

HUA! HEARD, UNDERSTOOD, ACKNOWLEDGED: UNDERSTANDING THE
IDENTITIES AND EXPERIENCES OF WOMEN STUDENT VETERANS

by

JENNIFER BRANNON

(Under the Direction of Merrily Dunn)

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the identities and experiences of women student veterans through their narratives. This research advances the knowledge of women student veterans in college and the practice of student affairs professionals serving them by providing insight into this group of women. In this study, ten women student veterans shared stories of their experiences joining the military and attending college, the influence of military service on their lives, and the identities that shape who they are as women at this time in their lives. Ten semi-structured interview questions were asked of each participant, each of whom had been enrolled in college at least two semesters, had served in the military on or after September 11, 2001, was 18 years old or older, and identified as female. The study focused on the research questions: How does the identity status of women veterans, as measured by Josselson's theory of identity development in women (1996), affect how they experience college and how do the experiences of women student veterans in the military and in college influence their identity as women? Guided by her, this study provides insights that women student veterans fit within all four identity statuses, and how they experience college and their

identities are understood through the application of Josselson's theory. This study found that, although these women student veterans' stories reflect the four identity statuses of Josselson's theory, they were also all different. Their life, military, and college experiences shaped their lives, and who they are as women, and all agreed that their military service had an impact on their lives. This research advances the knowledge and understanding of this growing population of student veterans.

INDEX WORDS: Women, student, veteran, identities, Post 9/11 GI Bill, military, Josselson, college, spouse, female, servicemembers, veteran services.

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BS, The University of Georgia, 1994

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A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2016

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to the women of the United States Armed Services and
to my dad, who would have been so proud.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This journey has reminded me of the poem *The Road Not Taken* by Robert Frost (1916), “Two roads diverged in a wood, and I – / I took the one less traveled by, / and that has made all the difference.” I will never forget the support and encouragement I have received by so many as I traveled down this road; most notably from my husband, Mike, and my boys, Carter and Brady, who were by my side throughout this journey. Their love and understanding and countdown skills have gotten me through this experience. I look forward to the adventures we can have together now that this adventure is over - Aloha! I am grateful for the on-going love, unwavering support, and tremendous patience of my family and friends throughout this process. It gave me great peace to know you were on my side even when I was not around.

I would like to give a special thanks to my dissertation advisor, Dr. Merrily Dunn, who never had any doubt that I could accomplish this. Her encouragement and thoughtful guidance and direction gave me the confidence I needed. I also extend much appreciation to the other members of my committee, Dr. Diane Cooper, Dr. Laura Dean, and Dr. Candace Moore, who provided valuable and constructive feedback in order to make my study the best it could be.

Throughout my research, I continually heard Helen Reddy singing in my head, “I am woman hear me roar in numbers too big to ignore” (Reddy & Burton, 1971) as I researched, met, interviewed, and analyzed this amazing group of women student veterans. As I learned the meaning of HUA, I gained a greater appreciation for these

women who volunteered to be heard, understood, and acknowledged for my study. I will be forever grateful for their time and their stories but more importantly, for their service to our country.

Finally, I extend a huge thank you to my SAL cohort! Our motto, “Start together, finish together, motivate, and graduate” was always on my mind. I appreciate all of the e-mails, text messages, phone calls, Facebook posts, Mexican restaurant lunches, fun times in Griffin and Athens, and of course, the elevator selfies that have tied us together forever. The road on this journey would not have been nearly as enjoyable and memorable with anyone else.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
LIST OF TABLES	x
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION	1
Problem, Purpose, and Research Questions.....	2
Research Paradigm.....	3
Theoretical Framework.....	3
Operational Definition	5
Assumptions and Delimitations	5
Significance of the Study	6
Conclusion	7
2 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE	8
Women in the Military.....	8
The Military and Higher Education	11
Theoretical Frameworks	12
Women Student Veterans	15
Women Veterans.....	21
Student Veterans	23
Summary.....	28

3	METHODOLOGY	30
	Methodological Design.....	30
	Research Site.....	31
	Participants.....	32
	Procedures.....	33
	Data Collection Methods	34
	Instruments Used	34
	Data Analysis	35
	Protection of Subjects	37
	Trustworthiness and Positionality.....	37
4	FINDINGS	40
	Identity Status	41
	Pathmakers	42
	Searchers.....	50
	Guardians	56
	Drifters	62
	Themes.....	66
	Finances	67
	Masculine Culture.....	68
	Military Veterans as Military Wives.....	70
	Peer Support in College	71
	Conclusion	73

5 DISCUSSION.....	74
Discussion of Findings.....	75
Implications for Practice.....	90
Recommendations for Research	92
Conclusion	95
REFERENCES	97
APPENDICES	
A Invitation E-mail	106
B Participant Information Form	107
C University of Georgia Consent Form.....	108
D Southeastern University Informed Consent Form	111
E Interview Guide	114
F Interview Guide Development.....	116
G Codes and Themes	122

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 1: Women student veterans.....	41

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The transition from United States military servicemember to civilian is an adjustment veterans have experienced since the end of the American Revolution (Coll & Weiss, 2015), but shifting from the role of civilian to the role of student occurred later when college was more accessible to a wider range of citizens. Although job training and college was always available for veterans prior to World War II, they came to college in large numbers after World War II in part due to the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, commonly called the GI Bill (Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). Today, veterans who are starting college or re-enrolling in college are mostly doing so using their Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits. This latest version of the GI Bill provides an influential enticement for veterans to enroll in college (Renn & Reason, 2013). In 2013, the Veterans Administration (VA) anticipated payments totaling \$10 billion to veterans using their GI Bill benefits (Dao, 2013).

Campuses across the country are creating veteran-friendly or military-friendly environments to serve and support a population of student veterans (Cook, Kim, & Associates, 2009; Lighthall, 2012; Lokken, Pfeffer, McAuley, & Strong, 2009; McCarthy, 2011; Moon & Schma, 2011; Nichols-Casebolt, 2012; Vacchi, 2012).

Women veterans currently make up 27% of the student veteran population but only 10-12% of military personnel (VA Campus Toolkit, 2014), and this percentage of women student veterans is expected to increase for the next 20 years (National Center for Veteran

Analysis and Statistics, 2011). About one in four veterans enrolled in colleges and universities is a woman, and these student veterans come to college with unique experiences (Sanders, 2012; VA Campus Toolkit, 2014). While many colleges offer specific programs and services designed to support veteran students in general, these programs may not be addressing the distinct experiences women veterans have transitioning from military life to college life while making meaning of their identities as women, veterans, and students.

Problem, Purpose, and Research Questions

The experiences of women veterans during their military service and in college may be different from male veterans. The research generalizes the experiences of veterans without differentiating by gender (Lighthall, 2012; Rumann & Hamrick, 2009; Vacchi, 2012). The purpose of this study is to explore how women student veterans define for themselves who they are and how their experiences in the military and in college affect their identity as women. Examining the experiences of women student veterans enrolled at a public four-year university will provide a better understanding of how military service and college experiences inform women's identity. The intended outcome of this study is to contribute to the literature on women student veterans in college and the practice of student affairs professionals serving women student veterans. The following research questions guide this study:

1. How does the identity status of women veterans, as measured by Josselson's theory of identity development in women (1996), affect how they experience college?

2. How do the experiences of women student veterans in the military and in college influence their identity as women?

Research Paradigm

The constructivist paradigm frames this study as a narrative inquiry of women veterans in college and how they use their military and college experiences to define for themselves who they are as women (Guido, Chavez, & Lincoln, 2010; Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014). Constructivism is a qualitative approach that seeks understanding and meaning of lived experiences of a group of individuals (Creswell, 2014). Research within constructivist paradigm uses an inductive process to produce knowledge (Creswell, 2014). The epistemology, or nature of that knowledge, is an interactive process as the researcher and the participant explore the phenomenon (Jones et al., 2014). Ontology, or nature of reality, in constructivism involves multiple perspectives acquired as a result of the interactions of and with the participants (Jones et al., 2014). The constructivist paradigm offers an authentic, in-depth view of participants' realities constructed by the researcher and the participant (Jones et al., 2014). Axiology, or the role of values, in constructivism involves exposing biases and assumptions of the researcher as part of the understanding of the research (Jones et al., 2014). The focus of this study is understanding, through their stories, how military and college experiences shape the identities of women.

Theoretical Framework

This study draws on Josselson's (1996) theory of identity development in women to determine where women student veterans fit within Josselson's four identity statuses and how military and college experience may affect their identity. Josselson's theory of

identity development in women classifies four identity statuses of development as guardians, pathmakers, searchers, and drifters. Guardians are women who have established their identity with little or no conflict and are fulfilling a plan made as a child or by a parent. Pathmakers are women who have explored the identity they desire and have committed to who they want to be. Searchers are women who are trying to decide who they want to be and exploring their options. Drifters are women who are not concerned with exploring who they are or who they want to be. The theory explores how women adjust their lives as they mature and how changes in perception of gender roles affect women (Josselson, 1996). Other researchers have used Abes, Jones, and McEwen's (2007) model of multiple dimensions of identity (MMDI) to understand how women student veterans make meaning of their multiple identities and to understand the social influences that affect their identities (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; Demers, 2013; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). Using Josselson's (1996) identity development of women as a framework may provide an alternative view on how women college students' experiences in the military affect their identities as women.

The use of Josselson's (1996) identity development in women theory is absent from the literature regarding women veterans with the exception of a brief mention in a chapter about supporting female student veterans (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). Although DiRamio and Jarvis (2011) present no empirical evidence, they believed Josselson would classify women student veterans in the identity status of pathmakers. If all women student veterans fit into the pathmakers identity status, then military experience has an enormous developmental impact on the identities of women. This is relevant research to see if, in fact, DiRamio and Jarvis (2011) are correct or if women student veterans fit

within all four of Josselson's identity statuses. Understanding their identities and their experiences from this lens may provide information to serve this population.

Operational Definition

The Higher Education Act of 1965, section 480(c)(1) defines a veteran as someone who has "engaged in active duty in the United States Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, or Coast Guard" and "was released under a condition other than dishonorable" (Higher Education Act, 1965, p. 544). Vacchi (2012) defined a student veteran as "any student who is a current or former member of the active duty military, the National Guard, or Reserves regardless of deployment status, combat experience, legal veteran status, or GI Bill use" (p. 17). The term *student veteran* for this study is a person who has served in the United States military and enrolled in college. The student veteran could be one who has recently separated from the military or one who enrolls in college years after separation from the military.

Assumptions and Delimitations

I am studying women who served in the military during or since September 11, 2001, a significant date in American history. Following September 11th, Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom were the first large military operations in which women servicemembers could deploy and engage in combat like male servicemembers (National Center for Veteran Analysis and Statistics, 2011). This group of women veterans, who were actively involved in combat situations, is the largest cohort of women veterans in American history (National Center for Veteran Analysis and Statistics, 2011). The experiences of women attending college who served in the military prior to 2001 may provide additional context, but that is not the focus of this study.

Studying the Post-9/11 era of women veterans in college is the focus of this study as their opportunities in the military are different from the women prior to this era.

Significance of the Study

Historically, much of the research into the student veteran experience focused on information about veterans in general; however, more researchers are now exploring issues involving women veterans. Many studies offer firsthand accounts of women veterans' experiences in and out of the military. For instance, Baechtold and De Sawal (2009) compared post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) differences between men and women and found women suffer from PTSD more than men but are less likely to seek help. Hamrick and Rumann (2011) studied two women student veterans and their college transitions. Additionally, Iverson and Anderson (2013) studied the needs of female veterans to recommend better services at Kent State University. DiRamio, Jarvis, Iverson, Seher, and Anderson (2015) studied 13 female veterans at Auburn University and Kent State University regarding help-seeking attitudes and how military service shapes help-seeking attitudes in women. Suter, Lamb, Marko, and Tye-Williams (2006) studied members of a women's veterans group after they transitioned to civilian life and found that their military experience transformed their identity and sense of self. Phillips (2014) created a veteran critical theory as a new lens to explore student veterans. Despite the increased presence of women veterans on campuses, there is more to learn about their identities as women after their military experience while they are enrolled in college.

Information from a study of women student veterans is important for at least two reasons. First, a study that produces information of women's identity development shaped by military and college experiences may contribute knowledge and a different

perspective to the literature about women student veterans in college. Second, understanding the experiences and identity development of women student veterans can add to the knowledge and understanding for campus administrators, faculty, and staff that may lead to support and services for women veterans and help colleges and universities move away from the “one size fits all” mentality that often characterizes service for veterans. With women student veterans making up 27% of the student veteran population (VA Campus Toolkit, 2014), there is a need to gather more information in order to understand and support women student veterans on campuses.

Conclusion

HUA is a military term that means heard, understood, and acknowledged. HUA means anything but “no” and usually is an answer to a question or confirmation that the person or the group agrees. This study focused on listening, understanding, and acknowledging the women of this study. The following study seeks to discover how women student veterans define for themselves who they are and how their experiences in the military and in college affect their identity as women. I positioned this study within the theoretical framework of Josselson’s identity development of women (1996), which aligns with the goal of the study. In the following chapter, I will explore the women student veterans’ experience and identity development and offer synthesis of the existing literature on women student veterans.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Veterans come to college with many of the challenges traditional and non-traditional students face; however, veterans transitioning from military life to civilian and college life have experiences that most students do not (Elliott, 2014; Hamrick & Rumann, 2011). The transition from military life to college life can be challenging for many male and female veterans (Ackerman, DiRamio, & Mitchell, 2009; Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). Student veterans are now in a college environment, which is very different from the military, and with people who have not experienced and do not understand what the veteran has experienced (Ackerman, et al., 2009; Lighthall, 2012). "The loss of friendship, purpose, identity, structures, and income is enough to push most people to their limit" (Lighthall, 2012, p. 82). The result is a transition to a new way of life that for student veterans may be different from the transition of traditional or even non-traditional college students.

Women in the Military

Women have served in the military, officially and unofficially, from the founding of the United States. In the Revolutionary War, women followed men into battle and helped the wounded, cooked, cleaned and mended uniforms, and spied (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2011). Some stepped in, unofficially, to help, like Margaret Corbin who picked up her husband's weapon and continued to staff his post

after he was killed (Office of Policy and Planning, 2007). In the Civil War, many women helped in these same roles while some disguised themselves as men and served in combat (Office of Policy and Planning, 2007). Their contributions to the wounded and healthcare were significant in both wars (National Center for Veteran Analysis and Statistics, 2011).

In 1901, Congress passed an act to establish nursing corps; this was the first time women were officially part of the military (National Center for Veteran Analysis and Statistics, 2011; Office of Policy and Planning, 2007). By the end of World War I, there were about 23,000 women in the nursing corps (National Center for Veteran Analysis and Statistics, 2011). Opportunities besides nursing began to open for women as clerks, operators, translators, couriers, and in other administrative positions to free men to serve in combat roles (National Center for Veteran Analysis and Statistics, 2011). Women neither received military benefits nor rank at the time, and they could no longer disguise themselves as men for combat as a physical examination was required prior to service (National Center for Veteran Analysis and Statistics, 2011; Office of Policy and Planning, 2007). Opportunities increased during World War II as women were mechanics, drivers, intelligence analysts, interpreters, photographers, and pilots (Office of Policy and Planning, 2007).

In 1943, Congress established the Women's Army Corps, which gave women military rank and benefits (Office of Policy and Planning, 2007). By 1970, women in the military were able to be high-ranking officials as nurses but also in leadership positions (Office of Policy and Planning, 2007). By the Persian Gulf War in 1990, women were in roles that put them near combat situations. Forty thousand women were deployed and

flew planes, drove vehicles in combat areas, served on ships, and staffed missiles (National Center for Veteran Analysis and Statistics, 2011; Office of Policy and Planning, 2007). In 1994, bans on women serving in combat zones were lifted (National Center for Veteran Analysis and Statistics, 2011; Office of Policy and Planning, 2007). Following September 11, 2001, 11% of the force deployed for Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom were women, the largest cohort of enlisted women deployed in history (National Center for Veteran Analysis and Statistics, 2011). This was the first opportunity for women to deploy and engage in combat zones with their male counterparts (National Center for Veteran Analysis and Statistics, 2011). Although the military excluded women from positions of direct combat, women were in combat support roles with blurred distinctions of direct combat and non-combat roles (National Center for Veteran Analysis and Statistics, 2011). In 2013, the Obama administration ordered the military to reclassify 250,000 military positions regardless of gender by 2016, and on December 3, 2015, the military opened all combat jobs to women (Baldor, 2015; Kamarck, 2015). Opportunities for women in the military have evolved and will continue to evolve. In 2012, the first woman to serve as a four-star general in both the Army and the U.S. armed forces, General Ann E. Dunwoody, retired and stated,

Over the last 38 years, I have had the opportunity to witness women soldiers jump out of airplanes, hike 10 miles, lead men and women, even under the toughest circumstances. Over the last 11 years I've had the honor to serve with many of the 250,000 women who have deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan on battlefields where there are no clear lines, battlefields where every man and woman had to be a rifleman first. Today, women are in combat that is just a reality. Thousands of women have been decorated for valor and 146 have given their lives. Today, what was once a band of brothers has truly become a band of brothers and sisters. (Seven Famous Women Veterans, n.d.)

The Military and Higher Education

The Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 linked the military and higher education through state and federal funding of education. This led the way for the creation of higher education institutions to serve the educational needs for agricultural, mechanical, and military training programs (Renn & Reason, 2013). Colleges served as training grounds for the military and then saw increased enrollment of military veterans after World War II. The Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944, commonly referred to as the GI Bill, provided education benefits for military veterans to enroll in college (Department of Veterans Affairs, n.d.; Renn & Reason, 2013). The Veterans Administration (VA) invested in the veterans by providing education and housing benefits to support their educational and occupational endeavors. The educational benefits of the GI Bill changed in 1952, 1966, 1973, and most significantly in 2008 (Department of Veteran Affairs, n.d.; National Center for Veteran Analysis and Statistics, 2011). The 2008 version of the GI Bill, referred to as the Post 9/11 GI Bill, paid full tuition and fees directly to the

institution and provided a housing allowance directly to the veteran (National Center for Veteran Analysis and Statistics, 2011). The Post 9/11 GI Bill has been a significant enticement for military participation (National Center for Veteran Analysis and Statistics, 2011; Renn & Reason, 2013). In fiscal year 2013, the VA paid over 10 billion dollars on Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits to 754,229 people (Veterans Benefits Administration, 2015). Through the GI Bill, the government makes an investment in both veterans and higher education institutions. Understanding the history and benefits of military service is valuable knowledge for appreciation of the veteran experience.

Theoretical Frameworks

Researchers have conducted studies on student veterans, women student veterans, women veterans, and veterans in general using theory to ground their research. Qualitative research on student veterans frequently uses Schlossberg's transition theory (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Livingston, Havice, Cawthon, and Fleming, 2011; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010) or Tinto's theory of student departure (DiRamio et al., 2008; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). Quantitative researchers are using U.S. Census data (Holder, 2011), National Center for Education Statistics data (Radford, 2011), or higher education institution data. In this qualitative study, identity and identity development were the primary focus with transition as a secondary focus. The next section highlights Josselson's identity development in women, and the model of multiple dimensions of identity.

Identity Development in Women

The theory that guides this research study on women student veterans is Josselson's (1987, 1996) identity development in women. Josselson (1987) studied

women's identity development in a longitudinal study with women she interviewed in the final year of college and again during their thirties. Josselson (1996) interviewed the women again in their forties and told the story of development from college to the midpoint of their lives. Both studies looked at how women determine their identity as they mature and found women's identities center on who they want to be rather than social labels such as career, political, or religious attributes (Josselson, 1987, 1996). Building upon James Marcia's ego identity statuses, Josselson presented four identity statuses: guardians, pathmakers, searchers, and drifters.

Guardians' identities conform to their childhood and family beliefs (Josselson, 1996). They have not had an identity crisis nor has their identity been challenged. They are comfortable with living in a manner consistent their upbringing and their parents' expectations. Guardians are in relationships with others who share their perspectives and beliefs. Later in life, guardians look for new opportunities but do not stray too far from their comfort zones (Josselson, 1996).

Pathmakers form identities for themselves that are different from how they were raised (Josselson, 1996). They allow themselves to construct their identities and balance their relationships with others with their new selves. They use new experiences and opportunities to change themselves. Pathmakers maintain relationships with others for a sense of connection while constructing their own selves, and their career choices become a way to relate and connect themselves with others on their own terms. They are decisive about their path and continue to revise that path (Josselson, 1996).

Searchers experience identity conflict because they respect and value their parent and familial beliefs but discover other options and opportunities to explore (Josselson,

1996). Searchers feel conflicted to become what their parents want them to be and what they want to be. This uncertainty leads searchers to explore many paths and many opportunities to find the path that may fit for them. Searchers carry the uncertainty with them throughout their lives (Josselson, 1996).

Drifters have not committed to their identity nor do they feel the need to (Josselson, 1996). They are in conflict about their lives and the choices that they need to make. Drifters explore but may not commit to anything. They have hopes and dreams but are lacking in direction in fulfilling those wishes. Drifters struggle to make sense of their lives and live with impulsive decisions and experiences (Josselson, 1996).

The identity development of women, according to Josselson (1987, 1996), is a continual process of rewriting and revising one's self throughout life. Women may move through or between these identity statuses based on commitments or crisis in their lives or within themselves. The military experience for women may influence their identity status as a commitment or a crisis in their lives as may their college experience. Information on how their experiences affect their identity is of interest in this study.

Multiple Dimensions of Identity

Jones and McEwen's (2000) model of multiple dimensions of identity (MMDI) connects a person's core sense of their identity to the social labels with which they identify and illustrates how the salient aspects of one's identity revolve around the core self. The MMDI portrays the core as the "inner identity" that consists of characteristics, attributes, and lived experiences that have shaped one's personal identity (Jones & McEwen, 2000, p. 408). The "outside identity" is composed of the externally defined labels of identity (Jones & McEwen, 2000, p. 408). These identities include race, gender,

sexual orientation, ethnicity, etc., but also other labels for professional, religious, relationship, and parental identities (Jones & McEwen 2000).

The MMPI explains the salience of one's identities as identity labels move closer to and farther away from one's core (Jones & McEwen 2000). This shows that the interaction of multiple identities to one's inner self changes over time with different experiences in life and evolves and changes throughout one's lifetime (Jones & McEwen 2000). The MMPI highlights the importance of seeing people as they see themselves as opposed to seeing them as defined only by their social characteristics that may or may not be salient to them at any given moment in time (Jones & McEwen, 2000). Baechtold and De Sawal (2009), Demers (2013), Phillips (2014), and Rumann and Hamrick (2010) used the MMPI in their research with student veterans.

The MMPI provides an understanding of core and social identities and the saliency of those identities for an individual. Woman, student, and veteran are identity labels used in this study to explore the saliency of these identities for this specific population. Adding the identity labels of student and of veteran signifies a transition from the military to civilian life and civilian life to college life.

Women Student Veterans

The research in this study focuses on women who are veterans and students. In the literature, researchers explored women who identified as women, veterans, and students. To understand women student veterans it is important to gain knowledge of women student veterans, women veterans, and student veterans.

DiRamio et al. (2015) studied 167 student veterans, 122 males, 44 females, and one who did not disclose gender, to understand help-seeking attitudes of student veterans.

In this quantitative study, the researchers found the men's and women's data were equal for both attitudes toward academic assistance and attitudes toward counseling (DiRamio, Jarvis, Iverson, Seher, & Anderson, 2015). DiRamio et al. (2015) then interviewed 13 women student veterans from the original study to understand why their attitudes were similar to the men and to explore their transition experience to college life (DiRamio et al., 2015). Gender expectations to conform to military culture produced a sense of responsibility to one's unit to represent women servicemembers well (DiRamio et al., 2015). The women felt pressure to perform to masculine expectations for personal advancement and a feeling of equality with the unit (DiRamio et al., 2015). This spilled over into the college transition as women student veterans felt the need to do well and meet expectations with the responsibility for success held on their shoulders (DiRamio et al., 2015). Many felt they needed to prove themselves without asking for help (DiRamio et al., 2015). The researchers found that while men and women typically differ in terms of help-seeking attitudes, the military service reduced this difference in veterans (DiRamio et al., 2015). The researchers also found that these women student veterans questioned their worthiness to receive campus resources based on the perceived value of their service, and they did not want to use resources that another veteran, who they perceived served more or differently, could use or need (DiRamio et al., 2015). DiRamio et al. (2015) recommended colleges to encourage peer support from other women student veterans in order to inform them about student support services and encourage their use.

Hamrick and Rumann (2011) studied two women veteran participants from Rumann and Hamrick's (2010) qualitative study and Rumann's dissertation on student veterans. One participant served in the Army National Guard and the other served in the

Army. Hamrick and Rumann (2011) found their transition was similar to male participants from the previous studies except in the areas relationships and identity transition. Like other veterans, the women in this study, identified that relationships with other veterans provided the most support upon returning from service. Both participants noted that, due to their unit assignments and deployments, it was difficult to establish “camaraderie” for transition support since both transitioned back individually and not part of a unit (Hamrick & Rumann, 2011, p. 14). Both women had experiences when their gender prevented them from serving with their units in certain areas (Hamrick & Rumann, 2011). Issues of distinguishing between combat action (permitted for females) and the boundary of the restricted front lines were salient for both participants (Hamrick & Rumann, 2011). At home, both participants experienced stereotypical perceptions from civilians over their roles in the military and the credibility of their experiences (Hamrick & Rumann, 2011). Like other veterans, both participants disclosed their military experience and veteran status to others when and how they wanted to share that part of their lives (Hamrick & Rumann, 2011). Hamrick and Rumann (2011) recommended more research on women in the military and in college. They also recommended institutions support student veterans organizations and veteran lounges in order to provide opportunities for male and female veterans to support their peers.

Baechtold and De Sawal (2009) believed that understanding women veterans’ identity development includes understanding how their military experiences may or may not affect their college experiences. How women veterans incorporate their military experiences as part of their identity may not connect with how they identify themselves or how others identify them (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009). The military is a male

dominated organization, and women servicemembers adapt to the military identity while in service (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009). Teamwork, discipline, and responsibility acquired in the military are aspects of military service that remain once servicemembers return home and juggle additional roles at home (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009). Upon returning from the military, women student veterans may face an identity crisis as they have the opportunity to construct a new identity for themselves or they may be able to adapt who they are now with what they want to be in the future (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009). This may be an opportunity for a woman student veteran to change identity status, according to Josselson's (1996) theory of identity development, as her military experience may have led to a commitment to or a crisis of identity. Baechtold and De Sawal (2009) and DiRamio and Jarvis (2011) suggested colleges provide opportunities for women student veterans to connect with other women veterans through support groups, organizations, networking, and mentoring.

One opportunity for women student veterans in their transition to college is the development of their new self (Elliott, 2014; Hamrick & Rumann, 2011). Once away from the military environment, a women veteran may redefine who she is as a veteran, a student, and a woman and this may include determining whether to identify as a veteran and maintain the strength and honor linked with the military or identify as something else (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; Hamrick & Rumann, 2011). Some women veterans can feel divided and torn in determining who they are and who they want to be. This decision may come easily or may be a struggle depending on the women and on the identity status she fits within (Josselson, 1996).

Women veterans are looking for the balance between self and others' perceptions of them (Baechtold, 2009). Male veterans are often easier to identify on campus than female veterans are. Women veterans may not define themselves by their service and may be hesitant to label themselves as veterans (Sanders, 2012). Because of this, they blend in on campus, which makes providing resources to this group difficult (Hamrick & Rumann, 2011; Sanders, 2012). Women veterans disclose their veteran identity to whom they want and when they want, and they tend to be selective in sharing this piece of their identity (Hamrick & Rumann, 2011). To be successful and trustworthy in the military, they lived with this military mentality of doing things better, faster, smarter, and more independently than the males with whom they worked (Elliott, 2014; Hamrick & Rumann, 2011). Women veterans have to take that identity and redefine that sense of self or incorporate it into a new self (Elliott, 2014; Hamrick & Rumann, 2011).

Elliott (2014) explored the perceptions of support services and campus climate from interviews of six women student veterans. The participants shared their need for support from enrollment through graduation, and they felt there is a need for services for both male and female veterans but also some specialization for women in personal and group counseling and childcare and family issues (Elliott, 2014). The women student veterans perceived the campus climate at their institution focused on traditional student interests, events, and classroom discussions (Elliott, 2014). They felt their inclusion in classroom discussion and interactions with others were both positive and negative on campus (Elliott, 2014). Participants agreed that most campus climate issues affect both men and women veterans but felt women veterans had experiences that were important and unique, and they could add to the learning experience for others (Elliott, 2014).

Women student veterans want to feel welcome in student support services offices and want to connect with other women student veterans on campus (Hamrick & Rumann, 2011; McCarthy, 2011). Programs like counseling and disability services, health services, women's centers, and sexual assault services are offered on many campuses; however, many women student veterans do not take advantage of the programs and services offered (Ackerman et al., 2009; McCarthy, 2011; Sanders, 2012). Women student veterans are more likely to have children or to be single parents than their female non-veteran student counterparts (Sanders, 2012). Childcare is as much an issue when the veteran deployed as it is when the veteran comes to college (Baechtold, 2009; Hamrick & Rumann, 2011). Childcare is a financial, logistical, and psychological challenge for women veterans. Women veterans have the same social expectation of other women to be primary caregivers for their children; however, women veterans often face criticism for parting with their children to serve in the military (McCarthy, 2011). This stress coupled with leaving their children in a childcare facility in order to attend school is a challenge for these women and institutions seldom offer childcare services (Elliott, 2014; McCarthy, 2011). Women student veterans have had unique experiences that challenge the “one size fits all” mentality (Elliott, 2014; Phillips, 2014).

Women student veterans are a growing population of students on campus. Researchers are exploring women student veterans to gain knowledge and understanding of this population in order to provide services and supports to these students on campus. This section reviewed the literature on women who were also veterans and students. The next section explored the literature of women veterans who were not students.

Women Veterans

The last section reviewed literature of women who are veterans and students. This section reviewed the literature of women veterans after their transition to civilian life. Their identity and transition after their military experience is the focus of these studies. Understanding women veterans without the student identity is important in order to explore the affects of military experience separate from the college experience.

Demers (2013) studied 17 female Iraq War veterans to understand their transition to civilian life through their military experiences, their identity negotiation, and their relationships with others after their return. Women veterans felt the need to conform to being “female in a man’s world,” to blend into the role of soldier and doing their job, and to earn respect of their male superiors and counterparts (Demers, 2013, p. 499). The participants described harassment by male servicemembers as “fighting two wars”- the internal conflict with the males and the actual external conflict of war (Demers, 2013, p. 499). This conflict added stress and fear not experienced by male servicemembers (Demers, 2013). Coming home was an experience that many struggled to negotiate (Demers, 2013). Coping with their new life, negotiating being home, having civilian responsibilities, and creating their new sense of self were themes of the coming home transition (Demers, 2013). Demers (2013) recommended military culture training for mental health providers, support groups for female veterans, and transition support groups for military families and friends. As women will continue to serve in greater numbers, Demers (2013) suggested the military needs to move from the “masculine warrior model” (p. 508) to more diverse models through which every servicemembers can relate and identify themselves.

Much like Demers (2013), Pawelczyk (2014) studied women veterans, their military experiences, and their identities. Pawelczyk (2014) studied two women war veterans who both had served in the Army since 2001. They used masculine strategies to associate themselves as soldiers and feminine emotional aspects of their military experiences to create and solidify their professional identity (Pawelczyk, 2014). This study showed the continued viewpoint that the military is a masculine organization and that women feel they are “others” in the military (Pawelczyk, 2014, p. 108). Gender continues to be a challenge for the military even as the characteristics of a soldier are changing (Pawelczyk, 2014).

Mankowski (2012) explored the perceptions of identities, support, and transition to civilian life of 18 women veterans. Women veterans felt their military experience developed their identity into one with strength, determination, and independence (Mankowski, 2012). As their military identity was prominent and other identities compartmentalized during service, women felt a loss of identity when they separated from the military and struggled to resume gender and other identities once home (Mankowski, 2012). The participants found support from family members at home and fellow females with whom they served (Mankowski, 2012). Their transition to civilian life included renegotiation of identity and social roles and connecting to veterans’ services, supports, and medical treatments (Mankowski, 2012).

Foster and Vince (2009) studied 170 women veterans to determine challenges and needs of California’s women veterans. Women veterans wanted opportunities to interact with other female veterans and much like male veterans, wanted support services, education and employment opportunities, affordable housing, and physical and mental

health care (Foster & Vince, 2009). Foster and Vince's (2009) survey found men and women veterans share similar transition experiences.

Suter et al. (2006) examined how 28 women veterans who were members of a local veteran's organization for women could preserve their military identity within this group. The women veterans felt their military experience changed their identity and made them confident and strong women (Demers, 2013; Suter et al., 2006). Many found it difficult to return to their previous civilian roles after living the life of soldiers, and a few transitioned back to their previous civilian roles as if their military service was an experience now in their past (Suter et al., 2006). This group of women veterans felt this organization gave them a place where they felt they could revert to their soldier identity and gain the support and camaraderie with others who had served as they had (Suter et al., 2006).

Researchers found the military experience has a place in the identity of women, but women determine how the experience will shape their identity after the military experience is over. Adapting to and from the masculine culture of the military is a component of the transition women veterans have returning to civilian life. Camaraderie and support of other women veterans provides opportunities to connect and relate to others who understand the military experience.

Student Veterans

The last section reviewed literature of women who are veterans. This section reviewed the literature of student veterans in college after their military service. The challenges of transitioning to college after military experience are the focus of these

studies. Understanding veterans with the student identity is important in order to explore the affects of military experience on students experience in college.

DiRamio, Ackerman, and Mitchell (2008) studied the challenges for veterans in transitioning their military identity to their student identities. They studied 22 combat veterans, 16 men and 6 women, who had transitioned to full time college students and found that many tried to blend in and not stand out in class or on campus (DiRamio et al., 2008). Student veterans want their service to be recognized and understood but not be called on to represent all veterans (DiRamio et al., 2008). Student veterans found connecting to other student veteran peers was important during their transition to college, not only because they felt more mature than traditional students, but because they wanted to connect with others who would understand what they have been through (DiRamio et al., 2008). Financial, physical health, and mental health issues were challenges for veterans in their transition, and the researchers recommended college to have a strategy to assist student veterans from acceptance and orientation through services of financial aid, counseling, academic advising, and working with faculty and staff throughout their college career (DiRamio et al., 2008). DiRamio et al. (2008) separated and reviewed the data of the women veterans and recommended colleges pay attention to financial issues and issues related to sexual violence, which are not different from issues on non-veteran women students.

Livingston, Havice, Cawthon, and Fleming (2011) studied the transition experience of college students who returned to college to resume the role of student following combat zone deployment or other active military service. They studied 15 student veterans, 14 males and one female, who felt their military experiences allowed

them to have a different perspective on life and made them more mature than their non-military peers (DiRamio et al., 2008; Livingston et al., 2011). Student veterans found the re-enrollment process confusing and felt “culture shock” in adapting to the college structure following life engaged in a military structure (Livingston et al., 2011, p. 325). As their military training made them feel the need to take care of themselves and not ask for help, student veterans would often not seek help or support when needed and often relied on themselves to solve the problem (DiRamio et al., 2015; Livingston et al., 2011). Livingston et al. (2011) referred to student veterans as a “camouflaged population” on college campuses; students who had a desire to get in, blend in, get their degree, and go to work (Livingston et al., 2011, p. 327). Livingston et al. (2011) recommended that colleges identify student veterans early in the enrollment process; use veteran faculty, staff, and current student veterans to provide support for new student veterans; and provide information and contacts pertinent to veterans on a veterans’ website so student veterans find information without asking for help.

Rumann and Hamrick (2010) also researched the transition experience of student veterans and found similar results as DiRamio et al. (2008) and Livingston et al. (2011). Rumann and Hamrick (2010) studied six student veterans, five males and one female, and found student veterans tended to combine their civilian and student transition in discussions on their transition experience away from the military. For most, the financial support for college was the incentive to join the military, but the complicated and sometimes confusing institutional processes and policies made the transition to college difficult (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). Student veterans felt more mature and confident to reach their goals (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). They were more selective about what they

shared about themselves to others and felt that it was easier to connect with other veterans who understood what they had been through (Baechtold, 2009; Elliott, 2014; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). For some, they felt they had a civilian identity and a military identity that they had to balance as they experienced different, both negative and positive, treatment from veterans and civilians (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). While adapting to a new less structured environment, student veterans were still working through post-military issues and managing their own stress of going to college (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). Much like DiRamio et al. (2008) and Livingston et al. (2011), Rumann and Hamrick (2010) recommended supportive environments and services for student veterans.

Olsen, Badger, and McCuddy (2014) studied the personal strengths and challenges student veterans have in academic success and in an academic setting. In their study of seven men and three women, the researchers found self-discipline, leadership skills, teamwork, and experiences with different people and opinions helped the student veterans succeed in college (Olsen, Badger, & McCuddy, 2014). The participants perceived social interactions, financial stress, and new role changes were challenges to their success in academic settings (Olsen et al., 2014). Olsen et al. (2014) concluded student veterans needed social support and services to connect them with the VA and financial resources.

Griffin and Gilbert (2015) studied how institutions offer resources and support for transitioning student veterans. They interviewed 72 administrations, faculty and student affairs staff, individually and 28 student veterans in focus groups, not broken down by gender (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). Using Schlossberg's transition theory, Griffin and

Gilbert (2015) found situation, self, support and strategies within the themes of the data from the participants. For situation, they found that institutions need specific policies and procedures for veteran related paperwork, credits, financing, benefits, and services (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015) For self, they found that institutions need military focused support services and academic and psychological services for veterans to have resources to negotiate and cope with their transition to college and their new sense of self. A challenge is that many veterans do not self-identify; therefore, services available may go unutilized (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). For support, Griffin and Gilbert (2015) found social support from fellow student veterans, veterans' organizations, peers, and campus faculty and staff was important. For strategies, they recommended providing mentoring opportunities for current student veterans to help new student veterans transition and connect to campus and veterans (Gilbert & Griffin, 2015).

Phillips (2014) used feminist theory, critical race theory, queer theory, disability theory, border theory, and student veteran literature to develop veterans critical theory. Although developed through the lens of student veterans, the 11 tenets that make up veterans critical theory could be applicable to veterans in general (Phillips, 2014). "Veterans experience multiple identities at once" is one tenet in which veterans see their identities not just as a veteran but their other identities in the order of most salience (Phillips, 2014, p.211). "Veterans occupy a third space on the border of multiple conflicting and interacting power structures, languages, and systems" is another tenet in which veterans are in the space between military life and civilian life, not one or the other but the border of both (Phillips, 2014, p. 207). Another tenet, "veterans are unknowable,"

describes how veterans, like people in general, are different and the needs of veterans are individually different (Phillips, 2014, p. 220).

Summary

This chapter reviewed the literature and research studies that have advanced the knowledge on women student veterans, women veterans, and student veterans.

Researchers recommended services and supports colleges and university should provide for the support of student veterans, military personnel, and military family members within an institution (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; DiRamio et al., 2015; DiRamio et al., 2008); Elliott, 2014; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015); Hamrick & Rumann, 2011; Livingston et al., 2011); Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). From student veterans organizations and lounges to specialized orientation and advising to peer support and VA paperwork assistance, college and universities can implement supports and services for student veterans through standards established by professional organizations like the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, the American College Personnel Association, the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education and through best practices at military and veteran-friendly institutions across the country.

Josselson (1996) stated, “Identity links the past, the present, and the social world into a narrative that makes sense. It embodies both change and continuity” (p. 29).

Researchers studying women student veterans are continuing to discover how women student veterans are transitioning from soldier to civilian/student and from military life to civilian/college life and determining who they are (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; DiRamio et al., 2015; Elliott, 2014; Hamrick & Rumann, 2011). Looking at women student veterans identity through Josselson’s (1996) identity statuses provides an

opportunity to research statements of DiRamio and Jarvis (2011) and determine how the experiences of women student veterans influence their identity as women.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This dissertation used a qualitative constructivist design using narrative inquiry to explore how women student veterans define for themselves who they are and how their experiences in the military and in college affect their identity as women (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). The aim of this qualitative research was to gain an understanding of how military service and college experiences inform women's identity. The study explored the experiences of these women from their perspectives and in their own words. The following research questions guided this study:

1. How does the identity status of women veterans, as measured by Josselson's theory of identity development in women (1996), affect how they experience college?
2. How do the experiences of women student veterans in the military and in college influence their identity as women?

Methodological Design

As a study in the constructivist paradigm examines the meaning of personal experiences and how participants make sense of their experiences (Merriam, 2009), narrative inquiry explores the stories of the lived experiences and shares the stories (Creswell, 2014). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) stated that "in the construction of narratives of experience, there is a reflexive relationship between living a life story, telling a life story, retelling a life story, and reliving a life story" (p. 71). Temporality,

sociality, and place are part of a three dimensional space in narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Temporality involves how the experiences from the past and the present affect the future (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Sociality involves the relationship between the individual and a social setting; e.g., military and college (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Place involves where and how the experiences affect the participants' stories (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Temporality, sociality, and place show up in the study in stories and responses involving identity characteristics, relationships, and experiences. Through narrative inquiry, I captured the stories of the participants by allowing them to verbalize their experiences; I interpreted the stories related to the theoretical framework; and I explored identity development through storytelling (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zibler, 1998; Reissman, 2008). This study aligned well to narrative inquiry, as the stories of the participants provided insight into their lived experiences in the military and in college. These stories may lead to understanding and identifying how women student veterans define for themselves who they are as women because of their lived experiences (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009).

Research Site

This research studied women student veterans at a public university in the Southeast, assigned the pseudonym Southeastern University. Southeastern University was a mid-sized, regional university located near a large military base and enrolled approximately 7,600 students at the time of the study. The institution's admissions requirements were neither highly selective nor open access, with nearly 70% of the students living within the local service area. Southeastern University had about 100

women student veterans using their Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits. Student demographics, location, and convenience for the researcher were the factors in site selection.

Participants

In order to uncover the most insightful information about this population of students, I used purposeful sampling and selected participants who identified as female, had been enrolled for at least two semesters, were 18 years old or older, and served in the military on or after September 11, 2001. Purposeful sampling involves selecting the sample that meets the criteria needed to provide rich data (Merriam, 2009). With the help of the veterans certifying official (VCO), I e-mailed a recruitment invitation (Appendix A) to the VCO to forward to the women student veterans who met the criteria and were receiving or had received the Post 9-11 GI Bill at the institution fall semester. As some students may have exhausted GI Bill benefits, snowball sampling supplemented the purposeful sampling. I asked participants to provide contacts of other enrolled women veterans they knew who fit the research criteria. Snowball sampling uses the participants involved in the study to recommend other participants they know who meet the criteria and would add to the study (Merriam, 2009). The VCO sent an invitation by e-mail (Appendix A) to women veterans to participate in the study, and the VCO, on my behalf, extended personal invitations as the VCO encountered additional potential participants in person or by phone. I interviewed participants on the campus and at a time of their convenience in an available conference room or classroom. Thirteen women volunteered to participate in this study: two volunteers were on active duty; one did not show up for her interview; and the remaining ten participated. At the interview, I collected demographic information on each participant, and for confidentiality, each participant

was assigned a number as a pseudonym. After data analysis, their pseudonym changed to women's names to make their stories more personal and to align the first letter of their pseudonym names with the identity status in which they are classified. I did this in order to identify within themes and topics where the participants are not identified by their identity status but may be affected regardless of identity status.

Procedures

This study began following institutional review board approval by the University of Georgia and Southeastern University. Women student veterans who volunteered for the study made appointments for interviews at dates and times convenient for them to participate. I recorded date and time of each interview including duration of the interview. I provided a participant information sheet (Appendix B) and informed consent forms (Appendix C and D) to each participant who indicated they were interested in participating in the study, with the confirmation of their interview data and time. Participants were instructed to bring the completed participant information form with them to the interview along with the consent form. Additional forms were available in case the participants failed to bring the form to the interview. Participants received a copy of the informed consent form to keep for their records, as the consent form provided the contact information for the university counseling center. I kept the participant information sheets separate from the audio recordings and subsequent transcriptions of the interview. To ensure confidentiality, I created a pseudonym for each participant. I provided participants the opportunity to answer the questions but also informed participants that they could decline to answer any question.

Data Collection Methods

I conducted face-to-face in-depth interviews with each participant. The interviews focused on the stories of military and college experiences, identities of women, veterans, and students, and college transition experiences. Each interview had a semi-structured format with open-ended questions allowing participants to fully share their stories. The interview guide consisted of 10 semi-structured questions to draw out perceptions of identity as women student veterans and of military and college experiences (Appendix E). The interview questions within the interview guide were adapted from questions used in other research on women's identity and other research on military and college experiences of veterans (Demers, 2013; Gilbert & Griffin, 2015; Josselson, 1987; Mankowski, 2012; Phanco, 2003; Phillips, 2014). The interview development guide (Appendix F) displays each question, the original question, the research question intending to answer, and the information I wanted to elicit through their stories. The interview guide was pilot tested with two women veteran colleagues, who attended college after military service, to check for flaws or weaknesses in the interview guide in order to make revisions prior to data collection. I audio recorded the interviews and transcribed each interview. I made notes of information not heard on audio, such as facial expressions, body language, and other nonverbal communications.

Instruments Used

An interview guide (Appendix E) listed the semi-structured questions I used for each participant. I used semi-structured questions for flexibility to ask additional questions as they arose in an interview (Merriam, 2009). These questions extracted data needed to answer both research questions as shown on the interview development guide

(Appendix F). On the interview guide, the numbered questions were the primary questions with the lettered questions as potential follow-up questions. Pilot interviews with women veteran colleagues provided the opportunity for me to assess the questions prior to the first interview. As the researcher, I was an instrument for this study as the participants and I co-constructed the understanding of the experiences of women student veterans to inform the research questions (Josselson, 2013; Merriam, 2009). I told their stories using their voices based on the information from the interviews and attempted to find the connection of their stories and the development their identities through their life experiences (Josselson, 2013). The interview questions stimulated the telling of stories of their experiences and the meaning those experiences have on their lives. I shared their stories so the participants' experiences are heard, understood, and acknowledged.

Data Analysis

Narrative analysis requires examining the participant's whole life story as well as the parts that make up the whole to determine the meaning (Josselson, 2011; Lieblich et al., 1998). The participants' stories, as told by the participants, are emphasized in narrative analysis (Josselson, 2011). Transcription of interview recordings and notes started the analysis in this study. I transcribed each participant's interview and conducted member checking by emailing each participant her interview transcript and allowing her to provide feedback regarding the content. According to Josselson, "The process of analysis is one of piecing together data, making the invisible apparent, deciding what is significant and insignificant, and linking seemingly unrelated facets of experiences together" (2011, p. 227). Then, I reviewed the transcripts line by line and the notes from each interview, and through open coding, I identified and organized information into

connecting themes. Open coding refers to making notes in the margins of transcripts of possible data that may answer the research questions and considers that anything may become a theme (Merriam, 2009). I created codes on each interview transcript and combined similar codes to determine larger themes (Appendix G). I read each transcript multiple times to explore emerging themes (Josselson, 2011). I performed data analysis of transcripts, coding, and tracking of themes for each transcript by hand and then used the software program, Dedoose, for additional data analysis of transcripts, coding, and tracking of themes for each transcript (Dedoose, n.d.).

Although qualitative research typically uses an inductive process, I used both deductive and inductive processes to link data to Josselson's theory and to interpret findings from emerged themes (Hyde, 2000). I deductively identified data that described traits of Josselson's four identity statuses. I used stories and statements regarding motivation for military service, college experience, military influence, and identities as data to support and determine the identity status of each participant. I followed by inductively identifying four themes of finances, masculine culture, military veterans as military wives and peer support in college that related to the research questions.

I retained the voice of participants as their personal stories produced a representation of the lives, the experiences, and the reality of this specific group (Lieblich et al., 1998). I kept their stories intact, especially when the story told me about an experience through which her identity was developed (Riessman, 2008). I focused on "what" was said opposed to "how" it was said in order to focus on the stories that were shared in the interviews (Riessman, 2008). The result of narrative analysis revealed the experiences and the effect the experiences had on their lives (Josselson, 2011). Josselson

provided theory and methodological content to this study through her theory of identity development in women and work in qualitative inquiry methods (Josselson, 1987, 1996, 2011, 2013).

Protection of Subjects

I anticipated that participation in this study would have minimal risk to the participant. As participants' experiences in the military and in college may have evoked emotional responses, I was sensitive to that possibility and provided information regarding free counseling in the university counseling center on the consent form. I shared with participants how I would use the information they provided, how I would protect their information from exposure, and how the information would be stored. I was respectful of each participant and protected the privacy and dignity of the participants, especially if they did not feel comfortable answering a question. I masked the name of the university these women attended with a pseudonym, as well as any proper nouns used, so they would not be identifiable. The audiotapes of the interviews were labeled by the participant's pseudonym and erased once the study was completed to further protect the participants.

Trustworthiness and Positionality

Trustworthiness and credibility in qualitative research involves explaining how the research is conducted and how the findings are genuine representations of the research (Mertens, 2005). Several steps were taken to ensure data analyses and interpretation of data were as accurate as possible. First, I incorporated member checking to provide participants an opportunity to review their transcripts and provide input to the researcher (Merriam, 2009). According to Mertens (2005), "member checking is the

most important criterion in establishing credibility” (p. 255). I asked participants to verify what I understood from our interview session by e-mailing them a copy of the transcript and requesting feedback or confirmation of accuracy. That ensured I had properly represented their stories. Second, I coded and analyzed the coded data, and I utilized constant comparative method of analysis of the data. In constant comparison, the researcher continually compares categories and codes from each transcript to ensure themes are appropriately grouped together (Merriam, 2009). Finally, I kept a journal of activities to confirm the details of this study and the decisions made throughout the study (Merriam, 2009; Mertens, 2005).

Researcher reflexivity is the process for the researchers to explain their perspectives, biases, and assumptions regarding their research topics (Merriam, 2009). Reflexivity is an ethical responsibility for the researcher to allow the reader to understand the researcher’s ties to the subject and the researcher to recognize potential preconceptions that may affect the study (Merriam 2009). I became interested in student veterans when I was a registrar and served as the veterans certifying official at my institution. I enjoyed working with this group of students and felt they deserved more services than just certification of their veteran education benefits. I am not a veteran, but I am the daughter, granddaughter, niece, and great niece of veterans. My aunt spent her career in the military, which was a prominent identity for her in her life, including being cremated and scattered in the ocean near her Navy ship upon her death. DiRamio and Jarvis (2011) believed Josselson (1996) would classify women student veterans as pathmakers, but I believe my aunt was a searcher. She became what her father wanted her to become but secretly explored other social paths that fit her identity but maybe not

her family's values. Even though my understanding of my aunt's identity status contradicted DiRamio and Jarvis (2011), I remained open-minded to explore the identities of the participants in this study.

Understanding and appreciating my multiple identities (woman, student, mother, and cancer survivor) is important as I focus on the identities of the student veterans I research. Recognition as a cancer survivor makes me uncomfortable, because others have truly fought and survived cancer. I had cancer, I had three surgeries, and I no longer have cancer, but this is an identity that I will always have both physically and mentally. Besides my gender, I think my cancer survivor identity may influence my research more than my other identities as female veterans may not define themselves by their service and may be hesitant to label themselves as veterans (Sanders, 2012). As a researcher, I can understand how some labels may make someone uncomfortable or hesitant to disclose and discuss. This provided the opportunity for me to explore and appreciate how the salience of identities affects these women.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

I present the findings section in two parts: identity statuses and themes. Through data analysis, information acquired from specific questions designed to understand one's identity status, as measured by Josselson's (1996) theory of identity development in women, became clear through stories and statements about core and valued identity, mother and veteran identity, motivation for military service, and college experiences. Themes emerged regarding finances, adapting to and from the masculine culture of the military, the experience of identifying as a military veteran and a military wife, and peer support in college. At data analysis, it was clear that these women student veterans did not all fit within Josselson's (1996) pathmakers identity status but fit within each of the four identity statuses. The findings, displayed by identity statuses, illustrate why I categorized each participant in this study into the particular identity status, how their experiences influenced their identity, and how these women experienced college. The findings show how the military and college experiences of these women student veterans influenced their identity as women, which answers the research questions in this study. I then shared the themes of the study through the lens of women student veterans as a group outside of their specific identity status. Table 1 introduces the women student veterans of this study. The women are presented in Table 1 on the order they were interviewed.

Table 1

Women student veterans

Participant	Age	Race	Separation	Years of Service	Number of deployments	Time between military and college	Parental Status	Partner Status	Josselson Pathway
Sarah	28	White	Medically retired	6	1	> 1 year	Mother	Active military spouse	Searcher
Paula	31	White	Medically discharged	2	0	2 years	Mother	Active military spouse	Pathmaker
Grace	30	White	Honorably discharged	5	0	6 years	Mother	Active military spouse	Guardian
Patrice	38	African American	Honorably discharged	15	1	> 1 year	Mother	Active military spouse	Pathmaker
Ginger	38	White	Honorably discharged	11	4	> 1 year	Mother	Active military spouse	Guardian
Susan	28	White	Honorably discharged	5	1	while in military	Mother	Active military spouse	Searcher
Paige	47	African American	Retired	25	2	> 1 year	Mother	Retired military spouse	Pathmaker
Geri	25	White	Medically retired	3	0	> 1 year	NA	Single	Guardian
Danielle	33	African American	Honorably discharged	4	1	> 1 year	Caretaker	Single	Drifter
Shelby	27	White	Medically retired	2	0	> 1 year	Mother	Separated military spouse	Searcher

Identity Statuses

This study draws on Josselson's (1996) theory of identity development in women to determine where women student veterans fit within the Josselson's four identity statuses of pathmaker, searcher, guardian, and drifter. The questions asked in data collection intended to confirm the identity status of each of the participants in this study (Appendix F). I identified three participants as pathmakers, three as searchers, three as guardians, and one as a drifter. Their stories and statements verify their identity statuses.

Pathmakers

Pathmakers are women who have explored options and committed to who they want to be (Josselson, 1996). According to Josselson, pathmakers would agree with the comment, “I’ve tried out some things, and this is what makes most sense for me” (1996, p. 35). Paula, Paige, and Patrice were classified as pathmakers as they were strong, independent women who knew who they were, why they had made decisions, and were comfortable and confident with their identity and the life they had created for themselves (Josselson, 1996). Exactly as Josselson described, these pathmakers were able “to chart their own course and had enough inner strength to tolerate crisis and uncertainty and to design their lives to suit themselves” (1996, p. 37). Each was able to articulate their experiences and share in depth information for each question. All three were married to active duty or retired military spouses and had parents and/or siblings that had served in the military. Paula described herself as “being rebellious in spirit,” and shared,

I come from a family that is stuck in their ways. I’m trying to be very diplomatic. They’re very much stuck in their ways and the way that they have done things is always the way that they would do them. If there is a better method, they don’t care. Coming from that culture and then going to college, living life in a way that is different from the one that I was brought up in really has brought about the idea that continually learning and searching and being open to new ideas is the key for a happier, better, more fulfilled life. I think ‘why’ has been that question I have asked more than any other question in my life. I’m never satisfied with just one answer. I want to know why that is . . . just research all the time because I just, I don’t know, I want to know why.

Patrice and Paige both made their military service their career and served 15 years and 25 years, respectively. Patrice was confident in her decisions but experienced feelings of “anxiety and guilt” as she made choices that shape and balance her life (Josselson, 1996, p. 73). Josselson described this in pathmakers as “the emotional run off of taking their lives in their own hands” (Josselson, 1996, p. 73). Patrice shared, “I think that’s important to know that a woman who chooses to serve does it for her best interest, and that it is a struggle.” Paige believed in “total life progression,” and she said, “I’ll never be perfect but I am going to always try to get to that next level.” She shares her experiences and advice with traditional aged students in her classes.

Motivation for Military Service. Paige, Paula, and Patrice each joined the military for different reasons. Paula had spoken to an Air Force recruiter prior to September 11th and stated that, “when September 11th happened, it just kind of reinforced my desire.” Patrice’s father told her that if her grades dropped in college she was going to have to find a way to pay for college so she joined the Air Force. Paige and her sister scored so well on the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB) test that an Army recruiter told them they could have any job they wanted in the Army. When her younger brother passed away, life was disrupted and her mother’s grief was too much for her. Paige said,

She was just taking it so hard, and it was killing her but it was killing me too, because yes, he was my brother and I loved him but my mom had almost stopped living herself; and there was just something about it that was just tearing me apart. I can’t stop living; that’s her choice. While we tried to get her to go to counseling

and grief counseling, she refused to go. I just couldn't take it, so we went on active duty.

All three pathmakers considered their options and made choices that would benefit themselves and their future.

College Experience. In college, these women were confident in what they wanted to do with their post- military careers. Patrice was a supervisor over young airmen in the military and that inspired her to be a teacher. She thought, "Okay, when I get out of the military, I'm going to go back to school and I'm going to teach because I don't know how to stop leading and stop serving. If I could teach, I would still be serving." When Paige retired from the military, she tried to stay at home for her daughter. "She never experienced me as a stay-at-home mom because they were born in my life in the military. I tried to do the housewife thing for a couple weeks, and I'm not a stay home mom at all." Paige went to college and is majoring in public service, which is the four year degree for social work. She plans to get her master's degree in counseling immediately following her bachelor's degree. Paula wants to be a professional organizer. "I really love taking chaos and making it more organized. As soon as I'm finished with school, I'm going to try to talk to [local companies] and if nothing else, just build my own clientele." She is majoring in Interdisciplinary Studies because in this major she can earn her degree and graduate in the shortest amount of time. Each pathmaker was decisive in determining her career path based on her experiences, options, and plans.

Transitioning to college life was not difficult for any of the pathmakers. Paige had a lot of VA paperwork that she had to process, but she sought the right people to help her. All experienced college as non-traditional students in classes with traditional aged

students. Paula found complaints from traditional students annoying where Patrice and Paige enjoyed providing advice and encouragement to the traditional students in class. Paige explained how the structure in the military was different from civilian life, “We don’t do all that planning.” She shared that she “started to make a plan, a routine, and I know that once I do finish with school I’ll have a set routine.” This routine helped her use the military structure to balance life. Patrice works every day to prioritize responsibilities to get everything done which she shared, “means sometimes you’re up trying to study before everyone gets up.” All three found that the structure from the military helped prioritize and balance school responsibilities.

Military Influence. All three women believed their military experience influenced who they are today. Paula believed it made her more confident, self-aware, and trusting of herself.

It was the first time I ever got to be truly independent. I was expected to be independent while still achieving the group’s larger goals. It was an entirely different way of looking at things. There were a lot of times when I wanted to quit but that wasn’t an option. You just somehow get that last little bit of ‘oomph’ and you're able to get through it no matter what.

Patrice believed her military service gave her the courage and strength she had never had before.

It taught me to be a leader . . . the most experience came when I deployed, I was in an unknown country with unknown new young airmen that just came in the military, and I had to lead them. That gave me the strength and the courage that I never would have gained somewhere else. I learned something about myself . . .

I'm that person that can do those jobs and handle those responsibilities, I'm that woman in the military, that lady in the military that I see that's a commander, a colonel, because [even though] I don't wear a rank, I demand the same respect from them. I can accomplish the same things, so I think it gave me a sense of courage and accomplishment.

Paige found the community in the military had the biggest influence on her. "I've always been very family oriented, but in the military, it becomes even more so because you become family with people who are not your blood."

Identities. When discussing their identities, each of these pathmakers felt her identity as a mother was the identity she thought of first. Patrice classified her role as a mother as the identity she thought of first and the identity she valued the most. Although Paige and Paula felt their identities as mothers were what they thought of first, they both described core identity characteristic to explain the identity they valued the most. Paula described her valued identity as "somebody that's always seeking knowledge because that's what I care about the most." Paige described her valued identity as "just me, always being the best me that I can be. I do want to be happy, and doing what I love will make me happy."

Identity as a mother. Patrice's identity as a mother is most salient to her as she shared,

I think that's what pushes me to do everything else. When I first joined the military, I was in the military because it was for me. Right after I joined the military, about a year later, I became a mother and so everything, I based everything off of, every career decision I made, each decision I made I based it as

a mother's point of view. Every trail I take, path I take, I make sure that my children are the reason I'm taking that path.

Her choice to leave the military revolved around her children. She said,

When I got ready to re-enlist, they told me I've got to get ready to go up for a nine month deployment, and I'd only been home for four months . . . I didn't want to have to leave my children and my husband was getting ready to go to Korea for a year. I chose not to re-enlist so I would be at home.

She felt a connection to other mothers in the military as they would talk and support each other get through being away from their children on deployments. She felt the pressure from those who claim you cannot be in the military and a mom at the same time. She felt she was able to find her work and life balance through courage and focus and noted,

Finding that balance and having the courage to make sure that whatever people say about a mom and a military person, that it's not true for me, that you can have a perfect balance of both, and you will not neglect both of them or either one of them, if you have a focus.

For Paula, motherhood "is the focal point of almost every moment. It's almost like even if I'm not actively thinking about them, I'm planning for something I will do later. It's hard to disconnect from that identity." Paige shared how much she loved her daughters and how they make life better for her. She shared, "Even when I was deployed, I was able to talk to them, and they just made it okay because I knew that no matter what I had to get home to them. It wasn't about me, it was about them and real quick." Paige was going to be deployed and chose to retire from the military so she would be home and

make sure her daughter had a “fabulous” senior year. Paige, like Patrice, made career choices with her children in mind.

Identity as a veteran. The veteran identity is more salient for both Patrice and Paige, whose service was a career, than it is for Paula who served for two years. Paula stated, “I rarely ever think about my identity as a veteran. It’s just, I don’t know, almost completely disconnected. It’s a different life. It’s done. It’s over. I don’t say I’m a veteran very often, I don’t talk about that.” She shared a story of an experience at a Memorial Day parade where they were giving flags to veterans, and she was passed over.

It was the first time I had really said, ‘Hey, I’m a veteran’, because he was passing out flags to all the old white guys. To me, it was just the weirdest kind of feeling that he just completely passed over me and assumed that I wouldn’t be a vet. I guess because I’m young and I’m female. I don’t know what was going through his head. But my other son stood up and said, ‘My mommy is a veteran.’ I didn’t even know he knew, but it was really strange to just be completely passed over because of the way I looked. He didn’t even consider it. I never got a flag, but it always stands out that we view veterans, I’m saying we as a culture, view veterans as a certain demographic.

She thinks it is interesting that when she goes to the VA, others assume she is there on her husband’s behalf. Patrice feels that she is given more respect and credibility once someone knows that she served in the military. She feels disrespected when people assume she was not in the military because she is a woman.

I’m used to it because even in the military, when we go places together, if it’s both of us in civilian clothes, they ask him if he is the military person. I’m like,

‘We both are,’ so yes. I do feel disrespected at that times when they don’t even think that I’m in the military, at all. I think America is still, even though we’re making strides, we still think that if it’s two people, the man is the one that’s in the military. I have a lot of friends that are military women and their husbands are not even in the military. Nobody even acknowledges that they are the military person.

For Paige, the military was her lifestyle for the past twenty-five years, and she shared, “It’s hard to let it go, I miss it so much.” She is open about her military service and talks about her military experience in class and with those interested in her being a veteran. She shared that most people do not know she is a veteran, unless they see her retired veteran license plate, so she tells them. “It makes me feel proud when people make comments about it, like ‘Thank you for your service.’ I still love to hear it.” Paige feels that women veterans do not get the attention they deserve.

I think that's the worst part so far about being a female vet. They still don’t take us seriously. We're still seen as females not as equal participants. We've participated greatly in this war on terrorism. If not for a lot of female, there's a lot of things that wouldn't get accomplished. I don’t mean nurses and secretaries, administrators. We do other things besides that.

Paula, Patrice and Paige’s stories and statements align with the characteristics of pathmakers, according to Josselson’s (1996) descriptions of this identity status. These women made choices and decisions that were best for them. Their life experiences and commitments have shaped them into the women they are today.

Searchers

Searchers are women who have explored options but have not committed to who they want to be (Josselson, 1996). According to Josselson (1996), searchers would agree with the comment, “I’m not sure about who I am or want to be, but I’m trying to figure it out” (p. 35). Sarah, Susan, and Shelby are searchers as they were still figuring out who they were and what they were going to do with their lives. The decisions they had made were out of the desire to see what possibilities were out there for them. Each was able to articulate where they had been and what might be in their future. They continue to make changes to their plans as they try to determine what makes sense for their lives (Josselson, 1996). All three were married to active duty or veteran spouses and were parents. Two had fathers that served in the military. Susan shared, “I have a lot of interests. I’m still deciding . . . I’m just taking classes here and there and just continuing slowly but surely.” Sarah shared, “I really didn’t know what I wanted to do with my life honestly.” Shelby felt the Air Force would be a respectable place for her while figuring out what she wanted to do with her life. She knew she did not want to make a career of the military at the time. Her struggle came when she had to be medically retired and then had to determine what was next. She shared, “I didn’t really want to leave the military . . . I kind of want to go back in but I’m probably not eligible.” Each of the searchers is exploring the possibilities of creating their authentic selves.

Motivation for Military Service. All three participants joined the Air Force for different reasons. Sarah shared that many women joined the military to get away from abusive relationships. She stated,

I had an unreliable husband, and he had a bad background. He was violent, and I needed a way to take care of myself and my child. . . the military was a way to do that . . . ultimately, it got me got me out of an abusive situation. I'd probably be dead right now [if I hadn't joined].

During her military entry processing, Sarah said, "I was hesitant to talk to them. They were like, 'Did your husband beat you?,' like straight up, and I was like, 'What?' And they said, 'Don't worry, that's why we're here.'" Susan thought the military was a good place to "buy some time" and figure out what she wanted to do. "I joined with the anticipation of getting out to get the educational benefits, and, really, I just wanted to know what I wanted to do in life, figure out any interests, and discover if I had any interests." Shelby "wanted to get somewhere . . . and still doing something in my life." As she had not decided what she wanted to do as far as a degree, Shelby went to talk with a recruiter after she completed a discipleship program and decided to join the military and get job experience.

College Experience. In college, these women were unsure on what they wanted to do and changed their majors until they determined what else they might be interested in. Sarah enrolled in order to use her education benefits to earn her degree and help support her family financially. She shared,

I knew that I wanted an education because better education, better pay and benefits for your family. So, I didn't really know what I wanted to do so I changed my major a couple of times. Now I'm majoring in business accounting, and I'm pretty sure that one's going to stick.

Susan believes her education benefits make being a student easier as she does not have to worry about money “and being able to afford it and not having to worry and being able to take your time and really deciding what you want to do.” Susan is a stay-at-home mom and majoring in criminal justice although she is unsure what she wants to do with that degree in the future. Shelby attended college while in the military and several other colleges when she got out. She “wanted to do medical” and majored in dental hygiene then nursing. While taking prerequisites for nursing, she decided “I don’t think nursing is going to work out for me and if I wanted to do it, I will do it later in life after I get the regular, just a different degree [sic].” She changed her major again. She shared,

I looked at different degrees, and I wasn’t sure on psychology, so someone had said human services or public service. I looked at everything, and I was like, okay, well, that looks like it would really fit my personality and also go along with a little bit of my background. I could use my background and still be able to work with people and use it to help people, and enjoy something, enjoy the job that I would get. I changed it to public service.

All three seemed to think there were possibilities to their future. All three seemed to have a direction but lacked confidence that they were certain about their plan.

Military Influence. All three women believed the military had an influence on their lives. Sarah stated, “It’s definitely made me a stronger person. It also made me a stronger woman.” Although she did not elaborate on how her military experience made her a stronger woman, she felt her military experience provided her time management, planning, and goal setting skills that she felt she did not have prior to joining the military. Susan was more uncertain of the influence. “I think it made me a little more structured, I

guess, more responsible. I'm not sure . . . It has opened me up to the world, I guess.”

Shelby felt she was valued in the service, as a woman in the military. She shared,

It's definitely given me a work ethic and [a sense of] working for a cause, along with just learning how to work with others, superiors and people below. . . and it's helped me understand people, [how to] deal with every different type of person respectfully no matter if you agree with them or not.

Identities. When discussing their identities, Sarah was more animated and self-aware than the other two. She described her identity as a white female and then added, Obviously, I'm, well, I'm pregnant, so that means I have to be someone straight, right? Well, not necessarily but I kind of think of myself as the cis woman. I think being a woman is so much different than being a guy. I think it's easy just to think about that first. I'm constantly being reminded by people who think I'm parking in the wrong spaces, who think that it's all my husband's benefits that I'm getting. I think that constantly reminds me that I'm a woman and sometimes I'm like, ‘Yes, yes. I drive a disabled vet car and I have a vagina. It's hard to put together, I know.’ It's so modern these days, women being in the military.

Sarah recognizes the privilege that comes with being white, and she shared,

I was raised in an area where the majority of people back home are black, and I can see that some of the black women that I went to school with, they started in the same place as me, and they had better opportunities sometimes. I had a kid early. I got married early. He was abusive. I kind of made it further than them, which may partially be due to the military thing, but I don't know. I see my privilege. I don't have to worry about my son going to school. He was wearing a hoodie the

other day and he zipped it all the up, and it's like you could seriously rob a bank with one of these. He's 12, and he's kind of tall. He was walking around like that and people kind of giggled at him. 'Oh, that's cute,' or whatever. It might not be the same for some of my friends. Maybe it's because race relations is such a big issue in the country today, but then again, coming from it, constantly seeing it growing up, I think that impacts it.

Susan had difficulty articulating and expressing her identity. She classified herself as "just white, Northeastern," married, and a stay-at-home mom. For the identity she values the most, Susan said, "I guess, as a veteran." Where Susan struggled to share who she is, Shelby identified a broad sense of her core identity. She identified as a mother, wife, and student and shared,

I probably value just me as a person, just like the identity of me, myself, and I. I don't have to answer the call of other people but remind [myself] not to let any one of those identities push me and myself, my inner self, down as I am growing along with whom I am becoming.

As searcher, these women are still exploring who they are and making changes as they discover themselves.

Identity as a mother. All three are mothers and see their identity as a mother differently. Sarah was pregnant at the interview and talked about her two other children but did not include being a mom as an identity with which she identifies. Like Sarah, Susan was also pregnant at the interview and had other children. She shared, "I think most people just see me as a stay-at-home mom . . . I don't really identify myself as homemaker or something like that." Shelby, on the other hand, identified as a mom first

and then a wife and student. She shared, “I think just because that's what my life is surrounded by at the moment . . . these are three right now that are on my plate and need all my attention at the moment.”

Identity as a veteran. Susan identified being a veteran as a part of her identity that she valued most, and although she did not elaborate, she shared, “I'm very happy that I'm a veteran and getting the benefits.” Sarah felt she did not identify as a veteran much but felt it was easier for her to identify with younger veterans than with older veterans. She shared,

It's hard for me to identify kind of, a little bit, because I see a lot of the older vets who kind of act like people owe them everything, like, ‘well, I served my country.’ I just I don't believe that. I believe that it's a volunteer force; you made a choice to serve your country; and you can't hang that over everybody's head all the time. We're, honestly, all just trying to live the way we can. I feel like the younger veterans, that are getting out now, kind of have more of the same attitudes that I do. We're not trying to say ‘you owe me’ or anything.

Although Sarah does not identify as a veteran much, she shared that at times her veteran identity becomes more salient. When people believe she is using her husband's benefits instead of her own, she feels slighted by others. Sarah said, “You realize I'm a veteran, like you can't say that to me and me not be offended.” Shelby's identity as a veteran is not salient to her, but she shared how she and her spouse felt it necessary to instill their military values in their children.

It put us in a position that we want to teach our kids the important of the American flag and the Pledge of Allegiance. These small details that are not

being put into place as much anymore as when we were kids, and that we've seen the importance of them. We are ensuring that we not only have the respect for the national holidays and Memorial Day, but we are ensuring that our kids are learning that, and that they learn the values that we have learned in the military.

Sarah, Susan, and Shelby's stories and statements align with the characteristics of searchers, according to Josselson's (1996) descriptions of this identity status. These women were still working to find out who they wanted to be and exploring various opportunities and interests to help solidify what is best for them. Their life experiences are part of their exploration of searching for the women they want to become.

Guardians

Guardians are women who have committed to who they want to be without exploration into other options (Josselson, 1996). According to Josselson, guardians would agree with the comment, "This is how I am because it's how I was raised or how I've always been" (1996, p. 35). Grace, Ginger, and Geri were guardians as they were women who seemed to know where they were going without much crisis or conflict. Guardians did not fulfill their desires but did what would be acceptable to those closest to them (Josselson, 1996). Although guardians live their lives the way they feel they are supposed to, these three women each struggled with self-examination and answering the questions with much detail or conviction. This may have been because these women had not thought about or been asked about their life choices and decisions before. Each had parents who had served and two were married to active duty spouses. Grace valued her work ethic, in which she credits to her family. She shared, "I'm from a blue collar family and that's all you have, I guess in that setting or upbringing. That's something that no

one can take from me, I guess.” Ginger was unable to continue in the military after her third child but found comfort in her family, career aspirations, and school. Geri had to be medically retired from the military. She shared, “That was fine with me. I wanted to get out. I had lost my grandma last February. I was really just wanting to be home for my family. My sister was pregnant with my first niece or nephew. . . I was a homesick.” Family was an underlying theme for each of the guardians.

Motivation for Military Service. Joining the military was not a choice that was unique or far-reaching for any of these women. Grace’s mother, and Geri’s and Ginger’s fathers had all served in the military. Enlisting may have been a comfortable option as it was an option others in their family had chosen. Grace joined the Army and shared,

I was a senior in high school. It was shortly after 9/11, around 2002, and I was just really upset with everything that was going on. I just wanted to help. I picked a field that I could go into that would transfer once I got out. I was a combat medic and then I went to a nursing school so they paid for my LPN license.

Ginger had lost her job due to her employer downsizing, and she needed a stable job and stable money. She figured “the military’s the way to go” and joined the Army. Geri was living with her dad who had just gotten re-married, and she said, “Things weren't working out. I wanted to get out of that situation.” Her GPA had dropped and she had lost her scholarship. She was stressed out, and she thought joining the Air Force would help her financially and she would get the education benefits she needed to pay for school.

College Experience. In college, these women chose career paths not too far off what was comfortable and familiar. Grace had been a nurse for ten years and was tired of her career choice. She is majoring in business and shared,

I wasn't challenged [in nursing]. I just wanted to do something completely different. I don't know. I haven't really decided yet. I'm getting a degree in something as broad as possible so that I can have options. I may decide to go back in health care and be in management. I know how to run a department or an office. I don't know.

Ginger always knew she would enroll in college when she got out of the military. She shared, "I decided I've got to have something to do, and I didn't really want to do anything in the government . . . so, here I come to get completely retrained and reeducated." Ginger had been picked to go to drill sergeant school and train incoming soldiers before she had to separate from the military. She is majoring in early childhood special education. She said, "That is as different as you could get but the same. Instead of teaching adults, I'm teaching kids."

Geri was a criminal justice major before she entered the military as a medic. Returning to college following military service, Geri returned to criminal justice, and said, "I used to watch forensic files and CSI. I always read murder mystery books. It just always pulled me." Each woman chose a career path that was safe and comfortable to her.

These women did not seem to have many challenges as they experienced college. Grace was nervous at the start of college and felt her challenge as she experienced college was "being able to balance work, home and school, being a wife and being a

mother.” Geri did not feel like she had any challenges as she stated, “It was pretty easy for me to jump back into school.” Ginger felt the structure from the military eased her transition but being a lot older (mature) than the students in class was a challenge for her.

Military Influence. All three shared how the military influenced their lives today. They did not seem to become changed people but had had an experience that stuck with them. Grace shared,

It [the military] forced me to grow up very quickly. I was responsible for equipment and people and stuff at an early age . . . it’s just they teach you to be aware of your surroundings, to be tough, never to give up. They do brain-wash you, in a way, in the military. They kind of tear you down and then build you back up to the person they want you to be and that sticks with you . . . I didn’t know any better. I didn’t know what was being done to me so I just said ok. I just went along with it, but I wouldn’t take it back for anything.

The structure of the military influenced Ginger. She said

I like schedule. I like to be on time, early actually. I get really agitated if we can’t get out of the house and plan to be there at least 10 minutes early. You wouldn’t think that, but, you know, in the military, you’re always 10 minutes early to everything. If we get out of the house late, and I do it with my kids every morning, I’m like, ‘All right, we have 10 minutes. Okay, now we’re down to five. Now it’s three. Get your shoes on.’ It’s very regimented when we have to get out of the house. That’s the biggest change having served and got out of the military.

Although she did not deploy, Geri felt the exposure to different cultures and different people influenced her the most. She said, “I’ve met people from all different walks of life, people from different countries and that’s pretty cool.”

Identities. Discussing identities was difficult with these women, as they seemed to have a hard time knowing what to share or how to answer the questions. They used phrases like “I don’t know” or “I guess” frequently. Grace valued the work ethic she inherited from her family, and described herself as “a protector or advocate.” She shared, “I feel like I could stand up, even if I’m alone, against something that I think is wrong or to protect someone or to be the voice for someone who maybe can’t speak for themselves. I don’t know. I don’t know really.” She sees herself as “serious but also kind of goofy.” She followed that description of herself with “I don’t know.” Geri identified as a veteran and shared,

I definitely would think I’m a veteran. I definitely identify with that. I’m not sure. I’m a student. I’m a Southern girl. I guess I really do value that I’m a veteran, because I get so many benefits now that I didn’t have before like I’m a disabled veteran so I get money for it every month. That’s something I wouldn’t have had before. On Veterans Day every year, I get free food.

Ginger was the most assured of the guardians in terms of their identities. She saw herself as a mother and valued her identity as a mother. She shared,

I guess it’s that whole teaching thing. I mean, I just want them to grow up and I want them to grow up in a better world. I want them to be knowledgeable. I want them to succeed. I don’t want them to fail. As a mother, it’s my job to ensure that they’re ready to get out there and be productive citizens.

Identity as a mother. Grace separated from the military when she became pregnant, and she said, “I just didn’t feel that I should be on active duty with a child.” She did not feel that she needed to consider other alternatives. As being a mother was a valued aspect of Ginger’s life, she shared, “They [her kids] need somebody to guide them, and I have been given the privilege to have these three children and guide them. It’s a great honor.”

Identity as a veteran. Grace shared that her identity as a veteran was a big part of her life but could not explain how or why. She said, “Maybe the military didn’t make me what I am. I don’t know.” After eleven years, Ginger was not able to re-enlist when she could not lose the weight she had gained during pregnancy. She stated, “I went from the biggest honor I could be given to develop young soldiers to ‘sorry you’re not good enough for us anymore’ It was really sad.” Ginger’s veteran identity does not seem to be very salient to her. Geri shared how veteran’s identity has been salient to her in her internship at a sheriff’s office. She shared,

I guess some officers were like, ‘We’re going to keep you over here so you’ll be good and safe, away from people if we get out of the car and what not.’ I’m thinking, yeah, I’m a woman, but I was in the military. I can take care of myself. She felt that when she tells people that she was in the military she earns their respect. She said, “When you tell people, they really respect you more.”

Grace, Ginger, and Geri’s stories and statements align with the characteristics of guardians, according to Josselson’s (1996) descriptions of this identity status. These women knew who they were without the need to explore other options. Their life experiences are part of who they are.

Drifters

Drifters are women who have not explored options and have not committed to who they want to be (Josselson, 1996). According to Josselson, drifters would agree with the comment, “I don’t know what I will do or believe, but it doesn’t matter too much right now” (1996, p. 36). Danielle was the only participants that fit within Josselson’s (1996) drifter identity status. She had the most interesting stories and deployment experiences, and she seemed to be flexible to whatever happened. Danielle had different perspectives and enjoyed offering her opinions and points of view to others. Danielle described her transition to civilian and college life as awkward and stated, “It felt like I was on the outside looking in.” She was trying to connect with those with whom she served, but the good times began to disappear as others had moved on, had children, gotten married and had other commitments. She described her efforts by saying,

You just do what you want but it was awkward, like ‘What’s going on?’ and something like ‘Hey guys,’ killing the phone, going and visiting, driving back on base at night, going to a certain post or ‘you want me to bring some food,’ stuff like that, anything to keep the connection.

Motivation for Military Service. Danielle decided to join the Air Force to help her mother financially after her mother’s divorce. Many members of her family were serving or had served in the Army and Marines and advised her to join the Air Force as a branch better suited for women.

I just knew I wasn’t going to retire out of it. I just never saw it as a career. Then it didn’t help when you feel like when you go back home and visit, and you feel like you’re missing out on something. It just never was long term for me. Then

going through 9/11 as well, that was a wake up a call. Expecting to get in, do a little traveling, get money for school and get out. I joined up to help out, but also I knew about the G.I. Bill which would benefit me once I got out.

Danielle, like many drifters, is not making long-term plans but living day to day and trying to fit in where ever that feels comfortable for the moment.

College Experience. Danielle struggled when she came back to college following her military service. As a good student in high school, Danielle was frustrated that she did not understand the content of her college classes. “It had been a long [time], but it was frustrating. It just wasn't clicking. I couldn't understand why I wasn't good at something. I guess because I've never really had that problem.” Balancing college, work, and home life began to take a toll. She shared,

I'm getting some of these classes and then it kind of -- it got overwhelming. Then there was ‘Okay well I'm going to work and go to school at the same time.’ Work, go to school, and have my cousin's kids. That was an interesting time frame, four to six hours of sleep max. Then taking care of them, and then trying to get what I needed to get done. It was a lot. That was not easy. It's a lot more comfortable now. It's just me to focus on, and it's a lot easier. That kind of bothered me, too, in the beginning with all that going on. I was in honors classes in school and in AP classes and then to struggle with a class here or there when I got back, it was. . . I didn't know how to deal with that at all.

Danielle is majoring in business, and she thinks she wants to do something in the veterans affairs field.

Military Influence. For Danielle, her military service gave her structure and instilled in her integrity. She takes her commitment to integrity passionately and is not afraid to speak out when necessary.

I just can't stand when people just try feeding me a line; I can see right through it; and I know that it's not true. They try to tailor the conversation a certain way or slant it . . . just be upfront, be honest, have integrity. If someone needs help, help them. That was the whole service before self, thing. Just get it done even, if the person really doesn't deserve it. But maybe, I don't know, maybe they have kids or someone connected to them will benefit from it, just do it. That's how I look at it. I don't have a lot of time for excuses or just people not pulling their own weight. That's what I got out of it.

Identities. Danielle saw her identity as single with no kids but then stated, "I've always been the one that everyone leaned on, so to speak, in my family; the source of strength or something like the foundation. I'm kind of like the go-to person, if somebody needs something. It's just what it is." She described core parts of her identity as "mean at times, to the point, direct, don't show a lot of emotion, hard shell. I've been told that a lot. Good heart, very giving, good with kids." What she valued about her identity was knowing who she is. She describes herself as a "chameleon."

I'm not a conform-to-the-norm type of person, you know what I mean, just because it's popular or whatever. I have no problem being on the outside looking in at times. I'm not comfortable with it or if I don't believe in it, then you can't talk me into it. You're not going to force me to do something basically I don't want to do.

As Danielle is not a mother, she does not identify as one; however, she was the guardian for her cousin's three children while her cousin was deployed for two years. Josselson (1996) believed women without children incorporate their connections with others' children into their identity. It should be noted that while Danielle does not identify as a mother, she did describe within her core identity as "good heart, very giving, good with kids," characteristics, which likely formed during her time as the children's guardian.

Identity as a veteran. Danielle's military and veteran experience is salient to her. She shared how she can pick out veterans by the way they carry themselves and shared stories of others guessing that she served in the military as well. Drifters often respond to political issues and issues that go against their beliefs (Josselson, 1996), and Danielle is passionate about speaking out. She shared a story of an incident in a waiting room where she was listening to people talking about politics and the military.

But it was lies, I'm sitting there listening to them and they're talking about what was going on overseas and the president and this, that and the other. I'm just looking at them, and I'm like none of this is true. Just listening to things like that and then knowing what was going on, and what we were really over there doing and what missions we were really supporting. Then coming home and hearing the narrative that people were just so off base to what was really going on over there, but they were like all in. I was sitting there and I said something, and my mom was like, 'Stop,' and I kind of snapped a little bit but not directly to them, just aloud, to let them know that I knew what I was talking about and they didn't. She was like, 'You just don't need to engage with people' and this, that, and the other

and ‘You get too passionate.’ So I don't know, the misinformation just bothers me.

Danielle is frustrated that although the military is changing for women and there are more positions available for women, nobody is acknowledging that women can play a greater role in the military. She is open about her veteran identity and willing to challenge those without proper knowledge or respect of the military. This relates back to the strong sense of integrity instilled in her during her service.

Danielle’s stories and statements align with the characteristics of drifters, according to Josselson’s (1996) descriptions of this identity status. She was moving through life and making decisions when necessary. She was not exploring options or making commitments.

Each of the identity status of Josselson’s (1996) identity development of women have distinct characteristics that define women’s identity. The women student veterans in this study fit within each of the identity status. The next sections highlight the themes that emerged through data analysis that were not aligned by identity status but by women who had served in the military and were enrolled in college.

Themes

Through data analysis, information shared through the stories and statements of the participants brought forth themes that highlighted the how life experiences and military experiences influenced their lives. I developed codes through open coding, and then I collapsed the various codes into four themes: finances, masculine culture, military veterans as military wives, and peer support in college (Appendix G). Their stories and statements provide information regarding the impact of these themes on their lives.

Finances

While there was a variety of reasons these participants joined the military, finances was an important aspect for most. Patrice and Paige attended college before entering the service. Patrice said, “I knew there was no way I’m going to get a job to pay for school so I joined the Air Force.” Paige was working full time while in college because her mother couldn’t afford college for both her and her sister. She and her sister went on active duty. Sarah figured,

If I can get through basic training and stuff, I’d be making a whole lot more than I was at Dairy Queen. . . I was a little bit scared that I wouldn’t be able to afford all my bills and stuff. At least, I wouldn’t be financially in hardship.

For Geri, things were not working out in her life or with her finances at the time, and the GI Bill education benefit was what lured her to the military. Like Geri, Ginger’s finances were a deciding factor in her joining the military. She said, “My debts were piling up. I moved in with my now husband. We decided we needed more money. We needed something stable.”

The GI Bill benefit gives student veterans an opportunity to earn their degree without the financial burden of paying for their education and their living expenses. Paula stated, “Financially, it’s nice not to have to worry about it so much especially with the GI Bill . . . now I can focus just on school, which means I can take more classes and be done faster.” Susan shared that money from the GI Bill “makes being a student a lot easier because you don’t have to worry about the money.” Danielle knew the GI Bill would benefit her once she got out. Both she and Ginger highlighted the difference between the money and benefits earned while in the military and the money and benefits

earned through the GI Bill. They felt there was a big difference for which they were not prepared. Once Ginger's paycheck from the military stopped, she said,

I was like 'oh my goodness, what am I going to do?' . . . it's actually been a huge effect on us, because when that money stopped, the money stopped, and it was a big paycheck. It wasn't just the money, the benefits that came along with it.

When my kid got sick, I remember having to pay for my son's medication; \$800 out of pocket.

For all these women, the military provided an opportunity for them to take care of current financial issues or reduce future financial issues.

Masculine Culture

Paige and Sarah highlighted the effects of the masculine culture in the military.

In referring to female servicemembers, Paige shared her perspective,

They get seen in a negative light, manly, butch, crazy stuff like that. We can still be pretty, feminine and all about a woman and still drive a truck. Why not? I think that's the worst part about being a female vet is that they portray us as trying to be something more manly. They said this is a man's army, and I don't agree. I don't agree at all. You would think there's a problem with trying to be pretty, because I got accused of being a Barbie doll. This is not a Barbie dolls Army. We could wear makeup, but it had to be very, very conservative. We couldn't wear earrings. The uniform was made for men, boots, the long coat and all that. Anything that makes you more feminine, they didn't want. You're distracting, calm down with the perfume, stuff like that. On the flip side, my hair is natural. If I cut it too short, then they are going to say I'm trying to be a guy. If I try to

decrease my sway when I walk, because I do have a sway when I walk, I mean I have hips . . . if I try to calm that down, then I'm walking like a guy. It's like we can't win for losing. I'm not of that mind. What are you going to do? Yeah. I'm going to keep being me, I'm a girl. I love being a girl even out of a uniform.

Sarah's transition from the masculine military culture to college life posed a challenge for her.

I didn't have any clothes. I wasn't very feminine. When I was in Iraq, I was with security forces, military police, and so you kind of had to do away with femininity. It took me a little while, probably a couple of semesters really, to get on my feet as far as clothing and style. Even though it had only been like almost seven years, I don't know, I guess things have changed so much. I just didn't have any clothes, because I wear uniform five days a week so I had like two outfits for the weekend. That's really all you needed.

Grace believed that, in boot camp, the military would “tear you down and then build you back up to the person they want you to be” and this is where the military assimilates the servicemember into the masculine culture. Grace, a guardian, was going to go along with what they wanted her to be. Paige, a pathmaker, was not going to alter who she is to meet some other expectation. She was confident to express her opinions and who she was as a woman. Sarah, a searcher, worked to determine what she wanted to look like when she transitioned out of the military in order to adapt to her new environment in college. The impact of adapting to and from the masculine culture of the military was displayed according to the participants' identity status.

Military Veterans as Military Wives

Eight participants were not only military veterans but also wives of military spouses. Susan felt her experience in the military gave her an understanding about her husband's deployments and military experiences that other military wives did not have. She shared, "I think it works to my advantage, because I understand more of my husband's deployments and I understand what they're doing and what he has to do. We have an upper hand on that, dealing with that." Patrice shared her knowledge with those who may not have the experience or perspective she has.

You see women who aren't military, and they think of you differently when they have husbands that are military . . . sometimes you feel like it's you against them. I feel like I have to prove that I'm a mom, and I love my kids, and I take care of my kids, too. Just because I choose to work outside of the home, or I chose to take a deployment doesn't mean that I love my children any less than you love your children being at home or working a nine to five job that doesn't call you to deploy. I think that's the biggest conflict I have is inserting myself into stay-at-home moms or military spouses. Because, now I'm the military spouse, and I'm maybe a tougher one. I understand more of what it takes to be a member of the military for the spouse, or what it takes for a woman. When I hear them talk about women that are in the military or hear them talk about their spouses' job, I interject. It's not always a good thing, and they don't like it.

Patrice's advocacy for herself and other women veterans provided others with knowledge to see military service from a different perspective. This ties with the masculine culture theme as military the military veterans who are also military

wives are often viewed as spouses instead of veterans because of their gender. Sarah shared that, when she is at the VA or people see her disabled veteran license plate, they assume it is her husband's and not hers. The knowledge of the military, deployments, and sacrifices benefits military wives who are also veterans in understanding the military lifestyle but also adds an element of disdain when their service is overlooked because of their gender.

Peer Support in College

Most of the participants believe that a support group or organization for veterans is needed to help student veterans transition and succeed in college. Josselson (1996) stated, "The deepest sense of identity is located in these ties to others who need them" (p. 236-237). Paula thought a veterans group would be useful, "because women typically are more social creatures and being able to take that time to say, 'hey, I'm new. I have no idea what I'm doing. This is completely weird, a much weirder environment than anything.' That would be nice." Danielle also believed an organization "where you meet and you get together and you talk" would be helpful. Ginger said,

If they had an organization where veterans could mingle, get to know one another that would really be good. Then you would be able to meet other women in the area, not necessarily at this school, but in this general area, who were going through some of the same struggles as yourself.

Patrice believed a support group for women student veterans would help women as they transition out of the military and into college. She shared,

I think maybe meeting other women that are going through the same things that you're going through or will be going through eventually. It is emotional thing,

because you wonder, did I make the right decision; should I have gotten out; or is this the best thing? You don't want to go to the tutoring sessions because there's a lot of young kids there or they're taught by younger kids. You kind of feel intimidated to go, and it kind of makes you embarrassed to go if you need it. They [tutors] don't even know what you need once you need help. We [student veterans] don't even know each other on the campus, like a lot of veteran women, but we don't know each other. I think there's a lot of struggle dealing with balancing being a mother or being a wife as a veteran. There was a lot of discovery. It's like you're starting all over again, but your starting over at a later age. It is hard, so I think maybe a support group or even letting us know who each other are.

Shelby thought that women student veterans could help advise and guide other women student veterans on campus. She shared, "I think finding and helping women veterans, based on their likes and dislikes, and approaching it from that angle and getting to know them at a personal level." Paige thought institutions should increase communications and continually "push out the information all of the time, it may be a little repetitive and redundant, just keep pushing it out" to student veterans so they will know of the services and programs available to them. Susan felt advising for student veterans would benefit them as many student veterans have multiple credits in the form of transfer credits, military training credits, and standardized tests, like CLEP and DANTES credits. She felt that colleges should "give military students a little more credit for their experience."

As these participants are from a university with one veterans certifying official, a limited veteran's website, and no student veterans organization, this data provides useful

information for this institution. These women are making their way through college without these services but recognize how these services might benefit themselves and other veterans.

Conclusion

This chapter provides the major findings of the narratives of these women student veterans. Using narrative inquiry, I shared the findings through the stories of the participants as they relate to Josselson's (1996) identity statuses and through the reasons for which they joined the military, military influences, college experiences, and identities. I shared the themes of finances, masculine culture, experiences as military veterans as military wives, and peer support in college explored through stories and statements of these participants, as well. The focus of this chapter is how the participants' identities and experiences influence their identity status as women. The findings drew attention to the fact that, although these women student veterans have had unique experiences, they still fit within the four identity statuses of Josselson's (1996) identity development of women much like other women. DiRamio and Jarvis (2011) believed women student veterans would be pathmakers, but the findings in this study contradict that belief. The women student veterans in this study revealed that their military experience had an influence on their lives, but the military experience did not make them all into pathmakers. Their identity developed through many life experiences, which affected them as women. These life experiences lead them to military service for financial and educational reasons, and then led them to college or back to college in order to determine the next opportunity in life.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

In the previous chapter, I presented the findings from data analysis of interviews conducted with 10 women student veterans who had served on or after September 11, 2001 and were attending college. I used a qualitative constructivist design using narrative inquiry to understand the lived experiences of this group of women student veterans through their own words (Clandinin & Connolly, 2000; Creswell, 2014). Through stories and statements, I acquired information from specific questions regarding identity, motivation for military service, college experience, and military influence to understand each participant's identity status through Josselson's (1996) identity statuses of pathmakers, searchers, guardians, and drifters. Four themes of finances, military culture, military veterans as military wives, and peer support in college also provided data through the participants' stories and statements.

As the research sometimes generalizes the student veteran experience without differentiating by gender, this study explored the experiences of women student veterans. The purpose of this study was to understand how women student veterans define for themselves who they are and how their experiences in the military and college affect their identity as women. The study gathered participants' stories of their experiences joining and leaving the military, transitioning to college life, and understanding their identities. A better understanding of women student veterans contributes to the literature about

women student veterans and the practice of student affairs professionals serving women student veterans. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How does the identity status' of women student veterans, as measured by Josselson's theory of identity development (1996), affect how they experience college?
2. How do the experiences of women student veterans in the military and in college influence their identities as women?

How participants of this study experience college and their identities is understood through the application of Josselson's theory of identity development of women (1996). These women student veterans shared stories of challenges, perceptions, thoughts, feelings, and opinions on their experiences and identities that shape their lives.

Discussion of Findings

According to Josselson (1996), "identity in women cannot be simply named for it resides in the pattern that emerges as a woman stitches an array of aspects of herself and her investments in others" (p. 9). The identity statuses, developed by Josselson (1996), provide an accurate description of the identities of the women student veterans in this study. DiRamio and Jarvis (2011) believed Josselson (1996) would classify women student veterans as pathmakers. If all women student veterans were pathmakers, military experience would have an enormous effect on identity development of women. I found the identities of women student veterans are distributed through all four identity statuses and their status existed independent of the military experience. Of the 10 participants in this study, three were pathmakers, three were searchers, three were guardians, and one was a drifter. Women student veterans cannot be easily labeled by one category when

experiences before, during, and after military service and college enrollment also shape their identity. Phillips' (2014) veterans critical theory tenet that "veterans are unknowable" (p. 220) supports the idea that women student veterans are not all the same, like people in general. As Josselson (1996) believed that identity can continue to develop as women mature, studying this group of women student veterans five or ten years from now may produce different results as they continue to develop their identity through college and life experiences.

Identities

Jones and McEwen's (2000) model of multiple dimensions of identity (MMDI) is detectable through the descriptions of the identities shared by the participants. The MMDI connects the core of one's identity (characteristics and attributes) with one's social identities (race, gender, relationship status, etc.) and illustrates how salient aspects of one's identity revolve around the core self (Jones & McEwen, 2000). Salient aspects of their identity revolve closer to their core identity than other aspects. Paula described her core identity as "always seeking knowledge." Her identity as a mother was very salient and it revolved closer to her core. Her veteran identity, which she stated, "I rarely ever think about," revolved farther away from her core. Understanding one's identity through the context of saliency may help those working with women student veterans engage with them through more salient identities first. Phillips' (2014) veterans critical theory tenet "veterans experience multiple identities at once" (p. 211) also explains how participants' identities are expressed in order of saliency. Some participants identified social labels like mother (Patrice & Ginger), veteran (Susan & Geri), and white (Sarah) to define their identities. Others described characteristics of their personal identities like

“just me, always being the best me” (Paige), “protector or advocate” (Grace), and “good heart, very giving” (Danielle) to define their identities. The identity that most participants thought of first was not the identity they valued the most. The exceptions were Patrice and Ginger whose identities as mothers were the first identities they described and also the identities they most valued. Geri also chose her veteran identity as the one she thought of first and also her most valued. In this study, identity status did not dictate one’s valued identity as either core internal characteristics or social identities. Within each identity status, at least one participant identified internal characteristics to describe her valued identity. Paula, Patrice, Shelby, Grace and Danielle each described their valued identity as core internal characteristics. Shelby, a searcher, reminded herself to not allow her social identities affect who she is at the core as she is discovering who she wants to be. Although women may fit within the same identity status, they are not solely defined by their status and have similarities with women in other identity statuses. The pathmakers were most confident in their answers and had the easiest time answering the questions about their identity. The searchers and the guardians struggled more with classifying their identities. I believe this was due to the searchers still trying to figure out who they are and the guardians having never really thought about their identity. The drifter’s description of herself as a “chameleon” was appropriate as she could change at any moment without much concern.

Identity as mother. Eight of the ten participants were married with children and five of those described being a mother as an identity of salience for them. Danielle, one of the single participants, included her connection with children in her core identity after serving as a guardian for her cousin’s children. All three pathmakers described their role

as mothers as the identity they thought of first and were very passionate about the impact their children have on their lives. Where motherhood was very salient for Shelby, Susan, and Sarah both talked about their children but that part of their identity was not as close to their core as other parts of their identity. For Ginger, motherhood was a “great honor” and a valued part of her identity where it was not as salient for Grace even though she chose to leave the military when she became pregnant. DiRamio and Jarvis (2011) believe women student veterans focus on fulfilling their responsibilities and caring for those around them. Motherhood involves both responsibility and care, especially when adding military service, education, work, and family into the mix.

For most of these women, motherhood is an important aspect of their identity as women. Whether close to or far from their identity’s core, these women, regardless of identity status, made decisions, chose pathways, and cared for their children and for some, other people’s children. Although motherhood is an important aspect for many women in general, the women in this study had to make choices while in the military and while deployed that many women in general do not have to make. These decisions impacted themselves and their families, and those decisions were judged by others outside the military.

Identity as veteran. I found it interesting that veteran identity was not nearly as salient as I had suspected. Only two participants, Susan and Geri, stated their veteran identity was the identity they valued or was salient to them, although neither could provide solid reasons why. I wonder if Susan and Geri’s answers would have been different if I was not recruiting student veterans for the study but researching identities in general.

Identity status does not seem to have an effect on saliency of veteran identity. Pathmakers, Patrice and Paige, had the longest careers in the military and share their military experience in class discussions where Paula, also a pathmaker, feels disconnected from that time in her life. She even mentioned in her story about an experience at a Memorial Day parade when she did not know her son knew she was a veteran. Both Sarah and Shelby, searchers, do not identify as veterans largely except when a VA benefit issue or a military holiday moves their veteran identity closer to their core. Susan, a searcher, identified as a veteran using the phrase “I guess.” Susan appreciated the benefits (money, respect, free food, etc.) her veterans’ status provided. Her veteran identity moves closer to their core when the benefit of being a veteran presents itself. Ginger, a guardian, had to leave the military before she was ready and does not feel connected to her veteran status, where Geri, also a guardian, used her veteran identity to relate to others at her internship site. A drifter, Danielle’s military experience and veteran identity were very salient to her. She is very willing to share her opinions and perspectives with anyone who may have a different opinion or a perspective, especially about the military. Danielle can pick out veterans just “by the way they carry themselves.” She wants to stay connected to that part of her life. These participants agreed that the military experience is a life changing experience; however, when the experience is over, the saliency of the veteran status revolves around their core identities, as do other social roles, moving closer to and farther away from their core depending on current life experiences like military recognitions and holidays, semester GI Bill certifications, and VA processes. Understanding the elements and events that

bring the veterans identity closer to a veteran's core is important in order to understand and serve this group of women.

Research shows that veterans disclose their veteran status and share their military experience to others when and how they want to share (Hamrick & Rumann, 2011; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). Although somewhat similar to other invisible identities, the veteran identity is a chosen identity as military service is a voluntary opportunity. For these women student veterans, the more salient the veteran identity, the more likely they would share their experiences. Danielle, Paige, and Patrice openly share their experiences; however, they do choose when and how and with whom. The research of DiRamio et al. (2008) and DiRamio and Jarvis (2011) showed that student veterans try to blend into campus and classes. This is true with this group of veterans as well.

Motivation for Military Service

Finding a new life, discovering a career, finding a way to pay for college, expressing patriotism, traveling, and escaping from violence or abuse are all reasons women join the military (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Foster & Vince, 2009). The participants in this study were no different. Shelby, Grace, and Ginger were looking for a career option where Patrice and Susan were looking for a way to pay for college. Paige and Geri wanted to escape from family issues and Sarah needed to escape from a violent husband. Paula wanted to help her country following September 11th, and Danielle wanted "to get in, do a little traveling, get some money for school and get out." Sarah's story about her entry process in the Air Force where her abuse was recognized and her choice to join was accepted by those in the entry process was supported by the research. As all of the participants had close family members who were or had been in the military,

it is interesting that a need to follow in a parent's or family member's footsteps or fulfill some sort of family military legacy was not expressed as a reason for joining for these women. Family members seemed to support the participants' decisions to join but the participants did not present a feeling of obligation or loyalty to their family's military service. This may be a socioeconomic issue as these women chose the military to solve real and immediate financial issues. The legacy aspect may not have been as important to them as the financial aspect. Their motivation for military service is not separated by identity status but fits within the reasons for joining the military that is consistent with the research (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Foster & Vince, 2009).

College Experiences

Identity status does affect how these women student veterans experience college. Consistent with Josselson's theory (1996), these women student veterans experience college in accordance with their identity status characteristics. Their choices, challenges, and commitments differ by identity status as those define who they are as women.

The pathmakers were confident in their career choice and were in college to earn the degree to get them where they wanted to go in life. The college experience was not difficult for any of these pathmakers as they found their way through their transition, and they relied upon themselves to make decisions and solve problems. Experiencing college as non-traditional students, these women found the structure and discipline from the military helped provide skills for success in college. Challenges in their experience were resolved because of their own inner strength and personal independence.

None of the three searchers was sure if the major they had decided on was the right one for them but were pursuing the degree in hopes that it would lead to something

of interest. They were finding their way with the help of their GI Bill education benefits even though each struggled a little with the VA paperwork. Sarah's experience transitioning from the military to college was a challenge in terms of clothing. She left a world where she wore a masculine uniform and moved to a college campus where women were more feminine and stylish. Consistent with her searcher identity status, Sarah had to try and figure out what she wanted to be and what she wanted to look like.

The guardians were pursuing degrees that were comfortable and safe. None of the guardians found the transition to college to be very challenging. As non-traditional students, Grace and Ginger found being in class with immature traditional-aged students often frustrating. Ginger and Geri struggled with what to do with so much time on their hands, where Grace struggled with balancing her responsibilities of home, work, and school.

Danielle, the drifter, was majoring in business and she thought she wanted to work in "the veterans affairs field." Consistent with drifters, Danielle was not making any commitments but living day to day (Josselson, 1996). Of all the participants, she had the hardest time adapting to college and the academic rigor of college, and she was frustrated that she did not understand the material. The research shows that non-traditional students have concerns about their abilities when they come to college (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). This was true for Danielle.

Most of the women in this study had attended college prior to military service or had taken some classes while they were serving. The transition to college was not very difficult for most of the women in this study. Their prior experience in college and the structure, characteristics, and skills learned in the military may have helped make their

transition to college after military service more manageable. I think transitioning from civilian life to boot camp and military life may have been a bigger ordeal, which may have made the transition to college later easier.

Military Influence

All of the participants agreed that their military experience had an impact on their lives and had influenced who they are today. Strength, confidence, courage, structure, integrity, self-aware, independent, leadership skills, community, exposure to different people and cultures were all words and phrases used to describe the impact of the participants' military experience. The finding supported the literature (Livingston et al. 2011; Mankowski, 2012; Olsen et al., 2014). According to Baechtold and De Sawal (2009), the military experiences of women veterans may not have an influence on how they identify themselves. As the data in this study shows, few of the participants identify themselves primarily as veterans, but all agreed that their military experience had influenced them. The qualities and skills acquired in the military added to who they are as people and as women; they may not have acquired these qualities outside of the military; and they may have not become the same women if they had not served in the military. This confirms Elliot's (2014) finding that women student veterans felt they had experiences that were important and unique from others.

Although the influence of their military experience was not characterized by their identity status, Baechtold and De Sawal (2009) believed women student veterans could have an identity crisis following military service, creating an opportunity to make a new identity. This may be accurate for the searchers and the drifters as those in both identity statuses are looking for something else either now or in the future. I believe the military

experience for the pathmakers provides an additional accomplishment or choice along their trajectory. The guardians' military experience adds to their established standards and values. I think what women student veterans decide to do with what they have gained through their military experience can be characterized by their identity status.

Finances

The two parts of the finance theme that emerged from the data include joining the military to solve a current financial situation and joining the military to get the education benefits to pay for college later. The GI Bill benefit is a great incentive for people to serve in the military in order to pay for a college education (Renn & Reason, 2013; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). For all but Shelby, the GI Bill benefit was an important factor in joining and serving in the military.

For many of the participants, serving in the military was a way to solve a current financial issue. Military service was considered a stable career with good money and benefits. Socioeconomic status was not discussed in the interview but being able to support themselves and their families without financial hardship was a theme among six of the participants. Grace, who did not join to solve a financial issue, classified herself as being from a blue-collar family. For the others, my sense was that they were in a socioeconomic status where lack of money was an issue. Current financial issues and future education benefits were important for these women student veterans. Their ability to contribute to the financial stability of themselves or their families and to earn a college degree through the GI Bill benefit was an opportunity to find a solution that could then benefit them later in life.

Masculine Culture

Although there has been much progress for women in the military, the masculine culture remains. Gender and issues of femininity and masculinity continue to be challenges (Pawelczyk, 2014). Demers (2013) explained how the military is currently reflective of a masculine culture and suggested that there needs to be a movement of the military culture to be more reflective of the diversity of servicemembers, including women and people of color. Paige's "this is not a Barbie doll's Army" story about being called out for being too feminine and then being too masculine highlighted the frustration women in the military have in that masculine culture. Sarah had assimilated to the masculine culture and then struggled to find her feminine side once she left the military. Both stories are consistent with the literature (DiRamio et al., 2015; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011) and highlight the struggle of women servicemembers. For these two women, their military experience influenced their identity as women in different ways. Paige was firm in her identity as a woman, and she was confident and secure in her femininity and would assimilate as she needed to without denouncing her feminine side. Her statement, "What are you going to do? Yeah. I'm going to keep being me, I'm a girl. I love being a girl even out of uniform" shows her assertiveness and self-confidence. Paige, a pathmaker, was not going to allow the military to change her identity in that way. Sarah, on the other hand, had conformed to the masculine culture and had to redefine who she was when she left the military. Her identity as a woman was changed in the military, and as a searcher, her femininity was one aspect of her life, outside of the military, that she was working to discover. The military has not adapted to a culture that is more reflective of the people within its' ranks, specifically women and people of color (Demers, 2013; Pawelczyk,

2014). How long will it be before women do not feel like “females in a man’s world” (Demers, 2013, p. 499) and the “masculine warrior model” (Demers, 2013, p. 508) changes?

Military Veterans as Military Wives

All but two of the participants in this study had military-affiliated spouses. There is a lack of literature on the dynamic of being a military wife and a military veteran. There is literature on being a military spouse and also much literature on being a veteran but not on being both. Susan felt she had a greater understanding of what her husband was doing, especially while deployed. Patrice’s story about interacting with military wives who are not veterans was enlightening. Dealing with her identities of woman, mother, spouse, and veteran in an environment with other women who were not veterans made Patrice more assertive and outspoken to defend and honor her and her husband’s commitments and service. These women felt they were more supportive wives and had greater insight because of their experience in the military.

Veteran status was not often a salient identity for most of these women possibly because people do not recognize them as veterans. Shelby said, “I don’t think too many people see me as a veteran, of course that does not bother me.” Paula shared that when she goes to the VA “they assume I’m there on my husband’s behalf.” Assuming use of husband’s benefits shows the stereotype that men are in the military and women are the spouses of those men. People make those assumptions, and women veterans feel unrecognized for their service. Paige said, “We’re still seen as females not as equal participants.”

Peer Support in College

Many of the participants in this study thought that they would benefit by connecting with other women student veterans on campus. They felt the connection and community with other veterans with whom they can relate could provide additional support for them through college. Veterans like to connect with others who understand the experiences of serving and deployment. Connecting veterans with other veterans on campus establishes a natural peer network (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Elliott, 2014; Hamrick & Rumann, 2011). Spending time, offering support, and co-navigating the college experience can and should be a goal of veteran resource centers and other student support services (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Elliott, 2014; Hamrick & Rumann, 2011).

Student veterans may not need services when they enroll in college but that does not give colleges and universities an option for not providing services and supports to student veterans. As many institutions are trying to provide military/veteran-friendly environments, providing services and supports for student veterans on campus is almost an ethical requirement. The institution in this study provided certification of veterans' GI Bill benefits, a VA work study program, and a general veterans' webpage. Besides those three services, military/veteran-friendly institutions provide veteran specific services like peer-to peer support, tutoring, disability services, bridge programs, orientations, health care, student veteran organizations, military resource centers or lounges, counseling, transition programs, and a one-stop shop to provide veterans services from a variety of offices like financial aid, registrar, advising, etc. (DiRamio et al., 2015; DiRamio et al., 2008; Hamrick & Rumann, 2011; Baechtold, 2009; Vacchi, 2014). The institution, in this study, hired a director for veteran services (following data collection) and

immediately started a student veterans organization. The leadership of the institution desires a military/veteran-friendly environment, and they are taking steps to accomplish that goal.

Existing research is consistent with the desire of the women student veterans in this study to connect with other women veterans (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; DiRamio et al., 2015; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Foster & Vince 2009; Griffin & Gilbert 2015; Hamrick & Rumann, 2011; Olsen et al., 2014; Suter et al., 2006.). By identity status, the pathmakers in this study would probably lead and help organize a group of women student veterans and serve as mentors for others in the group. The drifter would participate, as she wants to make and keep connections with other veterans. The searchers and guardians would participate to connect with other women who can relate to their military and college experiences. Colleges can use this information to, strategically, develop women student veterans groups or programs through an understanding of the population of women student veterans they have.

Elliott (2014) believed women student veterans need services from orientation to graduation. This study confirms that women student veterans may need services throughout their college experience depending on their identity status. Pathmakers may take advantage of services provided for them but may go after the services they need on their own without extra help. Paige had to see a VA counselor in a city two hours away to sign a form each semester for her education benefits. She worked it out with the counselor to talk by phone and email the form back and forth. She found a solution for a more efficient use of her time. Searchers and drifters may actually need the services and support in an effort to help guide them through their college experience and potentially

through their identity development. Susan felt she needed better advising to understand what other classes she needed after articulation of her transfer credits and test credits. Danielle wanted to be a part of a group “where you meet and you get together and you talk.” The guardians may take advantage of the services and support because of a feeling they are supposed to use the services.

Summary of Discussion

This study provided an opportunity to see women student veterans through the framework of Josselson’s identity development of women (1996). The identity status of women student veterans in this study fit within all four identity statuses and their military experience did not place all of them into the pathmaker status as DiRamio and Jarvis (2011) believed. The pathmakers in this study did not become pathmakers because of their military experience but were pathmakers before they joined the military. Paula believed she was the woman she was because she was exposed to a “wide variety of people and being rebellious of spirit,” and she questioned the ways of her family in high school. Each participant was a self-assured, independent, and confident woman who made decisions to join the military based on what would be best for them. Whether it was a way to pay for college (Paige & Patrice) or escape from an abusive husband (Paula) these women had options and made choices. DiRamio and Jarvis’s (2011) experience with women student veterans may have been with women who were pathmakers, but women student veterans’ identity statuses are not all the same and their life experiences shape their identities much like they do in other women.

Implications for Practice

Student affairs is in a position to serve women student veterans by connecting services and supports for veterans to veterans. Depending on the institution, veteran affairs offices reside in student affairs or academic affairs divisions. Partnerships and collaborations between these divisions and their departments are necessary to organize and offer services to meet the needs or desires of the women student veterans at their institution.

Women student veterans are not all the same. Recognizing that women student veterans fit within all four of Josselson's (1996) identity statuses is important for providing services for them. Student affairs professionals and those working with women student veterans would benefit from education, training, and knowledge of Josselson's theory of identity development in women (1996). Understanding the identity statuses and then being able to recognize those statuses in the women they work with can provide professionals the knowledge to serve women student veterans well. Identifying pathmakers may help discover leaders and mentors for a veterans group for women on campus. By identifying searchers, drifters, and guardians, professionals can identify services and supports for these students as they are exploring their identities or adapting to their college environment.

Listening to their stories and understanding their experiences is not a quick process. Professionals who work with veterans need to take the time to get to know them in order to serve them in the best possible way. I think institutions should have dedicated staff that work with and provide services for student veterans. A dedicated staff would build relationships, camaraderie, and communications with this population of students,

which can lead to providing specific supports and services for specific needs and requests. Dedicated staff could devote time that may not be available if veterans services is an added duty to one's current position. A dedicated staff could have or make the time to get to know their student veterans and meet the students where they are developmentally.

Although many institutions offer a variety of services for veterans, the institution in this study would do well to connect with these women student veterans and see how a student organization or a support group would benefit these students. Institutions that already offer a student organization and other veteran services may need to inventory participation and see if the veteran services and organizations are meeting the needs or have participation from the women student veterans on campus. Many of the women in this study were also wives and mothers so services have to be convenient and useful for women balancing more than just college.

As veteran status is not often salient for the women student veterans in this study, these women might be more likely to take advantage of veteran services and participate in those services when their veteran status is salient. Building a support network and engaging women student veterans may build a community for women to connect with each other that may move their veteran identity to revolve closer to their student identity. With a clear focus on women veterans and services and supports specifically for women veterans, institutions would show women student veterans an appreciation and understanding that women veterans are not the same as men veterans and that recognition may provide an opportunity for greater inclusion. Student affairs professionals may consider engaging women student veterans by reaching them through more salient

identity roles. On campus, their student identity may be more salient. Co-curricular programs for students by academic major may engage women student veterans with other women in their major in a way that may provide the support and community they may want. Eight of the ten participants were mothers and wives. Connecting with women student veterans through family events or programs may provide an opportunity to connect with other women with similar salient identity roles. Once they are engaged, they may be more comfortable connecting with and taking advantage of other supports and services offered by the institution including veteran supports and services.

Recommendations for Research

The study of women veterans and women student veterans is increasing as the population of women serving in the military, separating from the military, and enrolling in college is growing. This study brought out a number of additional opportunities to study women student veterans further. First, African American women represent 31% of the women in the military (Dao, 2011). In this study, African American women represent 33% of the participants with two being pathmakers and one being a drifter. As women student veterans in this study fit within all four of Josselson's (1996) identity statuses, research on African American women student veterans may provide additional information to further knowledge on this population. In this diverse group of participants, race was not as salient as other identities. Sarah and Susan, both White, were the only ones who explicitly talked their race. Race was not significant for the rest of them in that moment. Although race was not a focus of this study, the fact that they did not talk about race was interesting. There is a possibility that race is more salient than expressed, but they may have not been comfortable talking with me about race

because of my privilege and power as the researcher. Would race be more prominent if race is the focus of research of women student veterans?

Second, socioeconomic status was not a focus of this study; however, socioeconomic status appeared more salient than race since most of the women in this study had financial issues that lead to military enlistment where others used the military as a way to fund their college education. Are there women who join the military from higher socioeconomic statuses who do not have financial issues or a need for the GI Bill to pay for college? None of these women in this study seemed to represent a high socioeconomic status but this was not asked directly.

Third, the Navy and the Marines were branches not represented in the participants in this study. Is there a difference between the women who join the Navy or Marines than the Army and the Air Force? Paula shared,

The Air Force is more civilian than I think other branches so it's kinda like 'yea, you served too? Good job,' or whatever compared to when my husband sees somebody that was a Marine, and they are all Semper Fi and bump the chest kind of thing.

Shelby decided not to join the Navy because "of the deployment on the boat. There was like a ton on men, and then I was like oh I don't think I'm that secure yet." Ginger did not go into the Navy because she felt she would be gone all the time and was "definitely not doing Marines." The difference in identity by military branch and in the lengths of deployments may affect saliency of the veteran identity. Research to examine women who had served in the Navy and Marines may bring forth new knowledge.

Fourth, four of the ten participants left the military due to an injury or medical condition. With uniforms, supplies, and training designed for men, are injuries related to women performing in a culture with masculine expectations? Is medical discharge and retirement prevalent for both women and men? The military provides medical benefits for veterans and college benefits in the form of vocational rehabilitation benefits. Paige shared, “We [female veterans] don’t get a lot of attention just in general in the military . . . even at the VA, there is a women’s clinic but there is only one doctor.” Recognizing the impact the military service has on women veterans physically and mentally may provide additional knowledge and inspire additional research.

Fifth, there is literature on military spouses, and there is literature on women veterans, but there is not literature on military spouses who are also military veterans. There is a variety of spouses and partners who support those who serve and have served that have stories to tell. Patrice and Susan shared their experience with this dynamic but others may have further information to advance the knowledge of this specific population. Research should examine the phenomenon of being both a veterans and military spouse.

Finally, most of the women in this study had attended college prior to military service or while serving in the military. Studying women student veterans who first attended college after military service may provide new information on the experience of transitioning to college as a first time college student by Josselson’s (1996) identity status. This information may also provide additional information and possibly different information to professionals working with women student veterans.

Other research can take this lens and research deeper by race, socioeconomic status, or military branch in order to further the literature on women student veterans. There is a variety of institutions offering services and supports to student veterans and further research can provide knowledge to advance opportunities for student veterans further.

Conclusion

This study examined the identities and experiences of women student veterans. Through this exploration, it became clear that women student veterans do not fit within only one of Josselson's (1996) identity statuses but within all four. The pathmakers experience college with confidence and independence. The searchers use college to explore what they want to do with their lives. The guardians continue through college because it is what is expected and they make decisions for themselves that are comfortable and safe. The drifter experiences college day to day, as she determines what is next for her life.

Although these women student veterans fit within the four identity status, these women are not all the same. Their life experience, military experiences, and college experiences have shaped their lives and shaped who they are as women. Their life experiences are different but all agreed their military experience had an impact on their lives. They acquired characteristics, traits, and skills like strength, confidence, courage, structure, integrity, self-awareness, independence, leadership skills, community, and exposure to different people and cultures in the military that became part of the women they have become. The college degrees they are working toward will add to the path they are continuing to journey on as they further develop as women. These were amazing

women willing to share stories of their experiences and their identities to advance the understanding of this growing population of student veterans. The number of women student veterans on campus will continue to grow as the numbers of women in the military grows. The responsibility of institutions of higher education is to provide services and supports to those who serve our country and want to further their education. Those services and supports need to recognize that women student veterans are a growing population on college campuses and veteran services must be specific and not “one size fits all.” Understanding women student veterans individually can shape the services provided to the veterans and involve women student veterans in providing services for other women student veterans. Through their stories, the women in this study provided information to understand how their experiences in the military and in college influenced their identity as women, and how their identity status affected how they experienced college. They were heard, understood, and acknowledged. HUA!

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Appendix A

Invitation E-mail

Subject for Email: Women Student Veterans Study

We (a research team from the University of Georgia) are conducting a research study to explore how women student veterans define for themselves who they are and how their experiences in the military and in college impacts their identity as women. We are looking for women student veterans interested in sharing how they define themselves as women and how they are experiencing college after military service.

We are looking for current students who:

- Have been enrolled for at least two semesters,
- Identify as a woman,
- Are 18 years of age or older and
- Served in the U.S. military on or after September 11, 2001.

If you choose to participate, you will be asked to fill out an information form and participate in a face-to-face interview on campus at your convenience. The entire process will take about 60 minutes to complete. Your responses will be completely confidential. At the end of the interview, I will provide you a \$20 Amazon gift card for your participation.

There is a minimal risk of emotional discomfort during the interview. You may skip any question at any time. Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw from the study at any time. Your participation in the study will also remain confidential. If you are interested in participating or have questions about the study, please contact one of us at the e-mail addresses below and we will send you additional instructions.

Please forward this to anyone else who may be interested in participating. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Dr. Merrily Dunn, merrily@uga.edu
Associate Professor and Program Chair, College Student Affairs Administration,
University of Georgia

Jennifer Brannon, jabbranno@uga.edu
Graduate Student, University of Georgia

Appendix B
Participant Information Form

Name:

Birth year:

Phone number:

E-mail address:

Please indicate your broad racial group membership (circle all that apply):

- White/Caucasian
- Middle Eastern
- African American / Black
- American Indian / Alaska Native
- Asian American / Asian
- Latino / Hispanic
- Multiracial
- Race / Ethnicity not included above

What is your current service connection?

What year did you join the military?

Have you been deployed?

If yes, how many times?

If yes, where were you deployed?

If yes, long was your last deployment?

If yes, how long has it been since you returned?

What year did you enroll in college after your military service?

Appendix C

UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA CONSENT FORM

Understanding the Identities and Experiences of Women Student Veterans in College

Researcher's Statement

We are asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide whether to be in the study or not. This study is not funded or supported by the federal government or by the Veterans Administration. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. Please ask the researcher if there is anything that is not clear or if you need more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study or not. This process is called "informed consent." A copy of this form will be given to you.

Principal Investigator: Dr. Merrily Dunn
Counseling and Human Development, University of Georgia
merrily@uga.edu or 706.255.8691

Purpose of the Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. Your participation is entirely voluntary. The purpose of this study is to explore how women student veterans define for themselves who they are and how their experiences in the military and in college impacts their identity as women. Examining the experiences of women student veterans enrolled at a public four-year university will provide a better understanding of how military service and college experiences inform women's identity. You are invited to participate because you are a woman, 18 years of age or older, veteran who served on or after September 11, 2001, and a student currently enrolled in college. Participation will require 60 minutes of your time.

Study Procedures

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to answer 10 semi-structured interview questions that will focus on identities and on the military and college experiences and also fill out a personal information form. You will only be contacted by Jennifer Brannon, doctoral student at the University of Georgia. The research and data will be coordinated by Jennifer Brannon with guidance from the principal investigator, Dr. Merrily Dunn. The research will be done at Middle Georgia State University during fall

semester 2015. Once consent is given, you will begin the interview that should last 60 minutes. The interview will be audio recorded in order to capture data accurately, and transcribed interviews will be e-mailed to participants to check for accuracy.

Risks and Discomforts

There are minimal risks in participating in this interview as your experiences in the military and in college may or may not evoke an emotional response. You may choose to decline to answer a particular questions if you feel that is necessary. If you experience discomfort because of participation in this interview and would like to talk with someone, the counseling center is available at 478.471.2985 or 478.934.6621 and services are free of charge.

Benefits

Participation in this study may not benefit you personally. Your participation will produce information that may lead to better informed practice for student affairs professionals working with women student veterans.

Incentives for participation

You will be given a \$20 Amazon gift card at the end of the interview session for your time and participation.

Audio/Video Recording

An audio recording device will be used to capture your story, from your perspective, in your own words. Following the completion of the study, the audio recording will be erased.

Privacy/Confidentiality

Information on the participant information form will collect information that will identify you directly. Following the interview, the transcription of the interview will be e-mailed to you to provide you an opportunity to review the information you provided for accuracy. Following that e-mail, your information from the form will be logged and a pseudonym will be created. Any identifiable information shared in the interview will be masked or a pseudonym will be used. The audio recording of the interview will be labeled by your pseudonym and erased following completion of the study. Audio recordings and participant information forms will be stored in a locked cabinet.

Taking part is voluntary

Your involvement in the study is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate or to stop at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision to participate or not will have no bearing on your grades or class standing. If you decide to stop or withdraw from the study, the information/data collected from or about you up to the point of your withdrawal will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed.

If you have questions

The main researcher conducting this study is Dr. Merrily Dunn, a professor at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Dr. Merrily Dunn at merrily@uga.edu or at 706.255.8691. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706.542.3199 or irb@uga.edu.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research:

To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form, and have had all of your questions answered.

_____	_____	_____
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date
_____	_____	_____
Name of Participant	Signature	Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Appendix D

SOUTHEASTERN UNIVESITY INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Title: Understanding the Identities and Experiences of Women Student Veterans in College

Principal Investigator: Dr. Merrily Dunn - Counseling and Human Development, University of Georgia, merrily@uga.edu or 706.255.8691.

Student Principal Investigator: Jennifer Brannon – Doctoral student at the University of Georgia, jabranno@uga.edu or 478.934.3352

Are you 18 years of age or older? Yes No
(If “No”, you need a different form; please see the principal investigator)

I. Purpose:

You are invited to participate in a research study. Your participation is entirely voluntary. The purpose of the study is to explore how women student veterans define for themselves who they are and how their experiences in the military and in college impacts their identity as women. Examining the experiences of women student veterans enrolled at a public four-year university will provide a better understanding of how military service and college experiences inform women’s identity. You are invited to participate because you are a woman, 18 years of age or older, a veteran who served on or after September 11, 2001, and a student currently enrolled at the university. A total of approximately 25 participants will be recruited for this study. Participation will require 60 minutes of your time over one interview session in October, November, or December.

II. Procedures:

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to answer 10 semi-structured interview questions that will focus on identities and on the military and college experiences and also fill out a personal information form. You will only be contacted by Jennifer Brannon, doctoral student at the University of Georgia. The research and data will be coordinated by Jennifer Brannon with guidance from the principal investigator, Dr. Merrily Dunn. The research will be done at Southeastern University during fall semester 2015. Once consent is given, you will begin the interview that should last about 60 minutes. Interviews will take place on campus at a date and time convenient for you. The interview will be audio recorded in order to capture data accurately, and transcribed interviews will be e-mailed to you to check for accuracy. When you feel the interview session is over, you will be given a \$20 Amazon gift card for your time and participation.

III. Risks:

There is the possibility that participation in this study may cause you to have an emotional response. There are minimal risks in participating in this interview as your experiences in the military and in college may or may not evoke an emotional response. You may choose to decline to answer a particular questions if you feel that is necessary. If you experience discomfort because of participation in this interview and would like to talk with someone, the counseling center is available at [REDACTED] or [REDACTED] and services are free of charge.

IV. Benefits:

Participation in this study may not benefit you personally. Overall, we hope to gain information that may lead to better informed practice for student affairs professionals working with women student veterans.

V. Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:

Participation in research is voluntary. You do not have to be in this study. If you decide to be in the study and change your mind, you have the right to drop out at any time. You may skip questions or stop participating at any time. Whatever you decide, you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision to participate or not will have no bearing on your grades or class standing. If you decide to stop or withdraw from the study, the information/data collected from or about you up to the point of your withdrawal will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed.

VI. Confidentiality:

We will keep your records private to the extent allowed by law. Dr. Merrily Dunn and Jennifer Brannon will have access to the information you provide. Information may also be shared with those who make sure the study is done correctly (Southeastern University Institutional Review Board, the Office for Human Research Protection (OHRP)). We will use a pseudonym rather than your name on study records. The participant information form you provide and audio recording will be stored in a locked cabinet and the key will be stored separately from the data to protect privacy. The audio recording of the interview will be labeled by your pseudonym and erased following completion of the study. Any identifiable information shared in the interview will be masked or a pseudonym will be used. Your name and other facts that might point to you will not appear when we present this study or publish its results. The findings will be summarized and reported in group form. You will not be identified personally.

VII. Contact Persons:

Contact Dr. Merrily Dunn at merrily@uga.edu and 706.255.8691 and Jennifer Brannon at 478.934.3352 if you have questions, concerns, or complaints about this study. You can also call, if you think you have been harmed by the study, the chair of the Southeastern University IRB [REDACTED], if you want to talk to someone who is not part of the study team. You can talk about questions, concerns, offer input, obtain information, or suggestions about the study. You can also call the IRB chair if you have questions or concerns about your rights in this study.

VIII. Copy of Consent Form to Subject:

We will give you a copy of this consent form to keep. If you are willing to volunteer for this research, please sign below.

Participant

Date

Principal Investigator or Researcher Obtaining Consent

Date

Appendix E

Interview Guide

1. Tell me about the time you decided to join the military.
 - a. Tell me about your decision to leave the military.
 - b. Describe your relationship with other veterans now that you are separated from the military.
2. Tell me the story of how you decided to enroll in college
 - a. Describe how you decided on majoring in ____ and your future plans.
3. Tell me about your experience transitioning out of the military and into college.
 - a. Tell me how this transition has affected you.
4. The military experience has been described as a life changing experience, tell me how your military experience has influenced who you are today.
5. Each of us has many identities such as race, gender, sexual orientation, class, religion, and social roles such as occupation, and relationship and parental status. These identities are often how we see ourselves or think about ourselves.
 - a. When you think about your identities, which one do you think of first?
Tell me what has happened to make this identity stand out for you.
 - b. When you think of your identities, which one do you think others identify you? Tell me about a time that you felt others identified you as this.
 - c. Tell me which aspect of your identity you value the most. Why?

6. Tell me about a time when your veteran identity intersected with your other identities.
7. Thinking of your identities of veteran, woman, and student, tell me about a challenge you have faced as you transitioned to the role of student in college.
 - a. Who are the people who have supported you during your college experience?
8. Thinking again of your identities of veteran, woman, and student, tell me about a time when your transition to the role of student was easy?
9. Describe, in your opinion, what institutions can do to help women student veterans transition and succeed in college.
10. Finally, I would like to give you the opportunity to share any story about your military/veteran/college experience that you feel would be important for me to know and understand.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this interview. Your experience is very important and I appreciate your willingness to share it with me.

Appendix F

Interview Development Guide

Interview Question	Adapted from Original Question	Research Question	What I want to know
<p>1. Tell me about the time you decided to join the military.</p> <p>1a. Tell me about your decision to leave the military.</p> <p>1b. Describe your relationship with other veterans now that you are separated from the military.</p>	<p>How is it you chose your first job? (Josselson, 1987)</p> <p>Why did you leave one job for the next? (Josselson, 1987)</p> <p>Describe your current relationship with your parents. How have relationships changed over the last 10 years? How many of your friends from college do you still feel close to? (Josselson, 1987)</p> <p>Please describe your relationships with other OEF or OIF veterans now that you are separated from the military. (Demers, 2013)</p>	<p>RQ1: How do the experiences of women student veterans in the military and in college influence their identity as women?</p> <p>RQ2: How does the identity status' of women student veterans, as measured by Josselson's theory of identity development in women, affect how they experience college?</p>	<p>I want to elicit information for identifying characteristics for the Josselson's (1996) identity statuses through their stories of military experience</p>

Interview Question	Adapted from Original Question	Research Question	What I want to know
<p>2. Tell me the story of how you decided to enroll in college.</p> <p>2a. Describe how you decided on majoring in __ and your future plans</p>	<p>How did you happen to come to college? (Josselson, 1987)</p> <p>What are you majoring in? What do you plan to do with it? Have there been people who have strongly influences your career direction or goals? (Josselson, 1987)</p>	<p>RQ2: How does the identity status' of women student veterans, as measured by Josselson's theory of identity development in women, affect how they experience college?</p>	<p>I want to elicit information for identifying characteristics for the Josselson's (1996) identity statuses through their stories of how they decided to come to college and their future plans</p>
<p>3. Tell me about your experience transitioning out of the military and into college</p> <p>3a. Tell me how this transition has affected you.</p>	<p>How would you describe your college years? (Josselson, 1987).</p> <p>Please share how your transition from military to civilian life has affected you (Demers, 2013)</p> <p>How have the experiences you had in college most affected your life? (Josselson, 1987)</p>	<p>RQ1: How do the experiences of women student veterans in the military and in college influence their identity as women?</p>	<p>I want to determine how women veterans experience the transition and see how it affects their identity</p>

Interview Question	Adapted from Original Question	Research Question	What I want to know
<p>4. The military experience has been described as a life changing experience; tell me how your military experience has influenced who you are today.</p>	<p>How have the experiences you had in college most affected your life? (Josselson, 1987)</p>	<p>RQ1: How do the experiences of women student veterans in the military and in college influence their identity as women?</p> <p>RQ2: How does the identity status' of women student veterans, as measured by Josselson's theory of identity development in women, affect how they experience college?</p>	<p>I want to obtain information for identifying characteristics for the Josselson's (1996) identity statuses and determine how their military experience affects their identity.</p>

Interview Question	Adapted from Original Question	Research Question	What I want to know
<p>5. Each of us has many identities such as race, gender, class, sexual orientation, religion, and social roles such as occupation, relationship and parental status. These identities are often how we see ourselves or think about ourselves.</p> <p>5a. When you think about your identities, which one you do think of first? Tell me what has happened to make this identity stand out for you.</p> <p>5b. When you think about your identities, which one do you think others identify you?</p> <p>5c. Tell me which aspect of your identity do you value most? Why?</p>	<p>Each of us has many identities, such as our race, gender, profession, marital status, class, background, or whether we have children, etc. These identities are often how we see ourselves or think about ourselves. Before joining the military, how did you think or see yourself? How did others think or see you? What aspects of your identity did you value most before joining the military? (Mankowski, 2012)</p>	<p>RQ1: How do the experiences of women student veterans in the military and in college influence their identity as women?</p> <p>RQ2: How does the identity status' of women student veterans, as measured by Josselson's theory of identity development in women, affect how they experience college?</p>	<p>I want to elicit information that explains how these women veterans make meaning of their identities as students, veterans, and women through stories on how they see themselves and how they think others see them. I also want to elicit information for identifying characteristics for the Josselson's (1996) identity statuses.</p>

Interview Question	Adapted from Original Question	Research Question	What I want to know
6. Tell me about a time when your veteran identity intersected with your other identities.	How do veterans experience multiple identities? (Phillips, 2014)	RQ2: How does the identity status' of women student veterans, as measured by Josselson's theory of identity development in women, affect how they experience college?	I want to obtain information for identifying characteristics for the Josselson's (1996) identity statuses
7. Thinking of your identities of veteran, woman, and student, tell me about a challenge you have faced as you transitioned to the role of student in college? 7a. Who are the people who have supported you during your college experience?	Tell me a story about the most recent tension between your roles as mother and professional. (Phanco, 2003) Have there been people who have strongly influences your career direction or goals? (Josselson, 1987) What assisted you in adjusting from military to student status and making your transition into college? (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015)	RQ1: How do the experiences of women student veterans in the military and in college influence their identity as women? RQ2: How does the identity status' of women student veterans, as measured by Josselson's theory of identity development in women, affect how they experience college?	I want to determine if their identity status affects their transition, challenges, and successes in college

Interview Question	Adapted from Original Question	Research Question	What I want to know
8. Thinking again of your identities of veteran, woman, and student, tell me about a time when your transition to the role of student was easy?	What assisted you in adjusting from military to student status and making your transition into college? (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015)	RQ1: How do the experiences of women student veterans in the military and in college influence their identity as women?	I want to determine if their identity status affects their transition, challenges, and successes in college
9. Describe, in your opinion, what institutions can do to help women student veterans transition and succeed in college?	What assisted you in adjusting from military to student status and making your transition into college? (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015)	RQ1: How do the experiences of women student veterans in the military and in college influence their identity as women?	Through their challenges and successes in college, I want to know what they think institutions can do to support college transition.
10. Finally, I would like to give you the opportunity to share any story about your military/veteran/college experience that you feel would be important for me to know and understand	If there is anything else of unique significance in your life in terms of influences, experiences, or relationships, please describe them here. (Josselson, 1987)	RQ1: How do the experiences of women student veterans in the military and in college influence their identity as women? RQ2: How does the identity status' of women student veterans, as measured by Josselson's theory of identity development in women, affect how they experience college?	I want to draw out information that the participants' think is important to share with me about their identities and experiences that I may have not asked.

Appendix G

Codes and Themes

Codes	Theme
GI Bill Money Worry Job Afford Stable Better pay	Career prospects Pay for school Pay bills/ paycheck Education benefits Hardship Financial Things Finances
Wife Husband Deployments Demographics	Military veterans Military mom Military spouse Overlook/no attention Military Veterans as Military Wives
Manly Femininity Man/guy Haircuts Appearance	Manly features Loss of femininity Man is military Not equal Certain demographics Masculine Culture
Support group Student group Veterans group Social group Coping	Social environment Organizations and clubs Meeting other women Helping women Peer Support in College