has shown that student veterans find they relate better to other

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student veterans, so offering ways for student veterans to meet each other would also be a service specific to the student veteran population (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009).

Student Veteran Research

This section reviews the existing literature on student veterans, which includes research on issues common to college students and veterans as well as studies on issues specifically pertaining to student veterans. The available literature on student veterans is sparse; however, several issues that affect student veterans have already been established across available studies and these issues include social support, mental illness, alcohol abuse bureaucracy in accessing military benefits, and a desire for programs specifically designed for student veterans. Reviewing the literature on student veterans allowed for the current study to be designed to fill gaps in the literature and avoid research framework duplication.

One of the initial studies on student veterans from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars was performed by Ackerman, DiRamio, and Mitchell (2009) and the researchers used semi-structured interviews to gather information about the experiences of student veterans' attending large universities. Several themes emerged, one of which was the struggle that student veterans face in developing and maintaining support systems. Three other themes that were revealed were the student veterans' difficulty with obtaining educational benefits through the Veterans Administration (VA), struggles in coping with post-traumatic stress disorder, and problems dealing with the lack of programs or accessibility to programs on campus to assist them in navigating the school system.

Military Experience and College Credit

One of the educational benefits of military service is that some military training can be counted as college credits. Post World War II the American Council on education created a system to award college credits for military training and experiences in order for veterans to avoid having to take courses that repeat information they have already learned. The system of awarding college credits is particularly important because repeating course work means veterans have to stay in college longer to complete their degrees. Additionally, the difficult process of obtaining educational benefits can cause service members to have to wait for credits, which may delay their advancement in college (Herrman, Raybeck, & Wilson, 2008). There is a considerable backlog of student requests for credits and the delay in receiving these credits can create considerable distress in students wanting to move forward in their academic programs (Ackerman et al., 2009).

The lack of programs or access to programs designed to assist student veterans on college campuses can make the transition to college more difficult and be detrimental to their academic success (Ackerman et al., 2009). For example, one student in the Ackerman et al. (2009) study described having a problem with financial aid after he had to withdraw from classes mid-semester because of deployment. While the student was in Iraq he contacted the financial aid office to reconcile the financial aid issue he was told that the only way to resolve the issue would be for him to come to the financial aid office in person. A military support service for student veterans could have worked with the student to settle his financial aid trouble, making his return to college much simpler post-

deployment (Ackerman et al. 2009).

Social Support for Student Veterans

Ackerman, DiRamio, and Mitchell (2009) found social support to be one of the themes that emerged in their study on veterans attending college. The researchers used a qualitative grounded theory model to examine the experiences of 25 student veterans attending large universities. One of the major problems that Ackerman and colleagues (2009) found student veterans faced was adapting to college life. One soldier stated that he felt isolated without the community of military colleagues he had grown accustomed to and found it difficult to relate to other students as well as family members and friends (Ackerman et al., 2009).

Wheeler (2012) employed a qualitative case study method to examine the experiences of veterans attending a community college and, similar to Ackerman et al. (2009), found that social support was an important theme of student veterans' lived realities. Many of the 25 participants in Wheeler's (2012) study reported feelings of isolation from their civilian peers on campus, in part because of their peers' immaturity and difficulty relating to them. Additionally, many participants' found it was hard to reestablish the ties they had with their families prior to military service, leaving them with low levels of social support overall.

As was found by Ackerman et al. (2009) and Wheeler (2012), Zinger and Cohen (2010) noted that many student veterans had difficulty resuming their personal relationships after returning from military active duty. Zinger and Cohen (2010) used structured interviews to gather data regarding the experiences of student veterans from 10

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student veterans attending a large community college in an urban locale. In addition to the theme of problematic personal relationships and social functioning, the researchers reported the participants' interviews revealed themes of mental health issues including PTSD, maladaptive coping, changes in self and world views, and support services for student veterans. Although many student veterans may be experiencing strong social support from systems off campus, the Ackerman (2009), Wheeler (2012), and Zinger and Cohen (2010) studies' results indicate that their participants did not have strong support systems on or off campus.

Whiteman, Barry, Mroczek, and Wadsworth (2013) examined the development and implications of peer social support in student veterans and civilian students. An electronic survey was completed by 199 student veterans and 181 civilian students on three separate occasions over the span of one year and four constructs were measured, including felt emotional support from college friends, mental health, alcohol use, and academic functioning (Whiteman, Barry, Mroczek, & Wadsworth, 2013). The researchers utilized multilevel statistical models to examine the participants' responses and determined that student veterans' perceived social support from their peers tended to increase at a rate parallel to that of their civilian counterparts; however, they reported less emotional support from their peers than their civilian colleagues. Peer social support was related to better overall mental health and academic outcomes; however, the relationship between peer emotional support and better outcomes was stronger in civilian students.

A mixed methods study by Persky and Oliver (2010) was similar to Ackerman and colleagues' (2009) research, in that the researchers focused on determining the self-

perceived needs of 60 student veterans attending a community college in order to assist administrators and college counselors in identifying what services would assist student veterans. Several themes emerged from the student veterans' responses, which included improving the programs and services offered on campus and training for faculty and advisors to improve their understanding of student veterans (Persky & Oliver, 2010). The participants reported a need for services that were related to developing a sense of belonging and camaraderie among student veterans and included a veterans' center for resources and fellowship and a cohort model of education (Persky & Oliver, 2010).

Mental Illness and Alcohol Abuse in Student Veterans

Research has demonstrated that mental illness is an issue that often affects civilians, veterans, and student veterans (Ackerman et al., 2009, Barry, Whiteman, & Wadsworth, 2012; Rudd, Goulding, & Bryan, 2011; Zinger & Cohen, 2010). Several studies have found that post-traumatic stress disorder is of significant concern for many student veterans (Ackerman, 2009; Barry, Whiteman, & Wadsworth, 2012; Rudd, Goulding, & Bryan, 2011). A study by Rudd, Goulding, and Bryan (2011) found that nearly half of the student veterans in the general college population endorsed considering suicide. Alcohol is widely misused by civilian college students and veterans and, not surprisingly, studies have found that student veterans also misuse alcohol and this is particularly troubling because of the positive relationship between alcohol abuse and suicide (Barry, Whiteman, Wadsworth, & Hitt, 2012; Widome, Laska, Gulden, Fu & Lust, 2011). Barry and colleagues (2012) examined alcohol use and associated mental health issues in 145 student veterans and 136 college students solicited from 16 postsecondary

institutions. Student veterans' drinking habits were demonstrated to be comparable to civilian college students'; however, student veterans' binge drinking was related to increased symptoms of mental illness such as anxiety, depression and posttraumatic stress disorder and signs of other types of problem drinking. A study by Widome, Laska, Gulden, Fu, and Lust (2011) also examined the alcohol drinking behaviors in addition to risk taking behaviors among student veterans and civilian college students and reported that student veterans were significantly more likely to abuse alcohol and take risks such as engaging in physical fights.

Approaches to Academic Endeavors

In addition to Wheeler's (2012) finding of themes of social support, and military benefits mentioned above, Wheeler also reported a theme about the student veterans' perceptions of how their military experience influenced their approach to their academic studies. The student veterans in the Wheeler (2012) study indicated their military service had a positive effect on their schoolwork in that they applied the attitudes they had toward military duties to their academic assignments and as such practiced discipline in studying, completed schoolwork prior to relaxation, and felt driven to finish assignments promptly and to the best of their abilities. Similarly, Newby et al. (2005) reported that student veterans' approaches to college are purposeful and serious and one of Hall's (2008) findings also coincided with Wheeler's (2012) finding regarding responsibility and drive, in that Hall (2008) observed that the military instills positive work ethic and responsibility.

Summary

Several themes overlap many of the different studies of student veterans. Difficulties accessing educational benefits and struggles developing a social support system on campus were issues of student veterans that Ackerman et al. (2009), Wheeler (2012), and Whiteman, Barry, Mroczek, and Wadsworth (2013) each found. Barry, Whiteman, Wadsworth, and Hitt (2012) and Widome, Laska, Gulden, Fu and Lust (2011) reported finding that alcohol and drug abuse was a problem for many student veterans. Posttraumatic Stress Disorder was identified as an issue affecting many student veterans by Barry, Whiteman, and Wadsworth (2012), Persky and Oliver (2010), and Zinger & Cohen (2010). Three studies found that student veterans were interested in the development and ready access of special services designed for student veterans (Ackerman et al., 2009; Persky & Oliver, 2010; Zinger & Cohen, 2010). Although there are similar findings in several studies; these studies were performed at large universities or community colleges and as such there is a gap in the literature as it is not clear whether the needs identified in the available student veteran studies will be the same as those of student veterans attending a midsized liberal arts university.

Research Questions

The current study is designed to fill the gap in the literature by examining the emerging themes of experiences of student veterans attending a midsized liberal arts university. In order to address this limitation in the research two questions guided this project and provided a framework for the study's research methodology, specifically the semi-structured interview.

1. What are the social experiences of veterans attending Radford University?

2. How have the military experiences of veterans attending Radford University affected their individual approaches to being a student and future plans?

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

The literature on the transition veterans make from the military to college life is quite sparse, and the research that is available involved veterans attending large universities. A gap exists in the literature regarding veterans attending midsized liberal arts colleges, and the current study attempted to address that gap. Student veterans are in the best position to say what their needs are, and once educational institutions understand the veterans' needs, the institutions will be better able to provide services to meet those needs. The present chapter outlines the rationale for using a grounded theory research design for this study. This chapter also delineates the inclusion criteria for participants, recruitment techniques, and how the data were analyzed and interpreted.

Grounded theory is a systematic qualitative research method that seeks to generate theory about a phenomenon through the analysis of data related to that phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The study of veterans in college is still in early development, and grounded theory gave the present study a framework from which new concepts emerged that can inform future quantitative research (Fassinger, 2005). Thus, the grounded theory method was appropriate for the current study because it allowed concepts to emerge from the data rather than from hypothesis testing. The grounded theory method afforded the collection of rich data that the researcher attempted to develop into a theory explaining the experiences of veterans transitioning from military life to attending college.

Participants

The nature of the study required the use of individuals who have experienced the U.S. military and currently be enrolled at Radford University. Therefore, participants in the study were all attending Radford University at least half-time. The second requirement was that participants must have been in the United States Military. For the purposes of this study the United States Military included the Army, Air Force, Marines, Navy, Coast Guard, Reserves, and National Guard. Although the experiences of veterans in these branches of the military are often quite different, there are essential principles that span the military experience, including discipline, hierarchy, and sacrifice for one's country (Hsu, 2010).

In the study, two sampling techniques were used, convenience sampling and chain sampling (Reichardt & Gollob, 1999). The researcher solicited participants through convenience sampling by placing fliers around campus and advertising in the "Sound Off," an online periodical that is emailed to veterans on a monthly basis. Individuals who responded to fliers and emails recruiting participants, and who met the two requirements listed above, were accepted into the study. Chain-sampling required the researcher to find key informants who could offer names of individuals who were appropriate for the study. In the current study, the key informants also were participants. The researcher spoke to Radford University's Student Veteran Research Team and found one key informant who suggested speaking to the Veterans' Student Organization at Radford University (VSO). The researcher attended a VSO meeting, and four members of the VSO participated in the current study. Chain sampling also occurs when participants are asked to suggest

participating to other veterans. Student veterans who participated in the study were asked to consider telling other Radford student veterans that the study was looking for more student veterans. Three student veterans stated that they had been informed about the study by other participants; however, many individuals did not state how they learned of the study.

The inclusion of additional participants in the study aided the research in reaching "saturation," which is the point at which no further themes emerge from interviews with additional participants (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Saturation varies across different studies, which is one reason qualitative studies do not usually specify a certain number of participants (Patton, 2001). According to Morrow and Smith (2000) saturation usually occurs within eight to 15 participants. In the current study, saturation was believed to be met at the 10th interview because the 11th interview, conducted and analyzed as a check on saturation, yielded no further themes, and consequently the data collection was ended at that time.

<div align="center">

Instruments

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Demographic Information Form

The demographic information of each participant was gathered through a brief questionnaire (see Appendix A). The requested demographic information included age, sex, race, marital status, number of children and their ages, employment status, branch of service, deployment location(s), deployment date(s), anticipated duration of deployment, actual length of deployment, return date(s), years in military service, highest rank attained, current military status / type of discharge, year enrolled at Radford University,

number of hours enrolled in this semester, and whether this was the first time attending college. Each participant was given a questionnaire to fill out prior to his interview.

Semi-structured Interview

The semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix B) were generated by researching existing literature, consulting with veterans, and conferring with Dr. Valerie Leake, the director of Radford University's Student Veteran Research Team and the researcher's dissertation advisor, and another Radford University professor, Dr. Don Cunningham, who is a Vietnam military veteran. The literature reviewed included research on the different issues affecting the discrete populations of veterans, college students, non-traditional college students, as well as veterans attending college. The veterans who previewed the questions offered suggestions for modifying the questions in order to clarify the questions for the student veteran research participants. The researcher utilized the veterans' proposals in revising the interview questions. Dr. Valerie Leake and Dr. Don Cunningham reviewed the questions and offered recommendations for re-organizing the questions into a more coherent format, which the researcher used to revise the order of the interview questions.

After the interview with the first participant, the researcher asked this individual for feedback about the process of the interview and to identify any questions that were confusing or resulted in truncated answers (Fassinger, 2005). The participant reported no specific questions resulted in significant confusion and/or excessive brevity related to that question; however, he noted that none of the interview questions directly inquired about benefits. The researcher noted this feedback from the first participant that benefits were

not mentioned. The researcher consulted with Dr. James Werth, Jr., a researcher who has

conducted several qualitative studies, supervised qualitative dissertations, and taught

doctoral classes on qualitative research, and he suggested a new question be added at the

end of the survey, as a post hoc question. However, the researcher did not consistently

inquire about benefits in further interviews, so the available data are not considered in the

Results chapter, but are examined in the Limitations and Future Research section of the

Discussion chapter.

Researcher as Instrument

In qualitative studies, the researcher is considered to be a research instrument

used to gather and interpret data (Fassinger, 2005; Morrow, 2005; Patton, 2001). The

researcher's competence, aptitude, and accuracy in interviewing participants are critical

components of gathering valuable data (Morrow, 2005). If the researcher's ability to

interview and collect data is poor, it is likely that the data and consequently the finished

study will be of poor quality (Morrow, 2005). Additionally, the researcher's competence

in interpreting the data is critical to the development of sound theory (Patton, 2001). The

researcher's ability to interview and to interpret data is influenced not only by skill, but

also by his or her level of self-knowledge and willingness to continually self-evaluate.

According to Creswell (2003), "…the role of the researcher as the primary data

collection instrument necessitates the identification of personal values, assumptions, and

biases at the outset of the study" (p. 200). Any research design is vulnerable to bias;

however, according to Corbin and Strauss (2003), Creswell (2003), and Patton (2001),

qualitative research may be biased as a result of the researcher's immersion in the

research, emotional connection to the research topic, and assumptions based on the researcher's experiences. In order to minimize the effects of the researcher's bias, it is necessary for the researcher to reflexively explore his or her own biases, attempt to set his or her biases aside, and make his or her biases known from the outset of a research study (Morrow, 2005; Patton, 2001). Additional ways to reduce bias are discussed in the section on trustworthiness.

The researcher for the current study has had several experiences that may have created biases that could have affected the present study. The researcher is the youngest daughter of a retired United States Air Force Captain, the grand-daughter of a career Army Lieutenant Colonel, and her sister was in the Junior Reserve Officers' Training Corps. The researcher's family has a close friend who has a mental illness related to his service in the Vietnam War. As part of a practicum assignment, the researcher assessed veterans for neuropsychological disorders at the Robley Rex Veterans Administration Medical Center in Louisville, Kentucky.

Clearly, the military has played an important role in the researcher's life, in both positive and negative ways. Over the years, the researcher has come to the understanding that she has great respect and love for the men and women who serve the United States and concern regarding the physical and emotional harm many suffer as a result of their military experience. The researcher was constantly aware of the possibility that the biases related to service members and the military could have affected the current research study.

Procedure

Veterans at the local VFW, veterans who are also professors, and faculty who have taught student veterans, were consulted in order to locate potential participants. The veterans and professors were also asked to consent to the researcher using his or her name as a reference when the researcher contacted the potential participants. Potential participants were sent a letter (see Appendix C) that requested their participation and notified them that the researcher would be contacting them. Those veterans who had not already responded to the first letter were contacted again via email and asked whether they might be interested in participating in the study. Although the research study was open to both male and female participants, only male individuals demonstrated interest participating in the research study. The potential participant was asked about his status as a veteran of the United States Military and as a current student at Radford University. If he met the inclusion criteria, the researcher requested the veteran's participation in the study. If the veteran agreed to participate in the study, an interview date and time was scheduled. Interviews were held at Radford University. Prior to the interview, the participant was sent a letter with a reminder of the date, time, and location of the interview.

After the interviewer greeted the participant and thanked him for his willingness to participate, the interviewer reviewed the informed consent form. Once any questions about the informed consent were answered, the form was signed, and a copy was given to the participant. The interviewer then asked the participant to complete the demographics form (see Appendix A).

After the student veteran completed the demographics form, an audio recorder was started and the interviewer conducted the semi-structured interview.

Once the interview was completed, the interviewer advised the participant that he could contact the interviewer if the participant had something to add to his answers. The participant also was reminded that if he had any questions, he could contact the interviewer or the interviewer's advisor. If the participant had questions regarding his rights as a research participant, he could contact the appropriate Radford University personnel at the numbers provided on the informed consent. After the interview, the raw data, analysis, memos, and research decision log were kept in a locked box in a locked filing cabinet.

Analyses

The researcher analyzed the data using the procedure described in the leading grounded theory text (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Analysis consisted of three stages of coding which are discussed in more detail below: (a) open coding, (b) axial coding, and (c) selective coding (Fassinger, 2005). In the open coding stage, the data are separated into individual concepts, and each concept is analyzed to find differences and similarities (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). If each concept is sufficiently different, they are named based on the phenomena they describe. If the concepts are not significantly different, the data are reanalyzed to ensure there is not excessive overlap of concepts. The second stage is axial coding, in which inductive and deductive reasoning are used to develop categories that relate the concepts developed in open coding to each other. In the third stage, selective coding, the core category is identified, and its relationship to every other

category is defined. Throughout these stages, there are constant comparisons being made in order to compare data across participants, compare incidents, and properties (Charmaz, 2000). The process of coding allows for the generation of coherent categories that can then be utilized to develop theory.

Trustworthiness

According to Fassinger (2005), in qualitative research, trustworthiness can be defined as the theoretical and scientific validity of a study. Fassinger (2005) stated that the factors that make up trustworthiness are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In order to maximize the trustworthiness of the current research study, several procedures were utilized, including keeping an audit trail which is a "detailed chronology of research activities and processes; influences on the data collection and analysis; emerging themes categories or models; and analytic memos" (Morrow, 2005, p. 251). After each interview, the researcher wrote memos, and one memo was written during each month that no interviewees participated in the study. Each time a new analytic memo was written the researcher examined all of the previous memos in order to keep track of the ideas, interpretations, code developments, and notes of the researcher from the beginning to the end of the study (Morrow, 2005).

In grounded theory an external auditor may be utilized to provide an objective assessment of the study, including reviewing the transcripts in and providing feedback on the researcher's coding. In this study, Dr. James Werth, Jr. was the external auditor and his feedback noted a possible redundancy that was left over from an initial round of coding. Once the researcher and the external auditor resolved the issue of redundancy,

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they were in agreement about the coding of the data. Additionally, Dr. Valerie Leake read the transcripts and supplied the researcher with feedback on the coding, which was in agreement with the researcher's coding.

Transferability. Transferability is the degree to which the reader is able to extend the findings of a study to his or her environment. In order to increase others' understanding of what parts of the research may not transfer to different contexts the researcher noted that the study was conducted at midsized liberal arts university in Southwest Virginia (Patton, 2001). Additionally, the analytic memos, including the researcher's notes and development of coding, are available, upon request, to other researchers. The data analysis has been de-identified in order to protect participant confidentiality.

Dependability and confirmability. Dependability is the degree to which the stated procedure, as outlined, was followed throughout a study. Confirmability is the extent to which the findings have been explained in such a way that the reader is able to assess the quality of the results (Morrow, 2005). The current research study addressed dependability and confirmability by utilizing a log to record research decisions and rationale. Several of the notes recorded in the study's log pertained to the different methods used to advertise the study and the assessment of these methods over the course of the study.

Some research decisions were based on the following information written in the research log. The researcher noted in the log that during the first eight months of data collection, fliers and chain sampling were used to interest individuals in participating in the study. In March, July, and August there were no interviews conducted because of a

lack of participants. The researcher concluded from the lack of participants that fliers and chain sampling were not attracting a sufficient number of individuals interested in participating in the study and this was noted in the log. The researcher decided to supplement the existing advertising methods with announcements placed in the Radford University online veterans' monthly publication "Sound Off," and announcing the study in the Radford University's Student Veteran Research Team. One of the research team's members suggested the researcher speak to the Veterans Student Organization at Radford University (VSO) and the researcher followed this recommendation.

In the final four months of data collection, the researcher conducted more than half of the interviews in the study. As a result of the increase in the number of participants in a much shorter period time, the researcher noted a supposition in the log that the decision to increase advertising may have assisted in collecting enough interviews to reach saturation. In quantitative research, long periods of time for data collection are considered to be a possible threat to trustworthiness or validity as an event or some circumstances could occur that change their lived realities (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). Although data collection began in the spring of 2012 and was not completed until December of the same year, this gap in time is not considered to be an issue as no national or international events had occurred that would have changed student veterans' experiences at Radford University.

The audit trail of memos also provided information necessary to compare the data and analysis to the concepts the researcher had developed in the memos (Yeh & Inman, 2007). The researcher used memos to record insights and hunches about the research that

occurred with each interview and during the coding process, which is explained furthered in the following section. The memos were reviewed for any concepts the researcher may have inadvertently overlooked in the transcripts. No new concepts were discerned in the review of the memos and their evaluation against the transcripts. For example, the researcher noted a possible concept that student veterans encourage veterans not in college to consider going to college; however, this did not become a theme among the student veteran participants.

Dependability and confirmability were further supported by having an external auditor and dissertation advisor who were involved from the beginning of the research study and who reviewed the data and coding to confirm the researcher's coding of the transcripts and assess the transcripts for researcher bias. Dr. Valerie Leake and Dr. James Werth, Jr. read and examined the interview transcripts for researcher bias, and both reported finding no significant bias in the data. Additionally, the researcher analyzed the transcripts and memos for bias. The researcher's review of the memos did not reveal researcher biases.

Coding

Open coding, axial coding, and selective coding are the three levels of the grounded theory coding process. The coding process allowed the researcher to analyze the data systematically, allowing for themes to emerge from the data, rather than the researcher testing a hypothesis with the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). In open coding, the transcripts of the raw data were reviewed, and any identifiable concepts and the properties and dimensions of the concepts were documented (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

In axial coding, the concepts that emerged in open coding were related to each other and placed in categories through inductive and deductive reasoning. During axial coding, the researcher worked to find relationships between concepts that would explain the phenomena. It is important to note that the coding process is iterative rather than linear (Patton, 2001). In the current study, the interviews were coded as soon as they were transcribed, and therefore new codes were developed over time. As additional codes were developed, the raw data from previous interviews and the previous codes were compared to see if the new codes fit parts of the interview and had not been observed before or whether they were new codes. Through the process of constant comparison, new categories were developed. The next level of coding is selective coding, in which the third level of coding occurs, and a core category emerges from the categories that are developed (Strauss & Coben, 1998). However, in this study the categories that emerged paralleled the semi-structured interview questions and because of this, an overarching theme or substantive theory did not develop in the coding process. The categories were then re-examined for excess categories; however, no superfluous categories were identified. The results of the coding analyses are reported in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

In this chapter the findings from this research study are described. The purpose of the current study was to develop a theory that explains the experiences of veterans attending Radford University. Grounded theory methodology was used in order to analyze interview data from 11 student veterans. Themes included in these results were endorsed by at least four of the 11 participants (36%), unless otherwise noted. In order to present the rich data acquired in the interview process, quotes from participants are included in the explanation of some themes (e.g., P1 is participant 1). The data in this study revealed concepts that were strongly connected to the interview questions. Because the concepts rarely spanned across items, no overarching theory emerged from the data. Therefore, the results are organized by the frequency of emergent themes revealed for each interview questions, from most to least endorsed. Section headers are included for each interview question or the meaning behind a series of questions from which a concept emerged. Appendix B lists the interview questions; Table 1 delineates the demographic results and Table 2 outlines the themes structured according to the related question.

How Would Faculty and Other Students Know Your Status as a Veteran?

One of the goals of the research was to gain an understanding of whether the participants revealed their veteran status to others on campus and, if so, how they chose to reveal their status. Three themes emerged in the student veterans' responses to this question: discussing experiences or opinions as a veteran in class discussions (6 participants), displaying objects or wearing clothing marked with military insignia, or (6)

informing faculty of the need to miss class to attend military training (5). At least one of these themes was expressed by 10 of the 11 participants. In the next section, each theme related to how student veterans reveal their veteran statuses is established and explained.

Discussing Experiences or Opinions as a Veteran in Class Discussions

Participants most frequently responded to the above query by indicating that his veteran status was revealed during class, as the result of a class discussion he disclosed that he was a veteran either in the course of talking about his experience in the military, or an opinion he believed was affected by his status as a veteran. As one participant noted, "if it comes up in class, something to do with the military, or something I have experience with, then I'll bring it up" (P6).

Within the theme of revealing their status in class, some participants revealed that they preferred to disclose their veteran status in a modest manner. As one participant noted:

> I am proud to be a veteran ... I just don't want to be that guy who says look at me I'm a veteran, and I'm better than everyone else, I just think that since I am one I should just let people know, if they're going to know me that's part of who I am. (P4)

Another participant stated,

> If something comes up in class that I don't agree with I might, I guess become part of the discussion. If it's like, well, an opinion on what's happening in Afghanistan, I might say something about it, but even then I wouldn't be like, "I'm a veteran and you don't know what you're talking about," I just try to say it

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like, "yeah, I was in the military and I was over there." (P10)

Displaying Objects or Wearing Clothing Marked with Military Insignia

In keeping with the subtheme of revealing their veteran status in a discreet manner without drawing undue attention, some participants indicated a passive way in which they revealed their veterans status to faculty and students, wearing or using items with military insignia. The student veterans reported they often used or wore items they had from their military service, including shirts, binders, and back packs. Some of the participants noted that while wearing they were military insignia, some Radford University students had approached them and expressed support for their military service. One student veteran stated, "just the other day I talked to, I was riding my bike and I guess he saw my backpack, a basketball player said, 'I want to thank you for your service,' just like, 'hey come out and hang out sometime'" (P6).

Informing Faculty of the Need to Miss Class to Attend Military Training

The next theme that emerged was explaining to faculty the need to miss classes in order to attend military training. Although the majority of Reserve and National Guard branches (e.g., Navy and Air Force), have training one weekend a month and two weeks a year, the Army National Guard members have that training obligation as well as the possibility of being mobilized for national or state disasters such as hurricanes, earthquakes, or extreme rioting (U.S. Const. art. I, § 8).

The length of time for which Army National Guard members may be deployed for homeland disasters varies from a few days to six months. Depending on the mobilization period and length of time left in the semester, it may be possible for Army National

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Guard members to make up the work missed in class or complete the class over the Internet. As one veteran said:

> I usually let my faculty know in advance the first part of the semester that there is the potential that I might have to miss classes due to military obligations. If that's going to happen I let them know as soon as I know. And try to make arrangements to work stuff out in advance so they are all usually informed. (P2)

All of the participants who indicated they still had military training obligations on a consistent basis reported disclosing their veteran status to professors early in each semester so the veteran's absence was not unexplained.

Describe Fellow Students' Attitudes Toward Student Veterans

The most common theme related to the above query was believing that that most of their civilian classmates are supportive (6) and the other theme was that participants thought that their military status was immaterial to civilian students (5). Six of the participants explained their perception of their civilian peers' attitudes towards the participants as veterans as supportive. One veteran said,

> For the most part pretty much everyone I've met in college has been very supportive. A lot of people don't even know, but when I tell people I'm in the military and I deployed they're like, "well that's really cool." (P1)

Another participant described his civilian peers' attitudes in this way,

> There's a lot of thank you for your service and that's the end of it. They don't go On praising you which I like cause, I'm a veteran and I did this all right and then I'm ready to move on. (P3)

Even though several participants perceived support in their peers' comments, others sensed their fellow students viewed veteran status as being inconsequential. The two subthemes are apparent in a statement from one participant: "I think most people are supportive or don't care either way." Two other participants indicated specifically they felt it was a nonissue to people: "I honestly think most people don't care" (P7) and "I think they [civilian students] mostly don't think about it" (P10).

Describe Your Attitudes Toward Your Fellow Students

Several of the participants reported that their attitudes toward civilian peers were influenced by their civilian peers' status as civilians. The single theme that surfaced in response to this item was the participants' belief that their experiences were very different from those of their civilian classmates, making it difficult for the participants to relate their civilian peers (9). Within the larger theme of this query, two subthemes emerged; the first was that their civilian peers become overwhelmed by situations that would not cause the participants stress and the second was that their civilian classmates are immature.

Stress

One participant explained his difficulty relating to his civilian classmates by stating, "sometimes it's a little difficult to relate to people who, well, they haven't been where I've been, you know? The stuff they get worked up about just doesn't matter to me" (P11). Another participant portrayed how his having different experiences from his civilian classmates has influenced his attitude toward these peers this way:

It's almost like I'm on vacation here, a lot of people get like really stressed out,

and I'm like no, it's like I'm on vacation here, for me. I've seen things, and like a

lot of things that other people get stressed out about [that] I'm not going to get

stressed out about and I either want to help them or just not hang out. (P8)

Immaturity

A second subtheme was the participants' perception that their civilian classmates

lack maturity. One participant described attempting to relate to the rest of his classmates:

It can be hard to relate to regular civilian students because I try not to be

judgmental but at the same time they lack a certain maturity. So it can be hard to

interact with them. So when you do reach that interaction point it can be hard to

pretend to be interested in the same things. (P5)

Another participant suggested the felt difference in maturity and the associated difficulty

in relating to civilian peers can cause feelings of isolation:

there's a quote that my drill instructor told me at boot camp and it says "the path

of a warrior is a lonely one" and that's pretty true. Like, I know my older brother

has had problems readjusting, like for me it's just finding people that are like me

and like, I'm usually just a year older, but I feel like there's about five more years

of maturity than the rest of my classmates so I can't really, there's no connection. I

can't describe it, that's basically it. (P7)

A few participants reported that during some of the occasions that they had spent

leisure time with their civilian counterparts they felt the need to be the mature and

responsible person in the group, for example, making sure civilian students who

consumed excess alcohol got home safely. The participants also indicated that they felt

their student peers expected them to be mature. Notably, participants' reported that taking

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care of civilian students was not always enjoyable, and at times made the participants

reluctant to take part in future outings with fellow students. One student reported he

currently lives with a few civilian students and that he plans to move to a different

apartment at the end of the semester in part because of his roommates' immaturity. He

stated,

> I end up feeling like I have to be the responsible one and take care of wasted fools
>
> so they don't drive or break up the house, you know? One of them fell over the
>
> other day and broke the dry wall! So, yeah, moving somewhere else if at all
>
> possible! (P10)

While the participants individually reported difficulty in relating to their civilian peers

because of their peers' immaturity, the participants indicated a simultaneous change in

their relationships with veterans not attending college.

How has Attending College Affected Your Relationships with Veterans Not in

College?

Several participants reported that their attending college had produced feelings of

resentment from veterans they knew who were not attending college (5). One participant

stated, "I would get the reaction every once in a while, you know what you think you're

better now because you went to college" (P5). The same participant went on to state, "the

longer a veteran goes without going to college they can become slightly embittered about

the fact that they haven't gone and done something" (P5). Several participants noted that,

ironically, some of the veterans they thought were resentful stated that they do not even

want to attend college. For example, one participant noted, "Even those who, like, they

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say they don't even want to be in college and are in a good field, [it] feels like there's maybe a little bit of resentment, I think" (P10). Other participants indicated that some veterans they knew were not ready to attend college, as stated by these participants:

> I think there's always a little bit of resentment, I really do, because not everybody is really ready for college, after getting back from deployment, or even those not really wanting to do college, but there is a certain resentment too like "hey, you're getting ahead." (P9)

> I still get calls from some of the guys in my platoon and they tell me how they're doing, I tell them how I'm doing. I mean, obviously, they want to be where I'm at, but it's really hard for vets to actually come right out of their contract into school, because they lose focus. I did a lot to prepare to come here. For some of them it's a lot harder, because just getting through the day is hard for them, never mind planning, ahead so they are very happy for me, they have a slight, like 'I hate you' undertone, because they're so jealous of that. (P8)

Some of the participants still in the military noted that they spent time with other service members during military training, but rarely at other times. There were many different reasons noted for not spending much time with other veterans, including lack of interest, not enough free time, long distances, or limited finances. Although few of the participants reported spending any time with veterans, some participants reported using social media and texting to talk with other veterans. One participant talked about the financial burden as well as distance involved in visiting veteran friends, but stated he uses social media to maintain contact:

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It's hard to go visit my friends who are stationed in like North Carolina and stuff

with gas prices and stuff like that. I feel like that has kind of put a strain up on

some of my friends relationships, but with things like Facebook and stuff like

that, text messaging and stuff it's not that hard to keep in touch. (P4)

Participant 10 commented that meeting with many veteran friends simultaneously is

difficult as they are far away and spread out across the country in his statement "I talk on

Facebook and stuff to a few guys from my unit probably three or four times a week, but

we're so scattered." Participant 11 also endorsed distance as a significant issue, stating,

"but, I keep in touch with buddies from my platoon on Facebook and stuff. We're all over

the world now so it's not like I can just go visit."

The use of social media, texting and telephoning are options that were reported to

help participants keep in contact with other veterans. None of the participants reported

having a significant change in their attitudes toward those veterans not attending college.

However, the participants' perception of the feelings of resentment from veterans not

attending college demonstrates that attending college can have a negative effect on the

participants' relationships with veterans not attending college.

Do You Know Other Veterans on Campus?

Although approximately 200 veterans were attending Radford University in the

Fall of 2012, and the presence of a student veterans group, a student veterans' research

team, and a military resource center, the majority of participants reported not knowing

any other veterans attending Radford University (6). One participant's response was, "Not

really … it's not like we have a secret code that tells us when another vet is in the area"

(P10). Almost all of the participants who reported that they knew other student veterans were involved in the student veterans group. Some of the participants who reported not knowing other student veterans indicated they believed this was in part because of living off campus. As one participant said, "I don't live on campus, I don't hang out with people who are on campus, so I have very limited access to people here on campus" (P2).

How has Your Military Status Affected Your Preparation for Classes and Study Habits?

In addition to the basic training and instruction taught to military members, there are many different fields in the military, such as language translation, computer programming, combat operations, engineering, medicine, and others. Numerous skills are inherently necessary for work in the different disciplines and learning these skills quickly and efficiently is critical for the military's high standards. Several participants reported that they utilize the techniques the military uses to teach personnel content and skills to study for their classes at Radford University (8). One participant reported:

> It's pretty much the same way that the military does it. The three ways of, at least the way that I learned it, you look at what you're going to learn, a broad overview, then in depth on what you're going to learn, and then the details. The first one is just to see what's going on, get the lay of the land, the second is to see how things interact, and the third one is making all the pieces fit in your head. And that has really helped out. (P9)

Participants frequently endorsed the aid that military training had on the ease with which they developed good study skills. Several student veterans reported that the military had

enhanced their time management skills and almost all of the participants indicated that their military service had improved their discipline. The participants noted that time management and discipline were strengths that benefited their ability to succeed academically.

What Do You Do to Cope with Stress and Have Fun?

All of the participants reported using at least one of the following strategies for coping with stress and having fun: spending time with friends (8), exercising (5), playing video games (5), participating in sports (5), engaging in outside activities (4), and reading (4). Many participants said they enjoy spending time with civilian friends who attend Radford University, frequently playing video games, running or cross-training, and participating in sports and engaging in outside activities. One participant said he liked to "hang out with friends I like to play sports, like to play volleyball a couple times a week and go hiking, [play] video games" (P1). Some participants who are still in the military and attending military training once or twice a month reported spending time with veterans after the training. A participant described a recent weekend:

> This weekend I was up at drill and we went out to a friend's house and he has a big farm and we had a barbecue, a couple of kegs of beer, about 500 shotgun rounds, some clay pigeons, that was before the beer, some target shooting, that was just a good opportunity. Other times you know it's just going to the bars hanging out, just going to people's houses and relaxing. Because a lot of these guys I don't get to see but once or twice a month. So it's just good to catch up and relax after two weeks since the last time we saw each other and we are usually all

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away from our wives and families, so it's a chance for us to do things that we

wouldn't normally do, when we have to go home to the family (P2).

The participants' descriptions of the activities time to have fun and cope with stress were

so enthusiastic, that it is likely that while beginning their careers after graduation they

will continue to engage in these pursuits.

Describe your Plans for After Graduation

Many of the participants reported having specific plans for their careers after they

graduate from Radford University. Law enforcement was the most commonly cited career

choice for the participants (5). The participants' second most frequently named career

choice was re-enlisting or requesting active duty in the military (4). Another component

to this theme is that all of the participants who reported having these career plans

specified that their interests in these careers were related to their experiences in the

military.

Law Enforcement

Many participants indicated that they plan to enter the law enforcement field after

graduation, including city, state, or federal agencies (5). One participant reported, "I've

always thought about CIA or FBI, I just got a lot of options open to me" (P6). Another

participant stated:

I'm hoping to get an internship somewhere because I'm majoring in criminal

justice, which I'm soon going to change to a minor, because out of everybody I've

talked to at national or state level, they all said that they would recommend I just

minor in it because you don't need a major to get a job, but my eventual goal, like

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later down the line I want to be in DEA. (P8)

Military Reenlistment

    Several participants stated they intended to re-enlist or request to transfer from the reserves to become full time service members. Some of the participants also noted that they would be applying to Officer Candidate School (OCS). One of the motivations for some service members to attend college is that they can become eligible to apply to OCS is achieving a bachelor's degree. As a participant stated, "once I graduate and get commissioned my reserve contract is awarded and I start a new contract as an officer" (P7). OCS graduates may qualify for cash bonuses in addition to college loan repayment. An additional advantage to graduating from Officer Candidate School is that service members are commissioned as second lieutenants, which is a higher rank with a corresponding increase in pay grade. One participant who had been in the Air Force reported his intent to re-enlist in the military despite complex circumstances:

> Provided everything goes well next week, I will officially enlist into the Army because I'm a prior service individual. And then I will go to basic training for the Army and then I'll go to OCS for the Army. And then hopefully I'll get a helicopter slot, but that's unlikely, so I'll probably end up doing something else for the Army as I'm too old to commission for the Air Force. (P2)

Graduation is the ultimate goal for student veterans and many participants noted that there are different resources that would be very beneficial to student veterans.

Is There Anything Else You Think I Should Know About Being a Student Who is Also a Veteran?

This query evoked two themes involving special services that participants thought would be beneficial for student veterans including methods for meeting other student veterans at Radford University (4) and a new student orientation and introductory classes for student veterans (4). Although there are some resources already available for student veterans at Radford University that some participants were unaware of, not all of the services the participants reported are available.

Methods for meeting and interacting with fellow student veterans

Some participants indicated that having ways to meet and become acquainted with other student veterans would be helpful: "Would help, I think, to know others who've already been at RU awhile (P10). "I think, if there was a better way to connect veterans at Radford, like a webpage…" (P7).

Orientation and introductory classes designed for student veterans

The Quest Orientation and the University 100 class were frequently described by participants as being very unhelpful and a waste of their time. Quest is the freshman orientation at Radford University, which includes a theatrical play designed to illustrate some typical scenarios that may occur in day-to-day life on campus, a student social with bowling and a disc jockey, and the option to stay overnight in a dormitory to get the sense of what living on campus will be like. The Quest orientation also provides a concurrent parent curriculum that includes joint meeting times with students so parents and students can confer about what each has learned. The participants stated that the activities involved in the Quest orientation were not appealing because they thought the activities were irrelevant to their college goals, as they were more focused on academic

achievements than social endeavors.

The goal of the University 100 class is to assist students transitioning from high school to Radford University by teaching students study skills, time management techniques, and critical thinking techniques. The University 100 also introduces students to other new students, supplies students with a peer mentor, notifies students about campus/community resources and services, and it gives students information on many other topics. Many participants stated that while in the military they developed the skills that the University 100 class is designed to teach. The only material from the Quest orientation and University 100 class that any of the participants reported as being important was the information on campus/community resources. One participant reported his feelings on the Quest Orientation and University 100 class:

> Maybe a better orientation, I went to Quest and I hated it. It felt like I was in kindergarten again and then this year I had to take, this really was frustrating, I had to take, my senior year of high school I took college English, so I was going to take the 201 as a freshman. But no, in order to take that you have to take what's called Core 201 Connections and that makes you take University 100, which was horrible. I was banging my head on the wall every day, it was a huge waste of my time. So after learning to be on my own and do all this stuff, then back in the booster seat, like a kid again and that was really frustrating. And Quest was horrible, I hated it, but I had to figure out what college was about so [pause]. It's just so dumbed down, just really frustrating. (P7)

Participants frequently noted that a different orientation and a revised University 100

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class specifically designed for veterans would be particularly beneficial. As one
participant suggested:

> It would be nice to have an orientation or something just for veterans when they
> come in … just if there was like a 30 minute class for veterans. Just to be like
> these are the groups that you can be associated with, these are events we have for
> veterans, these are resources. You know, tell people about the website, stuff like
> that, I think that would be really helpful. (P4)

Having student veterans who have been attending Radford University give a short
orientation was proposed by one participant:

> it would have been nice to have a group of student veterans to greet us, show us
> the ropes, "so here's everything." It just would've been nice to have that, because
> it's a different world you're coming into. Just a separate meeting, "veterans if you
> need some help getting used to your new surroundings, here you go." (P9)

Summary

The purpose of this study was to form a theory explaining the experiences of
veterans attending Radford University. This chapter summarized the results of the
research project. The concepts that emerged from the data analysis were connected to the
interview questions; accordingly, the themes that emerged of the experiences of veterans
on Radford University's campus were organized by the semi-structured interview
questions. Themes of student veterans' methods of disclosing their veteran status, student
veterans' perceptions of civilian peers and veterans not attending college, their awareness
of other student veterans on campus, student veterans' stress coping strategies and leisure

activities, their plans for after graduation, and the student veterans' beliefs about what

special services would be helpful to have on Radford University's campus were

reviewed. In the next chapter the implications of the results will be examined,

recommendations, suggestions for further research and limitations of the study will be

offered.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The goal of the current study was to use grounded theory methodology to investigate the experiences of veterans attending Radford University. In this chapter, the results of the study are discussed and related to the original research questions. Next, the themes that emerged from the data are reviewed in connection to existing literature; then the implications of the study findings are explained, and the limitations of the research and directions for future research are addressed.

Research Questions

Many veterans of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) are entering or returning to college after active military service. Limited research exists about the experiences of student veterans and how their military experiences influence their choices about activities and future plans. The research that does speak to these topics is focused on large four year institutions or community colleges, leaving a significant gap of the experiences of student veterans attending midsized four year liberal arts universities. In order to address this limitation in the research, two questions guided this project. The discussion of the relationships between the themes revealed in this study and available research are organized by the following research questions:

1. What are the social experiences of veterans attending Radford University?

2. How have the military experiences of veterans attending Radford University affected their individual approaches to being a student and

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future plans?

The themes that emerged were closely connected to specific interview questions so these questions are used as the heading of each theme.

Research Question 1: What are the social experiences of veterans attending Radford University?

How Would Faculty and Other Students Know Your Status as a Veteran?

Each student veteran commented on how their veteran status played a part in their relationships with civilian students. Many participants stated they passively revealed their military status through military insignia on personal items, but other student veterans reported not revealing their veteran status unless there was a specific reason to do so. This is similar to Ackerman et al.'s (2009) finding that student veterans did not frequently reveal their military service and only noted it in classes when they believed it was appropriate.

Describe Fellow Students' Attitudes About You as a Student Who is Also a Veteran

Some student veterans in the current study believed that their disclosure of their military status had no bearing on their civilian counterparts' perception of them, but the student veterans did not indicate whether they felt the indifference of their civilian colleagues was a negative or positive. The lack of consideration of a student veterans' military status could be construed as a negative because it may be a lack of affirmation of a part of the participants' identities (Catherall, 1986). This perception of lack of acknowledgement can skew the attitudes of student veterans' toward civilian students. Similar to the participants in the current study, many service members consider the

military to be part of their identity and a piece of their heritage of which they are very proud (Hoge, 2010). Zinger and Cohen (2010) reported that several of their participants struggled to cope with a sense that while the war continued overseas people in the United States seemed to have lost awareness of the war and were not only not concerned with deployed military service members, but also had no particular awareness or interest in the veterans who had returned. Support of a student veteran's military status, as part of his identity, can encourage friendship and as a result feelings of social support and a sense of belonging (Weisz & Wood, 2005). Conversely, when participants do not think an element of their identity is affirmed they may feel isolated (Weisz & Wood, 2005). As noted by Kirkland (1995) lack of recognition of a service member's military service can impede reintegration into civilian society. However, some participants in the current study noted that they do not want to be treated differently because of their veteran status and this could be reducing some of the negative result of the possible feeling their military identity is not being affirmed. Rumann and Hamrick (2010) also found that veterans do not want to be singled out and wanted civilians to consider them the same as any other individual. It is important to recognize that although the participants in the current study can only articulate their estimation of their civilian peers' attitudes as supportive or unimportant, the student veterans' perceptions could help or hurt their ability to accomplish educational goals and appreciate social interactions with their civilian counterparts.

Describe Your Attitudes Toward Your Fellow Students

Student veterans' assessment of their civilian peers' opinions of them can affect

their feelings and thoughts about their civilian colleagues. An additional component that impacts the participants' attitudes towards their civilian peers is their awareness of the differences in experiences they have had compared to their civilian counterparts. Similar to the findings of many research studies, nearly all of the participants in the current study specifically reported believing that their experiences were very different from those of their civilian classmates (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008; Grimes et al., 2011; Wheeler, 2012; Zinger & Cohen, 2010). According to DiRamio et al. (2008), many student veterans find that the differences in their experiences from civilian students make relating to civilian students exasperating.

Cultural disparity. Some of the cultural experiences and attitudes that student veterans have had that civilians have not include living with a clear chain of command, distinct orders from higher ranking personnel, an expectation of consistent excellence, unfailing respect for higher ups, strict structure of daily activities, and intense loyalty to their peers (Hall, 2008; Wheeler, 2012; Zinger & Cohen, 2010). The military service members' cultural experiences are in sharp contrast with those of civilian students living with an ambiguous hierarchy, undefined assignments, a lackadaisical attitude toward responsibilities, uneven levels of respect for professors and faculty, few time commitments, and no particular connection with many peers. The disparity in the recent experiences of the student veterans and civilian students begins to explain the reason for the marked incongruence in the two groups' current experiences.

Immaturity. From the theme of dissimilar experiences emerged the subthemes of the immaturity of civilian students and the out of proportion reactions to stress among

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civilian students (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). The gap in maturity between college students and student veterans often felt was frequently attributed to their different experiences from their student colleagues and this made it difficult to relate to them. The sense that having differences in their felt realities made them more mature is similar to Jinkens' (2009) finding that what defines nontraditional students is not their age, but life changing events that color their approach to being a student as well as everyday life. These life altering events in civilian nontraditional students may include getting married, having children, and paying a mortgage, which are all things that student veterans may be experiencing. Thus, services that are tailored specifically to nontraditional students may also be of benefit to student veterans. However, the military experiences of student veterans likely make some of their needs different than civilian nontraditional students. DiRamio et al.'s (2008) study established as a result of the experience of military service, student veterans are a special needs population, which could make essential some services designed to meet the specific needs of student veterans. For example, understanding and obtaining military educational benefits is a need that is unique to student veterans. Further, research has shown that student veterans find they relate better to other student veterans, so offering ways for student veterans to meet each other would also be a service specific to the student veteran population (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009).

The finding in the current study that student veterans thought military service had developed their maturity to a level above their classmates is akin to Newby et al's (2005) finding that service members sensed that they had gained an increased level of maturity from their military service. In Rumann and Hamrick's (2010) study, participants stated

that their deployments had enhanced their maturity in many ways. According to these student veterans, their ability to apply themselves had improved because college was easy compared to what they lived through while deployed (Rumann & Hammrick, 2010). A student veteran in the current study echoed this sentiment concerning maturity in his statement, "this is a vacation."

A few participants stated that on some of the occasions that they had spent leisure time with student peers, they felt the need to be the mature and responsible person in the group, for example, making sure students who over imbibed alcohol got home safely. Of note is that the participants' reported taking care of their fellow students was not always enjoyable, and at times made the participants uninterested in attending future events or living with civilian students.

Three participants in the current study indicated they were not interested in developing friends or social support among their civilian peers and the reasons listed for this choice included their own lack of time and their peers' immaturity. Participants in the current study indicated that in addition to differences in maturity there is a divergence between themselves and the way their civilian counterparts react to stress. Similar to their attribution of having developed more maturity in response to their lived realities, participants indicated that their reactions to stress were related to their military service.

Stressors. The student veterans stated that they often felt that their civilian peers' reactions to papers and exams were disproportionate to the real world significance of these stressors. One of the stressors that student veterans' have faced and their colleagues have not is basic training. The demanding nature of the physical training and emotional

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strain that service members bear in basic training is overwhelming, so much so that many individuals "wash out," meaning they fail basic training and quit the military (Gilmore, 2001). The "gas chamber" is an example of basic training's trials that create intense physical and mental stress. In this chemical warfare test, each service member wears a gas mask in a room where tear gas is released and the service member is required to take off the mask, recite name, rank, and social security and then, leaving the gas mask off, walk out of the room without blinking. The gas chamber test is designed to make certain each recruit can put on a gas mask effectively; however, the test is also extremely physically and mentally taxing, as the tear gas causes the service member's lungs and eyes to fill with mucous, intense coughing, itching and sometimes chemical burns, profuse salivation, confusion and disorientation (Karagama, Newton, & Newbegin, 2003). The pressures of basic training are extreme; however, combat and the threat of combat are clearly more daunting situations than training exercises and many student veterans have also endured these realities (Alexander & Klein, 2003). Participants reported that their civilian counterparts frequently became overwrought about finishing a paper on time or passing an exam; however, many participants related that they do not develop anxiety over school assignments as they have seen and experienced worse situations during their time in the military. Some student veterans in the current study reported that their civilian peers' overreactions to academic stress made relating to them more difficult relate and less desirable to spend time with.

    Social connections for student veterans. The finding in the current study that some veterans were not interested in socializing with other students is similar to Wheeler

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(2012) and Grime et al.'s (2011) studies that reported a few student veterans purposefully chose not to engage with other students. The student veterans' disinclination to spending time with other students may cause them feelings of isolation, which is similar to Ackerman et al.'s (2009) finding that social isolation was a common theme among student veterans. This lack of significant social engagement with their civilian counterparts could indicate that the participants' are feeling a lack of social support in the academic setting. A component of social support is a sense of belonging, which is feeling like an important part of a group (Grimes et al., 2011; Hagerty, Lynch-Sauer, Patusky, Bouwsema, & Collier, 1992). Research has demonstrated that students who had few social interactions with students outside of class have lower levels of sense of belonging and this is probably also true for student veterans (Hurtado & Carter, 1997).

Do You Know Other Veterans on Campus?

Many participants stated they do not know any other student veterans at Radford University and participants tended to attribute this to limited contact with other students due to living off campus. Laffaye, Cavella, Drescher, and Rosen (2008) found that veterans consistently reported fellow veterans as their strongest support system, and extrapolating on this finding, it is likely that student veterans would also gain significant social support from other student veterans. This hypothesis is supported by Grimes et al. (2011) who found that participants reported seeking out other student veterans because of their similar experiences and that made the participants feel more at ease. Without knowing other veterans on campus, student veterans are left wanting for a component of their overall support system.

Some participants in the current study noted that they would consider being more active in campus life, but did not know about many student groups on campus. DiRamio et al. (2008) observed that many student veterans were interested in an organization for student veterans, but none were available on the campuses researched in the study. Many participants in the current study were surprised when the interviewer stated that there was an active student veterans' group on campus, the VSO, which will be discussed further in the chapter. Some participants in Wheeler's (2012) study also revealed that they did not know what student groups were available at their college. Many of the participants in the current study leave campus immediately after class, which is similar to findings in Wheeler's (2012) study. Student veterans' lack of time on campus may be one reason that they do not know about social clubs and purpose oriented organizations on campus. This unawareness of activities implies that for student veterans interested in joining in campus activities, advertising specifically targeting student veterans could encourage their engagement in on campus activities.None of the students in the current study specifically noted feeling isolated; however, most stated they did not spend time with civilian peers or veterans not attending college and reported that they did not know other veterans attending Radford University. Although the participants in the current study reported low levels of social support in several facets of their lives, they may be receiving social support in other areas, such as family or community. The lack of a direct theme of feelings of isolation in the current study is in contrast with the many student veterans in Ackerman et al.'s (2009) study noted that they are having difficulty resuming their relationships with family and friends, resulting in lower levels of social support. Zinger

& Cohen (2010) also found that student veterans struggled to reconnect with family and loved ones after returning from their military service. One participant in the Zinger and Cohen (2010) study stated that although she recognized that her perception and world view were altered during her time away, she did not anticipate the changes in her friends. Regardless of the student veterans' current level of social support, providing further avenues for the development of social support on campus can only further the benefits they garner from it.

Importantly, several participants in the Ackerman et al. (2009) study reported relating more to fellow student veterans and associated this with the similarities in their experiences. In Rumann and Hamrick's (2009) study student veterans reported they felt knowing other student veterans validated their military service and had made the transition to college easier. The participants in the current study strongly endorsed an interest in meeting with other veterans, which may be indicative of their feeling that they are better able to relate to other student veterans.

Student veterans without social support are missing its benefits, including greater resilience, self-worth, grades, self-efficacy, academic competence, and lower risk of attrition than those students with high levels of social support (Freeman, Anderman, & Jensen, 2007; Pittman & Richmond, 2007; Wilcox, Winn, & Fyvie-Gauld, 2005. However, the aforementioned advantages or lack thereof did not emerge as a theme in this study and it may be that these are issues among student veterans, but did not arise because the current study did not specifically address the listed benefits.

How has Attending College Affected Your Relationships with Veterans Not in College?

A theme in the current study that expands on the current student veterans literature as it has not been reported in the findings of the other available studies was that student veterans felt attending college has produced feelings of resentment in veterans they knew who were not attending college. Some participants noted that they perceived resentment from a few veterans who seemed to equate the participants' college status to the participants feeling better than their peers, were not interested in attending college themselves. A few participants reported that some veterans returning from deployment were not ready for college and may resent them for being able to attend college soon after their return from deployment.

Several of the participants still in the military noted that they spend time with other service members during military training, but rarely at other times. There were many different reasons noted for not spending much time with other veterans, including lack of interest, not enough free time, long distances, or limited finances. Although few of the participants reported spending any time with veterans, some participants reported using social media and texting to talk with other veterans.

None of the participants reported having any significant change in their attitudes toward those veterans not attending college; however, the obstacles to spending time with other veterans and the participants' assessment of the feelings of resentment from veterans not attending college demonstrates that attending college can have a negative effect on the participants' relationships with other veterans. Chhuon & Hudley (2008)

noted that continuing relationships with the students' previous community and having a sense of belonging are both important for diverse students' successful transition to college, which indicates student veterans need additional social support from other avenues to compensate for their loss of some social support from their previous community. Fostering student veterans' fellowship through social media, such as Facebook webpages, is one opportunity for adding social support another would be encouraging the student veterans' development of friendships with other veterans on campus.

Is There Anything Else You Think I Should Know about Being a Student Who is Also a Veteran?

The social and academic experiences of student veterans are unique in part because of their veteran status, so it is not surprising that the theme that emerged from this query was the participants' desire for services specifically designed for student veterans. Many participants noted a need for resources that provide methods for student veterans to meet each other. An indication that the participants in the current study would like to develop the student veteran piece of their support system is that several participants said there should be a veterans' student group. As previously noted, several participants were surprised when the researcher informed them about the Veterans Student Organization. Similar to DiRamio et al.'s (2008) research, several of the current study's participants reported an interest in joining veteran student groups. Zinger and Cohen (2010) reported a benefit of a campus student veterans' organization in that student veterans felt supported by the college veterans club and they appreciated the

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opportunity to share similar experiences. Interested participants in the current study were provided with information to connect them with the VSO. As aforementioned, the majority of participants who reported knowing other veterans cited the Veterans Student Organization as the reason they are familiar with other veterans at Radford University.

The VSO at Radford University was founded in 2007; however, the group became inactive a year later. The VSO group became active again in the spring of 2012 and in the fall of 2012 there were approximately 15 members. Many of the VSO members were military dependents and individuals interested in the veteran population. The mission of the VSO includes providing a social group to assist student veterans in integrating into college life, promoting continued veteran companionship, as well as conveying important information about available resources in the community and on campus. In addition to the VSO there are three other veterans' supports at Radford University, the Military Resource Center and the fledgling groups, SALUTE and Warriors at Radford University.

The Military Resource Center at Radford University was created by Radford University to offer student veterans assistance in their transition to college and seeks to accomplish that goal by presenting student veterans information about campus and community resources as well as linking student veterans to the VSO. Although the goals of the Military Resource Center are similar to those of the VSO the Military Resource Center has the advantages of being funded by the university and having an office located on campus. These advantages mean that the Military Resource Center is not susceptible to becoming inactive because leadership positions become vacant and go unfilled, which has happened to the VSO in the past and the MRC is more accessible as it is open during

the day a few times a week, unlike the VSO which meets once a month in the evening.

James Whorley, who is a transition coach with the MRC and the current VSO president, reported that the MRC is underutilized and that the VSO has low levels of involvement. He supported the current study's results that many Radford University student veterans are not aware of the MRC and VSO and stated that increased advertising and other efforts to increase visibility could improve student veterans' awareness of this valuable service and campus group and thus encourage greater utilization of the MRC and increase participation in the VSO.

Since the completion of the interviews two other veteran related groups have been established: Warriors of RU (WRU) and SALUTE National Honor Society. The formation of two new groups since this study's data collection was completed confirms the study's result that student veterans are looking for ways to connect with other student veterans. Warriors of RU's purpose is to give military-oriented students of Radford University the opportunity to physically advance themselves, develop camaraderie, and create a more military friendly campus at Radford University. The second group is SALUTE National Honor Society, which is a chapter of the larger organization which was established in 2009 at Colorado State University. The acronym SALUTE stands for the following values that this society strives to uphold: Service, Academics, Leadership, Unity, Tribute, and Excellence. The organization is designed to develop camaraderie between like-minded academic scholars and provides recognition to those military and student veterans who achieve a 3.0 grade point average.

Another special service that participants reported would be beneficial was a

modified orientation and University 100 class adapted to meet student veterans' needs. Many of the participants in the current study stated some required services at Radford University were not helpful and a "waste of their time;" these services included the Quest New Student Orientation and the University 100 class. In the Wheeler (2012) study participants also reported an orientation they attended that was designed for traditional students was unnecessary and a poor use of their time. An orientation expressly for student veterans would provide an opportunity for the campus and community resources, like the Veterans Student Organization, the Military Resource Center and the local Veterans of Foreign Wars chapter to be described and for representatives of the groups to be present for questions and introductions. Perhaps most importantly, a student veteran orientation would also present a chance for student veterans to meet each other.

Some of the goals of the Quest orientation are similar to University 100, such as developing relationships with other students. Quest is the freshman orientation at Radford University which includes a theatrical play designed to illustrate some typical scenarios that may occur in day-to-day life on campus, a student social with bowling and a disc jockey, and the option to stay overnight in a dormitory to get the sense of what living on campus will be like. The Quest orientation also provides a concurrent parent curriculum that includes joint meeting times with students so parents and students can confer about what each has learned. The participants stated that the activities involved in the Quest orientation were not appealing because they felt the activities were irrelevant to their college goals as they were more focused on academic achievements than social endeavors. In addition to the relationship goals of the Quest orientation, University 100

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includes study skills, time management techniques, and critical thinking techniques; however, these are skills that the participants reported they learned in the military. As the student veterans have already developed competence in the goals of the University 100 class, it would be appropriate for the University 100 class to no longer be a requirement for student veterans and could be replaced with another class that addresses topics that are more relevant to student veterans; such as methods of meeting other veterans, information about university and community resources, and transitional support as they move from the military to college. Dispensing with the prerequisite of University 100 and developing a class and an orientation specifically geared toward veterans would improve Radford University's efforts to create as veteran-friendly campus as possible.

Many universities already offer classes specifically designed for veterans; for example, Arizona State University (ASU) provides the class: Student Success for Veterans, which gives Freshmen and transfer student veterans the opportunity to meet one another, informs them of university resources, and teaches student veterans about transitional support. San Jose State University also has a class intended for veterans, with goals similar to that of ASU's named: Warriors at Home: Succeeding in College, Life, and Relationship. Other universities that offer classes exclusively for veterans include the University of Kentucky and Valencia College in Orlando.

Research Question 2: How have the military experiences of veterans attending Radford University affected their individual approaches to being a student and future plans?

How has Your Military Status Affected Your Preparation for Classes and Study Habits?

Several participants stated that applying the techniques the military uses to teach personnel content and skills to study for their classes at Radford University has been very helpful. The current study expands on the literature in that several participants detailed the specific method of learning they acquired in the military that they now use in their academic studies. Additionally, many participants indicated that the military has taught them responsibility and focus as well as a drive to complete their assignments in a timely manner and above satisfactory quality (Wheeler, 2012). These characteristics are similar to the results of the study by Newby et al. (2005), which indicated that student veterans' approaches to college are purposeful and serious. Additionally, the findings of the current study were very similar to the student veterans in the Wheeler (2012) study that indicated their military service had a positive effect on their schoolwork in that they applied the attitudes they had toward military duties to their academic assignments and as such practiced discipline in studying, completed schoolwork prior to relaxation, and felt driven to finish assignments promptly and to the best of their abilities. The constructive influence of military service noted by the participants will likely carry over into their future careers.

Career Choice

Law enforcement was the most commonly cited career choice for the participants. The participants' second most frequently named career preference was re-enlisting or requesting active duty in the military. All of the participants who reported having these

career plans specified that their interests in these careers were related to their experiences in the military. While student veterans are still in college, providing avenues for social support to them is important to their educational achievement and mental health. Several participants noted that it would be helpful to them in successfully graduating and beginning their careers if certain resources, including access to better social support, were available to them during their time at Radford University.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Self-report and minimization may occur when individuals are queried about topics they are uncomfortable discussing and they lessen their involvement with the activity or situation they perceive as being negative. Minimization may have occurred in this study when participants were asked about what they do to cope with stress and have fun as well as whether alcohol relieves their stress. Both of these topics may touch on subjects such as substance use that may disconcert the participant and he may have decided to dismiss or minimize his use of alcohol or other activities he was embarrassed to disclose. Minimization is an obstacle that the majority of research studies face; however, there is some evidence that the use of focus groups may lessen the influence of minimization so future studies may consider focus groups as part of their research (May & Foxcroft, 1995). As research has shown veterans tend to relate more with other veterans it may be that focus groups would increase participants' comfort levels and so lessen their feeling the need to minimize (Laffaye, Cavella, Drescher, & Rosen, 2008). Another way that minimization can be reduced is through assessing mental health and substance abuse issues with confidential online surveys and this would be beneficial to future research.

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The current study's semi-structured interview did not include direct questions about some aspects of student veterans' experiences and as such themes that other studies found and the current study did not may exist, but did not emerge because of the lack of direct questions on those topics. Military benefits, such as health and education benefits, were not directly addressed and although the interviewer queried several of the participants regarding benefits, not all of the participants were asked about benefits so the data gained from the queries could not be recorded in the results section. Many participants did report thoughts and feelings about benefits, and given that many student veterans depend on their benefits to pay their tuition, thus affording them brighter career prospects, it is important for future studies to address benefits. Mental illness also was not directly approached in this study, and because other studies have found this to be an issue among student veterans, mental illness is an area for future research (Ackerman et al., 2009; Barry, 2012; Rudd, Goulding, & Bryan, 2011). Although some studies have indicated that student veterans struggle with reestablishing and maintaining their social support systems off campus, the current study did not explore the topic of off campus social support systems in depth so, future research would benefit from examining how much social support is received off campus and from what aspects in the community. Furthermore, the current study did not probe for student veterans' perceptions of whether they see their age as a bigger factor in their experiences on campus than their military status and analyzing this in future research could assist researchers in understanding how veterans' experiences are influenced not only by their veterans status, but also by their status as non-traditional students in terms of age. Additionally, recognizing how student

veterans needs overlap those of non-traditional students could assist schools in avoiding duplicating services.

One limitation was that the amount of data gained from the semi-structured interviews was less than anticipated and this may be related to the design of the interview and the communication style of many service members. When the semi-structured interview was developed for this study it was estimated that the interviews would last approximately 45 to 60 minutes; however, in the data gathering phase, the researcher found that the interviews tended to be 30 minutes or less in length. The communication in the military is typically concise and to the point so many service members do not offer elaboration on answers unless prompted to do so (Pavlicin, 2003; Sayers, 2009). The participants' responses to the interview questions did not appear to be deliberately truncated; however, it is likely that future research would gain additional material from student veterans by providing the interviewer with additional prompts for each question in the semi-structured interview in order to elicit more information.

Recommendations

The results of the current study in the context of other available literature suggest the following recommendations would improve the experiences of student veterans attending Radford University.

1. Student veterans would benefit from awareness of the MRC, VSO, and other veterans' supports and this could be accomplished through targeted advertising and marketing on the Radford University website and the internal campus television system in residence halls and school buildings. Many student

veterans are majoring in Criminal Justice, so directing advertising to

individuals in that major would increase the number of veterans aware of the

veterans' supports on campus. Additionally, the MRC's visibility could be

improved by working with the Registrar and Admissions offices that have

direct contact with student veterans.

2. An orientation specifically designed for student veterans would be

   advantageous and far more valuable to student veterans than the current Quest

   orientation, which was created for traditional students.

3. A University 100 course developed for student veterans would assist new

   student veterans in learning about and accessing student veteran campus

   resources.

4. Student veterans could gain valuable assistance from faculty, staff, and

   administrators receiving training about the issues that confront some student

   veterans and the resources that are available to student veterans.

Conclusion

Operation Iraqi Freedom ended in December 2011 and the combat engagement in

Operation Enduring Freedom is scheduled to end in 2013. As the military role of the

United States in Iraq and Afghanistan is drawing to a close, many veterans are returning

to the United States and entering college. The existing research on student veterans'

experiences at college does not explore the experiences of veterans attending college at a

midsized liberal arts university, and this study was designed to fill that gap in the

research. Some of the themes that were revealed include the student veterans' methods of

disclosing their veteran status to individuals on Radford University's campus, student veterans' perceptions of fellow students' attitudes and veterans not attending college's attitudes, the student veterans' attitudes towards other students, student veterans' awareness of other veterans on campus, student veterans' ways of coping with stress, their plans for after college, and the student veterans' thoughts about what special services would be helpful to have on Radford University's campus. The themes of student veterans' lived realities discovered in this study can inform future quantitative research on student veterans and apprise college administrators and college counseling centers of the needs and strengths of the veterans entering college so they may provide for the student veterans' needs and encourage their strengths.

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APPENDIX A

DEMOGRAPHICS

Participant Number_____

1. Age: ___

2. Sex: _____

3. Race (Please mark any that you identify as): Hispanic or Latino   Not Hispanic
   or Latino
   American Indian or Alaska Native   Asian   Black or African-American
   Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander   White/Caucasian

4. Branch of Service: _____

5. Deployment Location(s): _____

6. Deployment date(s): _____

7. Anticipated duration of deployment: _____

8. Actual length of deployment:_____

9. Return date(s): _____

10. Years in military service: _____

11. Highest Rank Attained: _____

12. Year enrolled at Radford University: _____

13. Current Military Status: _____

         Type of Discharge: _____

14. Marital Status: _____

15. Number of children and their ages: _____

16. Employment status: Full time   Part time

17. Number of hours enrolled in this semester: ____

18. Is this your first time attending college: yes   no

If not, was your previous college experience interrupted by deployment(s)?

APPENDIX B

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

If the numbered question does not elicit the information in the prompts following that number, utilize the prompts.

1. People have varied experiences when they enter and attend college. Please tell me about your experiences as a veteran on a college campus.
   a. Describe how being a veteran has affected your social interactions with other students.
      i. Do you reveal that you're a veteran?
         1. Describe how others would know that you are a veteran.
      ii. Describe fellow students' attitudes about you as a student who is also a veteran.
      iii. Tell me about your attitudes regarding your fellow students?
      iv. Do you spend time with students outside of class? How would you describe your experiences spending time with students outside of class?

   b. Describe your social interactions with the faculty.
      i. Do your professors know that you're a veteran? [If so, how do they know you're a veteran]?
      ii. Describe your perception of your professors' attitudes toward you as a student who is also a veteran.

   c. How has attending school affected your interactions with your significant other, children or other loved ones?

   d. How has attending college affected your relationship with veterans not attending college?
      i. Do you know other veterans on campus?
      ii. Do you spend time with the veterans you know from school off campus?

   e. How often do you spend time with other veterans?
      i. What do you do while spending time with other veterans?

2. How has your military experience affected your approach to being a student?
   a. Probe for positives and negatives

3. Tell me how you study and prepare for classes.
   a. How have your study habits and preparation been influenced by being a veteran?

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4. Describe to me what you do to cope with stress.
    a. Have your choices in activities been influenced by your status as a veteran?
    b. How often do you participate in these activities?
    c. In what ways do these activities interfere with your social and academic life?
        i. Do you ever drink or use drugs to cope with the stress?

5. Tell me what you do to have fun.
    a. Have your choices in activities been influenced by your status as a veteran?
    b. How often do you participate in these activities?
    c. In what ways do these activities interfere with your social and academic life?

6. What are your plans for after graduation?
    a. Were these plans influenced by being a veteran?

7. Is there anything else you think I should know about being a student who is also a veteran?

INFORMED CONSENT
Radford University

You are being asked to participate in a confidential research study. The researchers for this study will provide you with a copy of this form for you to keep for your reference. The study will be described to you and any questions you may have regarding the study will be answered by the researcher. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may choose to not participate without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Title of Research: Veterans on Campus

Researcher(s): Alexandra M. Herren, M.S., and Valerie Stephens Leake, Ph.D.

What is the purpose of this study? This study will examine the experiences of veterans in college.

What will you be asked to do if you participate in this study? If you choose to be in the study, you will be asked to participate in an interview lasting approximately 60-90 minutes (depending on how much you have to say), during which you will be asked questions about your experiences as a student who is also a veteran.

What are the possible risks? This study has no more physical risk than you may find in daily life. However, it is possible that some questions during the interview could bring about uncomfortable thoughts or feelings. If this occurs, a referral to Student Counseling Services or other confidential resources will be made available to you.

What are the possible benefits to you? There is a possibility that you will have positive feelings as a result of describing your experiences in the interview. There are no other known benefits associated with participation in this study.

Are there any costs or compensation associated with being a part of this study? There are no costs to you for being in this study. There is no payment for you taking part in this study.

How can you withdraw from this study and who should you call if you have questions? You can choose not to be in this study. If you decide to be in this study, you may choose not to answer certain questions or not to be involved in parts of this study. You may also choose to stop being in this study at any time during the interview without any penalty to you. Your choice to participate or not in this study will not affect your current or future relationship with Radford University as a whole or the Psychology Department in particular. If you have any questions about the study or wish to withdraw

from this study for any reason, you should contact the principal investigator: Alexandra Herren, M.S., at aherren@radford.edu or (540)831-5361.

This study has been approved by the Radford University Institutional Review Board for the Review of Human Subjects Research. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or if you have complaints or concerns about the research, please contact the Vice Provost, Radford University at (540)831-6415.

How will your privacy and confidentiality be protected? If you decide to be in this study, what you tell us will be kept private unless we are required by law to tell. Any written records will be coded with an identification number and kept separate from this consent form in a locked box in a locked file cabinet. We will present the results of this study, but your name will not be linked in any way to what we present.

Audio Recording: In order to ensure accuracy, the interview will be audio recorded. The audio recording of the interview will be transcribed and after being examined for accuracy the audio recording will be destroyed. During the study, the recordings and transcripts will be kept in a locked box in a locked filing cabinet.

Do you consent to being recorded? Please initial below.

_____   _____

      Yes   No

After the interview Alexandra Herren will ask if you have any veteran colleagues who attend Radford University who might be interested in taking part in this study. If you do know student veterans at RU who might like to participate, would you agree to put us in touch with them by allowing us to contact them through the mail and reference you by name? If possible we would appreciate you advising your friend that he or she will be receiving a letter from Ms. Herren about the current research study.

If you have student veteran friends you would like to refer, would you allow us to use your name as a reference when we contact them? Please initial below.

_____   _____

    Yes   No

If you have questions now about this study, ask before you sign this form.

If you have any questions later, you may talk with Valerie Stephens Leake, Ph.D. or Alexandra Herren.

This study was approved by the Radford University Committee for the Review of Human

Subjects Research. If you have questions about your rights as a research participant or if you have complaints or concerns about the research, please contact the Vice Provost at (540)831-6415.

You have been informed of this study's purpose, procedures, possible benefits and risks and you have received a copy of this form. You have been given the opportunity to ask questions before you sign, and you have been told that you can ask other questions at any time. You voluntarily agree to participate in this study. By signing this form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights.

If all of your questions have been answered and you would like to take part in this study, then please sign below.

_____

Signature of Participant   Date

_____

Printed name and signature of person obtaining consent   Date

I/We have explained the study to the person signing above, have allowed an opportunity for questions, and have answered all of his/her questions. I/We believe that the participant understands this information.

_____

Signature of Researcher(s)   Date

Table 1

Demographics

Participant	Age	Sex	Race	Marital Status	Children	Employment Status	Military Branch	Deployment Location	Deployment Dates
1	26	M	W	S	0	Part time	Army National Guard (NG)	Iraq	2007-2008
2	29	M	W	M	4	Part time	Air Force NG	Germany / Iraq	2006-2010
3	25	M	W	M	1	Part time	Army	Iraq	2006-2007 & 2008-2009
4	26	M	W	M	0	Part time	Marine Corps	Iraq	2007-2008
5	38	M	W	M	2	Part time	Army	Germany / Iraq	1992-1994
6	22	M	W	S	0	Part time	Army NG	Afghanistan	2011-2012
7	19	M	W	S	0	Part time	Marine Corps Reserve	N/A	N/A
8	25	M	H	S	0	None	Marine Corps	Middle East	2010 & 2011
9	29	M	W	S	0	None	Army Reserves	N/A	N/A
10	24	M	W	S	0	Part time	Army	Iraq	2009
11	24	M	W	S	0	Part time	Army NG	Afghanistan	2009

Table 1 Continued

Demographics

Participant	Anticipated Duration of Deployment	Length of Deployment	Years in Military Service	Highest Rank Attained	Current Military Status	Discharge Type	Currently Enrolled Credit Hours
1	12 months	15 months	7	Sergeant	National Guard	N/A	6
2	N/A	N/A	12	Sergeant	National Guard	N/A	13
3	12 months & 12 months	12 months & 15 months	6	Sergeant	Separated	Honorable	19
4	5 – 7 months	7 months	4	Lance Corporal	Inactive Reserve	Honorable	15
5	18 months	18 months	3	Private First Class	Separated	Honorable / Medical	6
6	12 months	9 months	3	Sergeant	National Guard	N/A	12
7	N/A	N/A	1	Lance Corporal	Reserves	N/A	17
8	7 – 9 months & 7 – 9 months	7 months & 7 months	4	Lance Corporal	Separated	Honorable	17
9	N/A	N/A	8	2nd Lieutenant	Separated	Honorable	16
10	9 months	12 months	3	Sergeant	Separated	Honorable	12
11	9 – 10 months	12 months	4	Sergeant	National Guard	N/A	16

Table 2

Interview Themes

Theme	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7	P8	P9	P10	P11	Total
What are the social experiences of veterans attending Radford University?												
Student veterans reveal their veteran status in class	x			x		x			x	x	x	6
Student veterans reveal their veteran status by using items with military insignia		x	x		x	x	x				x	6
Student veterans reveal their veteran status to professors in order to explain possible absences due to military obligations	x	x				x	x			x		5
Student veterans' perception of civilian students attitudes toward student veterans - Positive	x		x	x	x	x			x			6
Student veterans' perception of civilian students attitudes toward student veterans - Indifferent		x					x		x	x	x	5
Student veterans state civilian students have had different experiences	x	x	x	x	x			x	x	x	x	9
Student veterans perceive civilian students as immature			x		x		x			x	x	5
Student veterans report veterans not attending college are resentful of student veterans					x			x	x	x	x	5
Student veterans state they know other student veterans solely through the Veterans Student Organization	x	x	x	x								4
Student veterans do not know other student veterans					x		x	x	x	x	x	6
Student veterans cope with stress and have fun by spending time with friends	x	x	x	x			x	x	x		x	8
Student veterans cope with stress and have fun by playing video games	x			x					x	x	x	5

Table 2 Continued

Interview Themes

	C1	C2	C3	C4	C5	C6	C7	C8	C9	C10	C11	Total
Student veterans cope with stress and have fun by engaging in outside activities	x	x	x	x								4
Student veterans cope with stress and have fun by exercising					x	x		x		x	x	5
Student veterans cope with stress and have fun by playing sports	x		x		x	x					x	5
Student veterans cope with stress and have fun by reading					x	x		x		x		4
How have the military experiences of veterans attending Radford University affected their individual approaches to being a student and future plans?												
Student veterans plan to re-enlist or become active duty after graduation		x			x	x				x		4
Student veterans plan to join law enforcement after graduation	x				x		x			x	x	5
Student veterans utilize study skills they learned in the military		x	x	x		x	x		x	x	x	8
Student veterans report having gained discipline from their military experience				x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	8
Student veterans gained time management skills from their military experience		x					x		x	x		4
Student veterans want services specifically tailored to their needs, such as new student veteran orientation and University 100 for student veterans class			x				x	x	x			4

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