COLLEGE VETERAN TRANSITION STORIES: THE USE OF WEBLOGS TO EXPLORE MILITARY-TO-COLLEGE TRANSITION NARRATIVES

by

Dimitrios Jason Stalides

B.S., Western Illinois University, 2003

A Thesis
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master of Arts Degree

Department of Psychology
in the Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
August 2008
THESIS APPROVAL

COLLEGE VETERAN TRANSITION STORIES: THE USE OF WEBLOGS TO EXPLORE MILITARY-TO-COLLEGE TRANSITION NARRATIVES

By

Dimitrios Jason Stalides

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in the field of Psychology

Approved by:

Dr. Patrick Rottinghaus, Chair

Dr. Stephen Dollinger

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
May 8, 2008
Literature investigating career transitions of college veterans is sparse and out of date. To begin re-exploring the lived experiences of enlisted veterans who have transitioned back into the civilian world as full-time college students, I utilized blogs to collect narrative data about veterans who transitioned from the military into the full-time college setting. Blogs allow participants to both write about and share their stories with a community of peers. The data was analyzed using a constructivist-interpretist paradigm that gave “voice to participants’ experiences by means of extensive quotation” (Fassinger, 2005, p. 157).

Some of the general themes included a sense of feeling out of place and isolated; seeking out fellow veterans, especially in school veteran organizations, provided many with a feeling of normalcy and belonging; the experience of being disciplined in the military was often noted as an asset when in regards to school work; most were dissatisfied with the transition assistance programs the military offered; and most reported difficulties re-learning how to communicate and behave in civilian culture, among others. Findings from this study can help to further clarify the obstacles that college veterans experience as they readjust to life as civilians and college students.
DEDICATION

For Kylie
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first like to acknowledge and thank Dr. Patrick Rottinghaus, without whose guidance this thesis would neither have come to be nor come to fruition. His suggestions sparked the initial ideas that became the impetus for this work. And his continued help, praise, and encouragement guided me throughout the process.

I want to also extend my sincerest gratitude to the extensive work the participants—and fellow veterans—put forth for this project. Their efforts displayed selflessness and a desire to make things better for future veterans. Their stories both inspired me and kept me going.

Thanks also to my committee members, Dr. Stephen Dollinger and Dr. Yu-Wei Wang, as well as Dr. Jane Swanson whose honest feedback, recommendations, and support were invaluable.

I would also like to thank other professors, from both SIU-C and WIU, each of whom imparted some of their wisdom on me: Dr. Ron Walker, Dr. John Snyder, Dr. Kathleen Chwalisz, and Dr. Ann Fischer.

And to my wife and best friend Kylie—who helps me more than she will ever know simply because she is the person she is.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>i</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF TABLES</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1 – Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2 – Literature Review</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 3 – Method</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 4 – Results</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 5 – Discussion</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## REFERENCES

| REFERENCES | 115 |

## APPENDICIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>APPENDICIES</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appendix A – Weblog Homepage Example</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix B – Example Blog Response and Comment</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix C – Questions Utilized</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix D – Follow-Up Questions</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix E – Informed Consent Statement</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix F – Recruitment Flyers</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix G – Demographic Questionnaire</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix H – Alpha’s Narrative</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix I – Bravo’s Narrative</td>
<td>141</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix J – Delta’s Narrative .................................................................146
Appendix K – Foxtrot’s Narrative ..............................................................153
Appendix L – Golf’s Narrative .................................................................159
Appendix M – Echo’s Narrative ...............................................................165
VITA ........................................................................................................167
# LIST OF TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Table 1</td>
<td>109</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 2</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 3</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 4</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5</td>
<td>113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 6</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

A good deal of vocational literature has discussed the multiple potential problems people encounter during career transitions (Blustein, Juntunen, & Worthington, 2005; Bobeck & Robbins, 2005; Gysbers, Heppner, & Johnston, 2003a, 2003b; van der Veld, Feij, & Taris, 1995). And while enlisted military veterans, in general, share many of these same career transition problems when they return to the civilian work force, very few studies have investigated the career transition obstacles unique to college veterans (Joanning, 1975; O’Neill & Fontaine, 1973; Peter, 1975).

The lack of studies that have investigated this particular transition represents a lack of awareness about the unique issues college veterans encounter as they embark on this major lifestyle and career transition from the military work culture to the academic work culture. This lack of awareness may correspond with a lack of services and programs to help college veterans navigate through this transition and adjust to an environment that may have very different values from the military environment. While this transition may share some characteristics with other career transitions, it also has many aspects that are specific to this population. Not only are veterans changing jobs, they also have to change their entire lifestyle. Furthermore, understanding this transition process is becoming increasingly relevant as increasingly more veterans are currently returning from contemporary conflicts in the Middle East. It is therefore not only important to understand this process in order to accommodate the needs of the newly returning veterans, but also, this information needs to be updated in order to understand the various challenges and barriers that contemporary veterans contend with.
In this present study, I explored the various problems and successes that enlisted contemporary military veterans experienced as they transitioned from the military work culture into the full-time college student setting through the use of weblogs. Weblogs, or blogs, allowed my participants to write personal narratives that illustrated their unique lived experiences. Blogs also allowed participants to share their transition stories with other college veterans who had experienced similar situations. As Suler (2005) pointed out, “blog communities…combine features of personal journals and support groups. People write to express themselves and their problems, but they also read and react to others who are doing the same” (¶ 3). Therefore, by allowing each individual to share and then respond to other participants’ stories, they were able to identify differences due to their own self-contextual situations; however, they also discovered that they have had similar experiences concerning their post-enlistment transition into the collegiate environment.

Blogs allowed for a collaborative approach and entrenched the participants in a very particular discourse community of peers who are knowledgeable about the phenomenon under investigation. This community allowed all of us, including myself, to test our developing stories, ideas, and assumptions concerning the lived experiences of veterans as they transition into the college setting. In this way, blog communities serve some of the same functions as other types of on-line support groups: they increase the participants’ anonymity, which allows them to feel more free to disclose personal information (Chang, Yeh, & Krumboltz, 2001). And they provide a ready-made interpretive community, which “are the sources of…the ‘meanings’…produce[d] through
the use and manipulations of symbolic structures, chiefly language” (Brufee, 2003, p. 421).

Consistent with other methods of qualitative inquiry, I studied the distinctive experiences of the participants through a subjective lens that took into account both their biases and contexts, as well as my own biases and assumptions, in hopes of accurately illustrating the actual storied events of the participants. The foundational paradigm I utilized in this study was a constructivist/interpretist approach that utilized extensive quotation in order to give voice to the participants’ experiences (Fassinger, 2005). This paradigm, which holds that “reality is constructed in the mind of the individual” and warrants the use of deep reflection, presupposes that I also engaged in the dialogue with the participants in order to “jointly create (co-construct) findings from the interactive dialogue and interpretations” (Ponterotto, 2005, p. 129).

Central to this constructivist/interpretist approach was also the use of narratological methodology, which Hoshmand (2005) described as utilizing narrative accounts (i.e., stories) of participants’ lived experiences in order to discern the “meanings and patterns” of what the participants “say about themselves” (p. 178). According to Mishler (1990, 1995), narrative methodologies also emphasize coherence with the individual narrative itself, as well as the context and functions of cultural narratives that inform and, in part, dictate an individual’s narrative. In other words, an individual’s narrative identity is framed, guided, and embedded in the larger cultural grand narratives that shape particular discourse (i.e., language) communities.

An advantage of the narrative approach is the way “narrative research…hinges on how one defines a story-form narrative” (p. 181). The specific type of narrative this study
most closely adhered to is what Hoshmand (2005) referred to as a “descriptive report of a…constructed self-account in its original narrated form” and “a recounting of a dialogically…set of narratives in a story form” (p. 181). Hoshmand noted *dialogical* knowledge generated by narratological research is characterized by participants sharing their narratives with each other. This sharing may function to elicit identification among the participants concerning a particular phenomenon and also deepen the participants’ abilities to reflect on the meanings of their own stories. The use of blogs as the format in which participants wrote their transition narratives is conducive to both the descriptive telling and dialogical sharing of stories.

Morrow, Rakhsha, and Castaneda (2001) also outlined a *paradigmatic* approach to narrative research, in which “the researcher elicits data in the form of stories from participants, then uses any number of analytic approaches …to analyze those data,” which may include the use of a “theoretical framework or conceptual model” (p. 586). The theoretical framework I utilized to help interpret the transition stories of the participants in this study is McAdams’ notion of narrative identity. According to McAdams (1993), “we each seek to provide our scattered and often confusing experiences with a sense of coherence by arranging our lives into stories” (p. 11). McAdams’s ideas are inspired, in part, by Sarbin’s (1986) similar assertion “that human beings think, perceive, imagine, and make moral choices according to narrative structures” (p. 8). Borrowing from Pepper’s (1942) concept of the root metaphor, Sarbin proposed that narrative structure functions as the root metaphor for human experiences—“the way [we] organize episodes, actions, and accounts of actions” (p. 9). Narratives are
the organizing principles of the human psyche “that help account for the observation that human beings impose structure on the flow of experience” (p. 9).

McAdams’s (2001) concept of narrative identity is also heavily grounded in the Eriksonian concepts of ego-identity and psychosocial development: “life stories are psychosocial constructs, coauthored by the person himself or herself and the culture context within which that person’s life is embedded and given meaning” (p. 101). Therefore, one’s identity is dependent on the particular cultural context of the moment. And, yet, despite the disparate aspects of our identities, we strive to impose a sense of coherence on our differing personas in order to unite them all in a single, homogeneous self. Furthermore, the addition of Eriksonian theory into this concept of narrative identity implies that there are crises moments throughout the lifespan when individuals experience difficulty and/or are unable to reconcile their inherently fragmented ego-identities (Erikson, 1950). It is then that they may encounter what Erikson came to call the “identity crisis” (1968).

During the inevitable life transitions, people are most likely to experience a crisis—a mismatch between who a person thought he or she was and who that person is actually becoming. And people, then, attempt to re-stabilize this perceived sense of disequilibrium with a process similar to Piaget’s (1977) concept of cognitive equilibrium, by either the assimilation or accommodation of mismatched life events (Feinstein, Krippner, & Granger, 1988). And as is the case with the general life transition, the career transition has disrupting effects for an individual’s identity as well.

The relationship between identity and vocation is well documented. Vocational psychology researchers have also repeatedly made a clear connection between identity
and vocation. Super (1984), Savickas (2005), and Gottfredson (2005), for example, have each made similar claims that vocational choice is influenced by self-concept.

Therefore, losing a job during a career transition results in losing an aspect of the self. Consequently, transitioning to a new work place results in the loss of work acquaintances, as well as familiar group affiliations, and changes an individual’s routine that they had become accustomed to (Bobeck & Robbins, 2005).

This sense of identity loss and accompanying identity crisis may be intensified by the career transition from the military workforce back into both the general civilian and college settings. Not only do veterans have to deal with all the normal stress issues associated with career transitions, they also have to re-adjust—become re-socialized in a sense—to the civilian and collegiate cultures. Therefore, college veterans experience both the loss of a job and the loss of an entire culture—consisting of separate histories, worldviews, laws, norms, discourse conventions, and even languages. By using the blog format to write about their transition experiences, participants were able to express the various barriers they encountered as they transitioned from the military lifestyle to the collegiate atmosphere. Writing about their military-to-college transition experiences also served to exhibit how the transition may have resulted in an identity mismatch that they have had to work through or are in the process of working through.

This identity mismatch aspect was illustrated in the pilot study conducted prior to this present study. Participants in that pilot study expressed identity mismatches as they transitioned from the military into the civilian work world due to the differences between the military culture and the civilian culture. But the degree and scope of these identity mismatches depended on their own individual contexts as well as the similarity of the
work they did in the military to the work they did post-enlistment. For example, one pilot study participant, who found work as a police officer, indicated his transition was more “smooth” than other participants who found their post-enlistment work environments were more different from the work they performed in the military.

The ultimate goal and purpose of this present study is to begin the process of updating information concerning this type of transition in order to better understand the experiences of college veterans, including both the various barriers they encountered and some of the strategies and resources they used to cope with these barriers. The present study seeks to understand aspects of this phenomenon to inform future studies, and ultimately inform veterans, as well as those who may help veterans, on how to better navigate through this life adjustment.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Veterans and the origin of the identity crisis

Psychoanalyst Erik Erikson’s (1950) seminal work on the process of identity development has its roots in his work with World War II Veterans. It was from these traumatized veterans that Erikson coined the now popular term “‘identity crisis’” (p. 16). Erikson observed the identities of many of the patients at the Mt. Zion Veterans’ Medical Clinic no longer experienced a feeling of self-sameness or continuity with their past and present experiences. They had lost their sense of a coherent and stable ego identity, which, according to Erikson (1950), functions to balance inner conflicting forces and ideals in order “to experience oneself as something that has continuity and sameness” (p. 42). Following war trauma, then commonly referred to as war neurosis, the veterans’ sense of sameness and continuity completely broke down. Their self-conceptions, which had formerly been supported and constructed by the ideals and norms of the military culture, had unraveled. Once separated from this rigid and inherently violent culture, it became clear to Erikson that the military allowed the veterans to only partially develop their ego identities, while other parts had stagnated and remained immature—almost infantile-like in some ways.

This phenomenon, despite all the advances in medical and mental health care since the 1950’s, has not disappeared. Veterans returning from war situations still suffer from war neurosis, now commonly referred to as Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome. But even veterans who have not experienced combat situations often suffer from a similar loss of self, a defragmentation of their ego identities—an identity crisis. Veterans of all
types must learn to readjust to civilian culture once their time in the service ends. Like Erikson’s World War II Veterans, all veterans deal with the loss of an ingrained group ideal that becomes intertwined with their self-conceptions.

Career transitions

Part of the reason both combat and non-combat veterans experience this sense of self-loss and isolation is due to transitioning from the military work culture to the civilian work culture. In other words, it is a type of career transition. As Gysbers et al. (2003a) suggested, career transitions have become increasingly common in the contemporary work world, and definitions of what constitutes career transitions are changing. Two commonly cited definitions of life transitions (not necessarily career transitions) are Arthur and Rousseau’s (1996) assertion that they entail “prevailing cycles of change and adaptation including stages of preparation, encounter, stabilization, and renewed preparation” (p. 378) and Schlossberg’s (1981) general proposal that “a transition can be said to occur if an event or non-event results in a change in assumptions about oneself and the world and thus requires corresponding change in one’s behavior and relationships” (p. 5). Both definitions emphasize life transitions require a shift in an individual’s self-perception due to the some kind of change in the environment and/or an inner perceived change of one’s self-contextual situation. In either case, the transitionee must somehow adapt to this new situation. Other factors, according to Schlossenberg, that affect how individuals adapt to career transitions include how the transition is perceived (e.g., on-time vs. off-time, gradual vs. abrupt, and permanent vs. temporary) and how similar or different one’s pre and post-work environments are. However, as Gysbers et al. (2003a) pointed out, most of the research concerning life transition has
focused on younger populations, and there is less awareness of the experiences and processes of adult transitions.

Similar to the general life transitions process, Louis (1981) defined a career transition as a “period during which an individual is either changing roles…or changing orientation to a role already held” (p. 57). And as Bobeck and Robbins (2005) noted, part of the crisis of career transitions is the individual’s ability to retain a sense of “life meaning and purpose” (p. 634) during the career transition process. Other complications include letting go of an established career identity, which is highly intertwined with one’s overall identity, “leaving colleagues and regular social relationships” (p. 635), and changing daily routines, which can add additional stressors to the career transition process. Taken together, there are multiple losses associated with career transitions: a loss of a job, a loss of the work sub-culture one had grown accustomed to, a loss of social contacts and even friends, and a loss of a familiar, daily schedule.

This pattern of loss is intensified for veterans as they transition from the military to the civilian culture. Not only do veterans have to deal with all the normal stress issues associated with career transitions, they also have to re-adjust—become re-socialized in a sense—to the civilian culture. Therefore, veterans experience both the loss of a job and the loss of an entire culture, consisting of a separate history, worldview, laws, norms, discourse conventions, and even language.

Military culture

There has been an increasing recognition of the potentially growing gap between military culture and civilian culture (Dunivan, 1994; Hillin, 1999; Katz, 1990; Siebold, 2006; Snider, 1999). This divergence between the two cultures is instilled in military
members from their very first day of boot camp. As Katz (1990) made clear, this early socialization process introduces and reinforces basic military cultural norms, including “specialized goals, language and technology which differs in significant ways from…civilian culture,” rigid role constraints that guide and control expression of aggression and violence, “an egalitarian ethos” (p. 459-460), an emphasis on rank and social class status, and an endorsement of group-think, along with a simultaneous discouragement of individualism.

Hillin (1990) elaborated further on this growing gap by reporting the general view as a “‘nearly unbridgeable cultural divide’ between the American society in general and the U.S. military establishment” (p. 52). He attributed this gap to a vast difference in values between the two cultures. In contrast to perceptions of the general American civilian mores and values, which include narcissism, moral relativism, self-indulgence, hedonism, consumerism, individualism, nihilism, among others, military cultures purportedly value honor, commitment, courage, fidelity, and integrity. This gap, according to Hillin, is a result of the general public’s focus on the pursuit of happiness and the military’s role to ensure that American pursuit.

Dunivan (1994) reinforced this claim by pointing out the basic “masculine-warrior” paradigm that is entrenched in the military culture, results in a “‘cult of masculinity’” (pp. 533-534). This masculinity cult is characterized “by conservativism: a homogenous male force, masculine values and norms, and exclusionary laws and policies,” which is intended to preserve “combat effectiveness,” (pp. 534-535). Furthermore, the masculinity cult rewards aggressiveness and views women and homosexuals “as outsiders and deviants” (p. 536).
Other elements of the military culture that perpetuate the military/civilian gap include unquestioned submission to authority and ritualized violence, which permits military personnel “to violate societal prohibitions against killing” (Snider, 1999, p. 15). Additional military ceremonies and rituals, according to Snider, function to cover up anxiety and ignorance, reinforce the value systems, and celebrate/reward violent achievements. The reinforcement of this masculinity cult has contributed to “central elements in the construction of gender and sexual identities…even outside of the military” (Agostino, 1998, p. 59). It is a self-perpetuating cycle of “creating warriors who…must ultimately reenter a larger civilian culture in which warriors values are minimally adaptive” (Brooks, 2001, p. 208).

This increasing cultural divide between the military and civilian culture, therefore, has significantly contributed to the readjustment and re-socialization problems veterans must face when they return to the civilian culture. But there has been a general lack of information regarding this transition process, along with the accompanying stressors veterans may experience as they return to the civilian world. And not only are the relatively few studies that have explored this transition process out of date (the overwhelming majority are from the Vietnam era), but there are also contrasting points of view concerning this transition process. Several studies minimized the consequences this transition may have on the returning veterans, whereas others pointed out many glaring individual and social problems that result from veteran transition experiences.

**Veteran transitions**

*Smooth veteran transitions.* Several studies did not recognize this readjustment period as a problem for returning veterans (Crespi & Shapleigh, 1946; Figley &
Southerly, 1980; Wilson, 1980; Worthington, 1977). This minimization of the problems returning veterans deal with has been a trend going as far back as, at least, World War II. One such World War II study argued the whole notion of the troubled veteran is a myth: an over-generalized stereotype that all veterans have a terrible time adjusting when they return to the civilian world and, consequently, become atheist alcoholics. Crespi and Shapleigh (1946) attempt to counter this so called stereotype by pointing out veterans constituted a high proportion of those who attend college; their experiences in the service had actually served to make them more independent and functional contributors to society; after they returned home, their involvement in religious activities increased (and therefore they did not become atheists); and no evidence was found to suggest veterans drink more than anyone one else. At the most, World War II veterans experienced increased levels of boredom and restlessness, probably as a consequence of their “frustrations involved in civilian readjustment” (p. 370). In fact, not only did returning veterans not become atheist drunks, but Crespi and Shapleigh claimed their study provided “definite evidence that among some veterans—perhaps large numbers—wartime experiences have occasioned constructive changes” (p. 372) in their personalities.

Several Vietnam era studies also minimized the effects of war on returning veterans. As Figley and Southerly (1980) pointed out, “only 14.8 percent had ‘bad feelings’ about being drafted”; “54.5 percent had good feelings about being drafted”; and “68.4 percent reported their military experience helped them to know themselves better” (p. 171). Figley and Southerly did admit black Vietnam veterans had a significantly harder time finding jobs than white veterans, and many veterans, especially those who
were more involved in combat and experimented with drugs, suffered from sleep problems (p. 178-179). But, overall, Figley and Southerly concluded “the majority of veterans adjusted very well to military service in general and the transition to civilian life in particular” (p. 177).

Worthington’s (1977) assessment of the post-service adjustments of Vietnam veterans also suggested the “assumption of [a] strong relationship between post-service adjustment and problems for Vietnam Era veterans...may not be accurate” (p. 866), except for those who were released at lower pay grades and those who had received the least education (i.e., the lower class enlisted veterans who constitute the vast majority of military personnel). And finally, Wilson’s (1980) attempt to examine the psychosocial development of Vietnam veterans—based on Erikson’s (1950) eight stages of psychosocial development—found the biggest developmental drawback was a mere prolonged period of psychosocial moratorium (p. 164). In other words, while Wilson did recognize a variety of problems veterans experienced as result of war trauma and the authoritarian hierarchy that military personnel must submit and adapt to, the only negative developmental outcome was the Vietnam veterans took a little longer than most adults to achieve a stable, autonomous, and independent adult identity.

Veteran transition problems. There were also studies that did recognize the various problems associated with returning to the civilian culture after serving in the military (Borus, 1973, Faulkner & Douglas, 1977; Green, Jones, & Hinton, 1975; Myers, 1974). But like most veteran readjustment studies, they were out of date and mostly from the Vietnam era. Faulkner and Douglas (1977), for example, illustrated three kinds of loss veterans experience when they return home: 1) veterans often experience a sense of
losing time from their lives, like the world had moved on with out them while they were away; 2) veterans reported feeling they had lost a part of themselves, a finding very congruent with Erikson’s early conclusions concerning World War II veterans; and 3) they experienced a sense of losing others (i.e., the close friendship bonds they made in the military). Incidentally, the last two losses resemble the general losses associated with all career transitions.

According to Green et al. (1975), Vietnam veterans also experienced considerable problems with their continuing education efforts and had a “harder time finding jobs than other unemployed civilians” (p. 109). And while their study focused on non-whites, the authors felt confident these problems were “common among veterans in general” (p. 104). Myers’s (1974) study was perhaps the most comprehensive in pointing out specific career transitions problems experienced by Vietnam veterans, including 1) inadequate preparation to help veterans readjust to the demands of civilians society, including counseling and guidance for both education and job training; 2) skills acquired in the military the were not transferable to the civilian job market; 3) an economy that was generally not receptive or interested in catering the employment needs of veterans; and 4) insufficient G. I. Bill funding in regard to covering increasing education and cost of living expenses. Taken together, these factors culminated in a “civilian reentry crisis” (p. 233) for Vietnam veterans, and many were forced to rely on welfare.

Borus (1973) outlined a few potential preventative interventions to help alleviate common adjustment issues of returning veterans: 1) a program that emphasizes the normality of veteran transition stress, 2) a program that facilitates successful coping
strategies for transitioning veterans, and 3) individual consultations with counselors who had endured the transition themselves.

Finally, as the Green et al. (1975), Myers (1974), and Crespi and Shapleigh (1946) studies all pointed out, many veterans enrolled in college once their enlistment had ended. These college veterans constituted a significant number of the overall college population as a result of the GI Bill, which recruiters often use as a major incentive to attract new members (Mettler, 2005). Veterans who do attend colleges or universities experience numerous transition obstacles unique to them. And how they cope with these obstacles can have a major impact on their success as college students as well as their future career decisions.

College veteran transitions

Like most of the other studies concerning veteran transitions, most of the studies concerning college veterans also date back to the World War II and Vietnam era (Joanning, 1975; O’Neill & Fontaine, 1973; Peter, 1975). These studies also revealed conflicting results concerning veterans’ ability to succeed in the academic setting. Peter’s (1975) study, for example, revealed Vietnam veterans did much worse than their non-veteran classmates. These results drastically differed from the World War II Veterans—when the GI Bill was first introduced (Mettler, 2005)—who did very well as college students. Peter attributes the poor academic performance of the veterans he studied to the change of perceptions concerning the veterans from the two different eras (World War II veterans were touted as heroes, whereas Vietnam veterans were often ridiculed and scorned by fellow-classmates as well as the society at large). He also noted this group of college students ranked among the lowest students in the high schools they attended, and
they scored lower than most on their college entrance exams. Peter’s findings, however, were dramatically different from Joanning’s (1975) study of college veterans’ academic performance. The veterans he studied received slightly higher grades than non-veteran students did. Furthermore, veterans who attended college before they served received “significantly superior grades to nonveterans of equal ability” (p. 10).

However, as O’Neill and Fontaine (1973) illustrate, some college veterans are not even aware of the GI Bill. They reported several problems they faced in the academic setting and in their personal life, such as difficulties finding a job so they could continue with their education, difficulty relating to pre-military friends who did not serve, and overwhelming feelings of guilt, all of which relate to their academic performance. To help veterans adjust to the collegiate setting, O’Neill and Fontaine believe it is the school’s responsibility “to recognize the problems of the veteran and to provide necessary help to enable him [or her] to adjust both to the college environment in particular and to civilian life in general” (p. 155). Most colleges offer career and personal counseling to its students at low cost or even free of charge. The counselors at these schools can make efforts to contact veteran students and offer both individual and group counseling that emphasizes the various problems that are unique to the college veteran’s situation. Despite values such as self-reliance and rigid autonomy that veterans often adhere to as a result of serving in the military, Berry (1977) nonetheless noted many college veterans indicated they would be open to receiving counseling and “willing to discuss personal problems” (p. 409).
Exploring dualities and updating information

Taken together, the literature concerning military-to-civilian transitions and military-to-college veteran transition presents a series of mixed results and out of date information. Not only do most of the studies date back to the Vietnam era (or earlier), but the results of these career transition processes and outcomes displayed conflicting information: there were studies that portrayed the military-to-civilian transition as having minimal negative effects on the veterans; there were studies that portrayed the military-to-civilian transition as a dramatic social problem inundated with difficult obstacles that veterans must somehow overcome; there were studies that showed college veterans received lower grades than non-veteran students; and finally, there were studies that showed college veterans received higher grades than non-veteran students.

Even more current studies concerning veteran transitions exhibit conflicting information (Iverson et al., 2005; Vogt, Pless, King, & King, 1991; Wolfe, Brown, & Kelley, 1993). Two studies that focused on veterans from the first Gulf War (Vogt et al., 1991; Wolfe et al., 1993) both emphasized the clear connection between war-zone exposure and mental illness after the surviving veterans return to the civilian culture. However, Iverson et al. (2005) presented an opposing view concerning Gulf War I veterans. Similar to World War II veterans, Iverson et al. concluded the majority of Gulf War I veterans not only did well after their time in the service ended, but also their chances of getting jobs increased, and their general mental health actually improved.

In any case, the duality of the literature results, along with the generally out of date information, suggests further research concerning the military-to-civilian transitions are needed for both college veterans and veterans in general. Such updated information
might help to determine the potential obstacles veterans face when they return home and enroll in universities, which is particularly relevant now. Many veterans are returning home from the current wars in the Middle East, and many of them will be utilizing their GI Bills and, subsequently, enrolling in colleges and universities. If they are experiencing problems adjusting to and performing well in their courses due to this specific type of career transition, which is exacerbated even further by vast differences between the authoritarian military culture and the more liberal college culture, then contemporary studies that point out the specific problems and barriers experienced by contemporary veterans can function to help them cope with these barriers. The updated information would also be an asset to college counselors and would allow them to provide the most effective help to contemporary veteran students, so they could adjust to college life and civilian life in general.

The present study

One of the main purposes of this study is to begin the process of providing more updated information about contemporary college veterans. This purpose is based on a general lack of research about college veteran transitions as well as how most of the existing literature pertaining to college veteran transition is severely out of date. Additionally, the extant literature displays mixed findings. Some researchers characterized the military experience as an asset to college veterans. Other researchers characterized the obstacles veterans face as a result of the mismatch between the culture and values of the two institutions. Additionally, this study is intended to also begin clarifying the obstacles college veterans encounter as they leave behind their past lifestyle and embark on a new, unknown lifestyle.
The use of weblogs for this study provided the veterans with a means to anonymously write about the various obstacles and successes they have experienced as college veterans, as well as read and respond to other college veterans’ experiences. This dialogic aspect of the study provided a context and an audience in which they could situate their experiences. The dialogic process also provides the participants with a ready-made community of peers who have shared similar experiences. The community, combined with the anonymity, ideally functioned to allow the participants to feel more comfortable to honestly disclose their military-to-college transition stories.
CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Participants

The goal of this study is to explore and better understand the obstacles and successes veterans experience as they transition from the military culture to the college student culture in order to begin updating the literature concerning this phenomenon, understand this transition process better, and, eventually, inform veterans as they transition into the academic setting.

The participants were informed of all procedural and confidentiality criteria through one-on-one phone or e-mail conversations prior to the study, through the informed consent form they signed (see Appendix E), and through the main blog site itself (http://mypage.siu.edu/stalides/collegevetstories.htm), which has an introductory post reiterating the procedural and confidentiality issues that they were able to review at any time. The narrative and collaborative nature of the blog format makes the use of a smaller sample size necessary. Since each participant answered the same series of prompts that helped to facilitate the telling of their own unique transition stories, as well as responding to each other’s stories, too many participants would have served to make the collaborative aspect too time consuming and overwhelming for the participants.

I utilized purposive sampling to recruit participants. Seven participants were admitted into the study. A smaller sample size served to keep the narrative data manageable for both the participants and myself. It also accounted for possible attrition. Ultimately, two out of the seven participants did drop out; however, the study was able to accomplish the same goal with fewer participants. The smaller number of participants
have even allowed for more intimate, collaborative relationships between both the participants. The pilot study also had a smaller than planned sample due to attrition, and this smaller sample similarly allowed for more intimate collaborative relationships, which informed how the decisions I made for this study. For one of the participants who dropped out after responding to the first question in this present study, I incorporated that participant’s data into the analysis of themes for that question.

I recruited participants by posting flyers (see Appendix F) around The Southern Illinois University Carbondale campus, as well as emailing the same flyers to other colleges/universities in Illinois, particularly schools with veteran organization/clubs, such as Western Illinois University and Northern Illinois University, among others. In order to be considered for admission into the study, potential participants had to meet several specific criteria: 1) they must have been an enlisted veteran, not officers; 2) they must have served for a minimum of three continuous years; 3) they must be full-time college students (or recently graduated college students—veterans who have graduated anytime between 2005 and 2007 were allowed to participate); 4) and they must have been honorably discharged from the military. Additionally, potential participants had to demonstrate a willingness to commit to the extensive written work involved, rigorous self-examination, a willingness to share and respond to others’ stories, and a willingness to remain and participate for duration of the study (approximately 5-8 weeks). Finally, participants had to demonstrate pre-existing experience and knowledge using the internet. Other than that, no other criteria, such as gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, or gender, were considered in regards inclusion into the study, although such information was recorded (see Appendix G).
I did, however, want to isolate the experiences of the enlisted veterans from commissioned officer veterans due to the vastly different roles and experiences of each group. Commissioned military officers represent an inherently different population in terms of training, education level, status within the military, and ability to transfer their training and education to available civilian jobs. Officers represent the privileged upper class of the military culture; comparatively, enlisted veterans represent a lower class. This social stratification translates into infinitely different experiences for both groups regarding finding jobs after their time in the military has ended, as well as enrolling as full time college students (commissioned officers usually already have college degrees). Also, those who have served for less than three years may not have encountered the total immersion, attachment, and socialization into the military culture. As for their familiarity with computers and the internet, while they will all need to be trained to use blogs for the study to some degree, those totally unfamiliar with the internet and contemporary computer usage would take much longer to train and may have a hard time keeping up with the rest.

I screened potential participants with a short, informal and unstructured phone interview. Prior to these interviews, I submitted my study to the SIUC Institutional Review Board for approval. After my study was approved, I began the recruitment and interview process by first asking potential participants where, when, and how long they served. Then I inquired about their familiarity with the internet. Those who continued to conform to the admission criteria were required to submit proof of their military service. The DD214 form is the most commonly used legal document that proves time of military service and type of discharge. I would have considered accepting other documentation on
a case-by-case basis, but all participants submitted a copy of their DD214. I simultaneously tested their familiarity and ability to access to the internet on a consistent basis through a few simple exercises by first sending them a few randomly timed emails. Finally, if they demonstrated familiarity with basic email usage, I assigned potential participants a short blog exercise, in which they posted a short paragraph to a blog site and then commented to a previous blog post (using a practice “dummy” participant created specifically for this reason). All the participants were from public schools in Illinois: three were Southern Illinois University at Carbondale students, two were John A. Logan Community College students, one was a Northern Illinois University student, and one was a Western Illinois University student.

The basic demographic information for the seven participants admitted to the studies are as follows: Alpha: 32 year-old, male Caucasian graduate student majoring in Public Administration. He served in the Marine Corps for four years from 1993 to 1997. He is classified as a Gulf War I veteran; however, he was never involved in combat. He was honorably discharged for medical reasons (see Appendix H); Bravo: A 27 year old, male African American junior majoring in Management. He joined the Army immediately after high school and served for eight years from 1997 to 2005 (see Appendix I); Delta: A 23 year old, male Caucasian sophomore majoring in Law Enforcement and Justice Administration. He joined the Army immediately after high school and served for four years from 2002 to 2006 (see Appendix J); Foxtrot: A 43 year old, male Caucasian pursuing an addition degree in Automotive Technology. He retired from the Army after serving for twenty years from 1983 to 2003 (see Appendix K); Golf: A 24 year old, male Caucasian junior majoring in Political Science-International. He
served in the Army for four years from 2002 to 2006 (see Appendix L); Echo: A 25 year old, Caucasian female junior majoring in Speech Communications. She served in the Navy for four years from 2000 to 2004. She only posted a response to one question. This participant failed to complete additional questions and did not respond to reminder messages regarding her participation (see Appendix M); and Charlie: A 27 year old, Caucasian male freshman majoring in Anthropology. He served in the Marines for eight years from 1998 to 2006. This participant also failed to complete additional questions and did not respond to reminder messages regarding his participation.

Procedure

As Polkinghorne (1988) noted “in a written report, the ‘narrative’ portion is…written in essay form” (p. 13). Therefore, to capture the lived experiences of my participants’ transition narratives, they extensively wrote about their veteran transition stories using a blog site created specifically for this study (http://mypage.siu.edu/stalides/collegevetstories.htm). The main blog site displayed a new question (see Appendix A) that the participants were asked to respond to every week in personal narrative essay format. To generate enough narrative content that adequately covered the veterans’ experiences for a given question, I required the participants to write approximately one full page, roughly 300 words, for each question. I did not rigidly enforce this minimum. There was, however, no maximum word limit. All the participants were informed they could make their narratives as long as they wanted.

Prior to the present study, I conducted a pilot study that explored general military-to-civilian carrier transitions. The study was very similar in format to the present study; however, the pilot study included more questions than this present study. The pilot
originally had eleven questions that I paired down to five, based on the content of the
participants’ responses to each question and feedback from the participants about the
questions. The pilot also had more participants (eleven), but six dropped out after posting
a few or no questions. The high attrition rate of the pilot also informed me on how to
screen participants better, so they would continue for the duration of the study. I took
other steps to reduce attrition, such as utilizing fewer questions and less time between the
posted questions.

For this present study, the initial question was very general (see Appendices A
and B) and the subsequent four questions were more specific, complex, and focused on
the actual transition process. In general, all the questions were informed by career
transition research, veteran research, my own experiences as a veteran, a pilot study, and
feedback and suggested refinements from my thesis committee.

Within the same week a question was posted (except the first week), the
participants were not only expected to write a narrative in response to the posted
question, but were also expected to read and comment to at least one other participant’s
question (see Appendix B). Therefore, the participants were expected to complete their
narratives within the first week after the question was posted. In the pilot study, the
participants were similarly allowed a week to write their narrative; however, they were
given an additional week to post comments to the narratives. This created a two week gap
between questions, and seemed to, at times, to contribute to a loss of focus for the
participants, missed due dates, and continual reminders I had to send for them to post
both their responses and comments.
The shorter time between new questions along fewer and more refined questions, allowed the participants to remain more focused and immersed in the study. These “due dates,” which I posted along with the questions, allowed the participants to have an equal opportunity to read and then comment to any participant’s narrative for the week the question was posted. This is also why they did not post a comment to previous responses in the first week: there was not anything to comment on yet during the first week. Their comments to the other participants’ narratives only needed to be a short paragraph or two, but, like the narrative, they could make their comments as long as they wanted. Furthermore, they were free to comment to whichever narrative piqued their interest the most; they were free to say whatever they liked (i.e., phrasing their comment as a general observation, as advice, as a question, as a disagreement, etc.); they were free to comment back to a participant’s comment and keep the dialogue going about a particular subject, or subjects, as long as they wished; and they could post as many comments to as many participants as they liked at any time during the study, as long as they continued to post their first comment to a new question each week.

Like the narrative word limit, I didn’t enforce the due dates rigidly. However, I did allow them extra time in order to accommodate their pace and schedule as much as possible. But if they needed or took too much time, given the short duration of the study, I would have asked them to drop from the study. Also, due to the short duration of the study (5 to 8 weeks), if a participant had to drop out of the study for any period of time, the participant would not have been allowed to rejoin the study. For participants who dropped out, I included what they contributed as part of the data, unless they indicated otherwise, which no one did. The participants were informed and aware of these time
restrictions beforehand. They were also informed they would not receive the $20 gift certificate unless they completed all the questions, comments, and follow-up questions.

The participants wrote their narratives on their own individual blog sites, which I created in advance for them. Each individual blog site is exactly the same in format, except for the codenames assigned to the each participant’s blog (see Appendix A). All the participants’ blogs were linked to the main blog site, and each individual blogs had links to all the other participants’ blogs, which allowed each to easily locate, read, and comment on each other’s transition stories (see Appendix A and B). The individual blogs for the pilot study were public blogs (i.e., anyone could go online and access their blogs); however, for this present study, the individual blogs were accessible only to those involved in the study (i.e., the participants, myself, and my thesis advisor) in order to increase anonymity.

To help further increase anonymity, which allowed me to make use of “the online disinhibition effect” (Suler, 2004, p. 1), I assigned each participant a codename that corresponded to the blog site they used to write their narratives (see Appendixes A and B). The codenames I utilized were letters of the military alphabet (see Appendix A) that I randomly assigned to each participant. Each participant was assigned a codename, and was informed how to access and use the blogs for this study (either in person or by phone). To do this, I walked each participant through a simple test-posting and a test-comment to someone else’s posting using a practice participant. Most were able to use the blog efficiently after the test, but when necessary, I walked some participants through extra practice postings. All participants were able to use the blogs easily and efficiently,
especially since blogging is just as easy, if not easier, than writing emails, once one becomes familiar with the process (Carbone, 2005).

I used the Google sponsored Blogger blog host for this study since it is user friendly. Once my participants logged on to the main Blogger entry page (www.blogger.com), they accessed the blog site I created in advance for them with the username and password I provided for each individual participant. In actuality, all the sites were created with my own personal information. I set the blogs up in this way for several reasons. The main reason was to afford me total control over all the participants’ blogs. This helped ensure all the blogs remained uniform. If a participant intentionally or unintentionally altered the format of the blog, I was able to change it back. Also, while I had no intention of censoring anything anybody said, if something should go wrong with a particular participant, I was able to alter or even delete the site should such an extreme situation occur.

Total control also allowed me to help participants fix any problems they may have had with their blogs as needed. And finally, creating the blogs with my own information allowed me to better ensure the anonymity of the participants. If a participant attempted to email another participant through the blog, the email would go to me. If a participant accidentally or intentionally divulged their real name, I was able to change such information immediately. All posts and comments were formatted to be automatically emailed to me. And the comments function includes a feature that allowed me to either accept or reject a comment before it was published. For the entire duration of the study, the participants were only able to communicate with each other only through the blogs, and they addressed each other only by the codenames assigned to them (see Appendix B).
If any of the participants expressed interest in contacting each other by other means on their own after the study was over, I would have allowed them to do so if both parties agreed they wanted the other person to know who they were. This situation, however, never occurred.

After the participants completed posting all their responses and comments, I also individually emailed each participant follow-up questions (see Appendix D). After they wrote their answers to the follow-up questions, they emailed them back to me. They did not share their responses to the follow-up question with other members of the group.

Data analysis

Once my participants started posting their first narratives, I analyzed their stories. The pre-arranged foundational paradigm of the study guided and pervaded virtually all of the decisions, procedures, interpretations, and analyses throughout the study (Morrow, 2007). As stated earlier, my foundational paradigm best conforms to an interpretist-constructivist approach, with an emphasis on phenomenology, which, according to Morrow, is often regarded as a subset of the interpretist-constructivist paradigm.

The interpretist-constructivist paradigm has a pluralistic and relativistic view of reality. In other words, “there are as many realities as there are participants (plus one: the researcher)” and therefore “meanings…are co-constructed by participants and researchers” (p. 213). This paradigm, then, forefronts and promotes subjectivity (by both the researcher and participants) in collecting and interpreting the data.

At the same time, the subjectivity that is central to qualitative research is also the greatest threat when it comes to validity. And while the notion of validity is a term derived from the post-positivistic perspective, validity, as well as other standards that
help determine the quality of a study, such as “rigor, trustworthiness,…authenticity, and credibility,” (Yeh & Inman, 2007, p. 386) must all be addressed and accounted for in non-post-positivistic methodologies.

There are a number of ways to help increase the credibility, trustworthiness, and rigor of qualitative data analytic method chosen for this study. Reflexive journal writing was my main and most often used method of inquiry. Reflexive journaling is “a kind of diary in which the investigator…records a variety of information about self…and method” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 327). The researcher is free to use this on a weekly or even daily basis as needed to record all his or her thoughts, running hypotheses, and ideas. The reflexive journal also serves as a documented record of the research process as it unfolds. This method of analysis also contributes to the trustworthiness of a qualitative study by providing both a “personal diary” and a “methodological log” (p. 327) that outside readers can use to confirm and validate the researcher’s inferences. It was through the use of reflexive journal writing that I pieced together the individual veteran transition stories of each individual and attempt to find the common themes.

As Yeh and Inman (2007) pointed out, “the objective of qualitative analysis is to determine patterns [and] themes…that inform the research about the participants” (p. 389) point of view in regards to the phenomenon being studied; therefore, coding is a primary method in qualitative data analysis. According to Polkinghorne (1995), narratives can be analyzed in two different ways: analysis of narratives, which analyzes narrative based data in order to generate paradigmatic categories, and narrative analysis, which analyzes the individual actions and events of a narrative in order to create a holistic story. In this study, I utilized aspects of both.
I initially analyzed each individual’s narrative like a separate case study, using the narrative analysis method to piece together holistic narratives. More specifically, I summarized each participant’s narrative blog postings for a particular question (see appendices for entire narrative summaries about each participant). I then utilized the analysis of narratives approach to discern categorically-based content themes for each of the participants’ responses to each question. After discerning such content themes, I cross-referenced individual content themes for each participant’s narrative with the content themes found in other participants’ narratives for each question. Based on the aggregated content themes found across all the participants’ responses for a given question, I grouped the content themes into broader theme clusters for each question (Yeh & Inman, 2007).

I did not incorporate comments in the themes found across the participants’ responses for each question. I did, however, include the comments as well as the participants’ follow-up questions in the final segment of the results section. In this segment, I synthesized the data from the participants’ responses to each question, the participants’ comments to each question, and the participants’ responses to the follow-up question, resulting in a collective story about the participants’ transition experience guided by even broader, more generic meta-themes that transcended all the data. This process is similar to Charmaz’s (2000) grounded theory method of constant comparison, which compares “data from individuals to their own data at different points in their narratives” (Fassinger, 2005, p. 160) and then compares themes with other themes from the other participants’ narratives. By analyzing and comparing the themes within each individual’s narrative and then comparing the themes of all the participants to each
others’ themes, I was able to analyze and interpret both the individual story of each participant as well find themes that were common to the group. In phenomenological based studies, this kind of “across-case comparison analysis” is referred to as intersubject analysis (Yeh & Inman, 2007) and allows for a “multidimensional perspective of the phenomenon” (p. 392).

To reduce bias and help ensure that I accurately captured the voices of my participants’ transition stories, I utilized participant/member checking: for each of the narratives I constructed for the participants’ responses to each individual question, I sent the participant’s narrative to the participant in order to review and help ensure I had captured their experiences accurately. In the few instances in which they felt something did not fit, I made the necessary changes, after which, I checked in with the participants again to verify the changes matched with their perceptions of the events. As Lincoln and Guba (1985) pointed out, allowing the participants to help verify and clarify the researcher’s interpretations “is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (p. 314) in a qualitative study. It was through this method that the study became a truly collaborative effort between me and the participants. In addition to member checks, and to further ensure the credibility of the study, I also incorporated an external auditor who evaluated the various interpretations and themes of the study and helped to ensure such interpretations and themes matched the data. This auditor is a European American male counseling psychology faculty member at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale.

The general design of this study automatically made use of prolonged and immersed engagement. According to Elder and Miller (1995), prolonged engagement adds to the trustworthiness of a qualitative study. It helps ensure continual
communication between the researcher and participants, which allows all involved to understand each other better and to understand the complexity of the issues better. Once I discerned the general and individual and group themes, I connected the themes to specific instances and verbatim examples from the narratives that helped to exemplify the themes.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The results are ordered by question number (see Appendix C). For each question, I displayed the most prevalent general themes and the categorical content themes that comprised the broader, more general themes for each question. In quoting the participants’ responses directly, I made textual changes at times to correct spelling and grammatical errors in order to avoid confusion. However, I also attempted to maintain and illustrate the unique voices and characters of the participants as much as possible. These broader and main content themes for each question are displayed as a separate table for each of the five questions (see Tables 1 to 5). Brief summaries of the participants’ comments for each question are included after each question. Following the comments are a summary of the responses for the follow-up questions. The comments were not included in the initial thematic coding. I concluded the results section with a collective meta-thematic analysis that ties together all the themes from all the questions, comments, and follow-up questions in the study. These meta-themes are presented and summarized in a table (see Table 6).

Results of thematic narrative analysis of responses to question 1 “1st question: Why, when, where, and what? In this first question, tell why you joined, how long you served, where, and about the various jobs and duties you held in the military.”

The first question served several purposes (see Table 1 for a summarized list of major themes). Starting the series of questions off with how and why the participants joined in the first place provided an accessible start for the participants to get used to and feel safe with the blogging process. These questions were intentionally broader in scope,
in regards to the actual transition process, in order to provide context and help set up the subsequent questions. The sub-questions of the general questions also served as guides that provided the participants with specific queues with regard to what to include in their narrative. However, these sub-questions were meant as guides, and participants were allowed to deviate and write about their experiences in whatever way felt appropriate to them, as long as they covered the general topic for each question. In this way, they were able to answer the specific posted questions and also go beyond those questions and add more content to their stories that may not have been addressed by either the questions or sub-questions.

*Antecedents of enlistment.* In discussing the reasons they enlisted in the military, the participants elaborated on pre-military experiences that influenced their decisions to join. Among some of the most common influences/life experiences that contributed to their decisions to enlist, participants identified ways in which they had been influenced, or primed to enlist, by family members and the media. Four participants (Alpha, Echo, Delta, and Golf) indicated ways in which they were primed to enlist long before they actually joined. Of those four, two participants (Alpha and Echo) discussed the influence their family had in their decisions to enlist. For example, Alpha pointed out, “my Dad had been in the Navy during Vietnam and I was born at the Portsmouth Naval Hospital, a navy brat of sorts.” Alpha continued, noting he “had grown up hearing of uncles in Korea, Check Point Charley, Vietnam, and a second cousin who was a defender of Wake Island.” Similar to Alpha, Echo seemed to be heavily influenced to join because of her family: “growing up in a Military household, on bases and on a firing ranges, I was quite comfortable with the entire process and wanted to join the service.”
The other two participants (Delta and Golf) discussed media influences on their decisions to join. Delta reflected that when he was younger, he wanted to do “all the ‘cool stuff’” that he had been exposed to by the popular media. Golf noted he used to read a lot of military-related literature: “I was reading a huge volume of biographies and histories from Vietnam and…Black Hawk Down.” These cultural influences seemed to influence the way they had perceived their lives before they joined the military.

*Pre-military environment fit.* Most of the participants noted their decision to join was influenced by a pervasive feeling of not fitting in well with the expected norms of civilian society. One expected norm adolescents face after they complete high-school is an imposed pressure to go to college. All six participants noted their decision to leave was in some way related to their thoughts about college. For example, as Alpha noted, “I didn't really want to go to college,” and after he met with a recruiter, he added, “as soon as I realized I had a choice, the idea of an education went out the window especially when I found out I could get a guaranteed contract.” Foxtrot, like Alpha, also enlisted in order to avoid college: “in high school, I was a terrible student and barely graduated…. [And] I was really scared of college.” When he was approached by a recruiter, he jumped at the opportunity: “I took the first and only job offered. I was an easy sell.” Golf simply noted, despite that he was already enrolled in college, he “disliked…school.”

Bravo, on the other hand, specifically joined in order to attend college: “to have the ability to go to college without having to take out a loan….in my mind this was the best way for me to go to college.” And even though Delta knew he always wanted to join the Army, he also wanted to eventually earn a degree: “I knew that someday I wanted to go to college, but I definitely wanted to join the Army first.” Echo, like Delta, also noted
she had always wanted to join, but she also mentioned how college did not seem like a good fit due to her career indecision: “I was contemplating college…but decided I had no idea what I wanted to be when I grew up.” The participants’ perceptions that they did not fit well with the expected norms of civilian life seemed related to a sense of meaninglessness they experienced before they joined, as well as the subsequent increased feelings of belongingness and purpose they felt after they joined the armed services.

*Pre-military meaninglessness and subsequent belongingness.* Three participants (Alpha, Delta, and Golf) specifically reported feelings of purposelessness in regards to their pre-military lives. These same three participants, along with Bravo, also discussed how serving their country in the military helped them to feel they belonged to something larger than themselves, as well as an increased sense of autonomy, that they felt the military offered. For example, Alpha noted, “I felt like I found a home that I never knew I was missing.” Delta joined out of a sense of duty to his country: “I wanted to serve and set myself apart from my peers. I wanted to do something elite that I would be able to take pride in.” Golf wrote specifically about “feelings of purposeless” as part of his reason for enlisting, especially after 9-11. He felt as though others did not have “any real concept or interest in what was happening” and that he wanted to contribute to those fighting for America: “I felt like…I should be a part of this.” Bravo pointed out how enlisting was akin to a statement of autonomy for himself: “[it was] my way of saying that I am independent and can make decisions affecting my life on my own.” This enhanced sense of belonging to something larger than themselves seemed to instill in the participants a sense of enhanced purpose and meaning in their lives. Furthermore, this
positive shift in attitude seemed to result in positive perceptions in regards to their perceptions of how they fit in with the military culture.

Participants’ fit with the military work environment. All six participants also noted that they loved their jobs, a notion Alpha noted practically verbatim: “Personally I loved my ‘job.’” Bravo described his job as “a lot of fun.” Despite Delta’s initial zeal for joining the armed forces, he noted he “wasn't exactly happy…during the first half of [his] enlistment.” However, he noted a turning point as he continued to do well, which led him to feel otherwise: “I loved the Army.” Echo also expressed her passion for the work she did: “I loved my job.” However, she did not like the “bureaucracy of the field.” Foxtrot, too, talked about his enthusiasm for what he did in the military: “I enjoyed the Army… [and] loved everywhere I’ve ever been.” Golf noted he loved his job because of the sense of “professional fulfillment” he attributed to his job.

There seemed to be two main themes that contributed to the participants loving their jobs. Four participants (Delta, Echo, Foxtrot, and Golf) insinuated a connection between job satisfaction and an increase in responsibility, especially leadership roles. The turning point Delta spoke of previously that led him to love his job seemed directly related to the increase in responsibility he was awarded: “once I was promoted to Sergeant and had my own fire team it all changed….I was proud when they did well and felt partly responsible when they screwed up.” Echo also noted, in regards to her work as a Hospital Corpsman, the pride and work satisfaction she felt as she amassed more responsibility: “we could see our own patients, make diagnoses, prescribe meds, order X-RAYS and lab work, manage wounds and perform minor ‘surgeries.’” Foxtrot noted, “I had my own aircraft at age 20 and I was responsible for it.” He also advanced fairly
quickly, four pay-grades, within a short time period, three years, which contributed to his job satisfaction and his decisions to “reenlist for [the] first time.” Golf also noted the sense of accomplishment he felt when he “was made an Infantry Team Leader”: “this gave me 3 subordinates and some small level of authority in the platoon and company….I found I liked solving people’s problems.”

In regards to their various military jobs as duties, while their specific duties were very different from each other, three participants noted their jobs required training to engage in violence, although none of the participants were involved in combat.

But with the good also came some not so good. All six participants wrote about how they had to constantly adapt to different duties within their various main jobs, and they all also reported having to adapt to a variety of different locations. Bravo identified this continual adaptation to different jobs as “the toughest thing…to adjust to” in the military. But despite some of the more unpleasant aspects of military life, the participants expressed that they enjoyed being in the military. One of the largest aspects of enjoying their work seemed to be the feeling of belongingness they felt, especially in regards to the close bonds they formed with their military colleagues.

*Feeling of belongingness experienced in the military.* Two participants (Bravo and Golf) disclosed they developed close bonds with co-workers, which also seemed connected with job satisfaction. Bravo attributed some of the enjoyment of his job to the “unique characters” he met and worked with. Golf noted the deep bond he formed with a unit he worked with in Korea, despite that the work was very difficult and “the shittiest.”

*Question 1 comments:* The comments served a couple key functions in this study. They forced the participants to read and respond to each other’s stories. This seemed to
create an audience for the participants to write for, and it seemed to promote a sense of community. Additionally, the comments served as a validation and normalization of their experiences. The comments also functioned as a means for the participants to add more data to their experiences as they continually clarified and elaborated on their earlier statements.

For the first question, the participants were a little more tentative than later questions with their comments. They mainly asked questions about each other’s jobs that allowed the participants to elaborate a little further on what they had written. For example, Bravo asked Alpha if he would make the same choices if he “could do it all over again.” In response to Bravo’s question, Alpha expanded more on what his job entailed and concluded “I like who I am today and I wouldn't be who I am without all the at time crazy choices I’ve made.” There were some similar questions and elaborations to other participants. There were, however, no normalization responses or new information.

Results of thematic narrative analysis of responses to question 2: “2nd question: Why did you decide to leave the military? As the question suggests, tell us about your decision to leave the military and return to civilian life. Discuss some of the fears you may have had about returning to the civilian world. If you didn’t have any fears about this transition, describe how you were feeling about it and why.”

The second question started to address the participants’ transitions back into the civilian world, but the focus is mostly about the period just before they left the military (see Table 2 for a summarized list of major themes). It is a continuation of the second question in that the reason they left often connects to the reason they joined. Also, after the first question, one participant, Echo, dropped out of the study.
Antecedents to leaving the military. Similar to their pre-military experiences that contributed to the participants enlisting, the participants also discussed some of the experiences in the military that contributed to them leaving the armed forces. For the three participants who left voluntarily (Bravo, Delta, and Golf), the common reasons noted for this decision included to seek a better life, limited ability to advance, and limited earning potential. For example, Bravo wrote he wanted more than life in the military could offer him: “I wanted to push myself to be better than just what I could be in the military.” Golf was more specific in explaining how the limits of a career in the military was one of the most important factors in his decision to leave: “as an enlisted man, the highest rank achievable…had no responsibilities that interested me, [and] the pay after 20 years was still shit.” Even Delta, who left only to get his degree in order to return to serve as an officer, insinuated he would not advance far or earn much in the military unless he earned a college degree: “I wanted to go to school…. [to get] the most money possible.” However, this dramatic career and lifestyle change entailed that they re-evaluate where they had been in order to explore where they wanted to go with their careers. This seemed to necessitate that the participants return to a state of vocational identity moratorium (Marcia, 1966), a state where they are searching but have not yet committed to a career.

Vocational identity moratorium. In discussing their post-enlistment career options, three participants (Alpha, Delta, and Foxtrot) considered careers/majors similar to their military job. Before deciding to go to school, Alpha sought out jobs that resembled the work he did in the service as a “Light Armored Vehicle Crewmen”: “I wanted a job driving so that I would have [job] continuity.” Delta was going to school as
a civilian in order to return to the military as an officer: “I'm not completely a civilian
now, I still have a contract but it’s kinda on hold for the next couple years.” Foxtrot, who
worked as a mechanic and repairman while he served, returned to school to pursue an
Automotive degree: “I chose [the school I went to] because they had everything I wanted,
Automotive Technology and Autobody.”

Two participants (Foxtrot and Bravo) noted they felt college was the best route
for them to pursue. Both also noted how school represented a fresh start that would
provide them with new opportunities. As Bravo pointed out, “I decided…I could restart
my life as a college student.” Foxtrot expressed his worries about what he would do for a
job after he got out, but he also talked about the college benefits, such as the GI Bill and
the Illinois Veteran’s Grant, which would allow him to go to college and support himself
financially: “I decided I was going back to Illinois to take advantage of an education.”

There were other reasons that contributed to the participants’ sense of having to commit
to a new identity (and vocational identity), especially their various aspects of their social
identity that contributes to their overall sense of self-sameness.

*Loss of a familiar environment.* All five participants expressed a certain amount
of stress about returning to civilian life, be it directly or indirectly. Alpha poignantly
asserted, “Was I scared—hell yes.” Bravo wrote about how tough it was to decide to
leave: “my decision to leave the military was not an easy decision.” Delta discussed how
the adjustment was difficult and how getting out was not the happy experience he thought
it would be: “I thought I was happy about leaving the military, until the day I got out.”
Foxtrot expressed his concerns about returning to the civilian world: “I [was] anxious
about being a civilian again, wondering what kind of job I’d get or what I’d do or where
I’d live.” Golf, too, noted his stressors about leaving the military: “a fear of not being able to support myself and that somehow I would fail and be forced to return.”

There were also some similarities as to why the participants felt stressed about leaving. Three participants (Alpha, Delta, and Golf) expressed financial concerns. Alpha stated, “I was married, owned 2 cars, had all kinds of bills and now I was gonna get kicked out.” Connected to financial concerns were the prospect of job-related concerns and the transferability of military job skills to civilian jobs skills. Alpha expressed concerns about both: “no real job prospects and my current job training/experience wasn’t really going to translate too well into the real world.” Delta, as noted previously, also expressed financial concerns about returning to the civilian world. He also spoke of what he termed a “campaign of fear” from his superiors who attempted to convince him that he would not be able to find a civilian job if he left. According to Golf, he was told “there wasn't shit out there for you. No jobs…you'd be back in a few months.”

Two participants (Alpha and Bravo) discussed socialization-related concerns, especially concerning their abilities to get along with civilians. As Alpha noted, “I really wasn’t too fond of civilians. Most of the ones I knew would go back on their word, didn’t take any kind of pride in their work.” Bravo also talked about his misgivings concerning readjusting to civilian life: “I gave so much of my life to the Army that I was unsure how I could adapt to being a civilian.” Along with these losses, the participants expressed the loss of close family-like bonds and friendships they would lose, which seemed to be one of the most difficult aspects about leaving the military.

Loss of close friends. Four participants (Bravo, Foxtrot, Golf, and Delta) expressed concerns about leaving friends and work colleagues behind, with whom many
participants mentioned they had formed family-like bonds. Feelings of guilt were also often associated with this particular theme. Bravo, for instance, wrote specifically about the difficulty in leaving his friends, who had become like family to him: “my battle buddies became more of my family than my real family did.” Yet Bravo also explained that as people continually moved on (i.e., either left the military or were transferred to another duty station), his military family broke apart, which contributed to his decision to leave: “as time drew on though, I started to see my military family break up slowly.” Foxtrot, too, noted feelings of guilt and stress due to the close friends he would be leaving behind: “it was hard leaving the Army knowing a lot of my friends were going [to the Middle East].” And even though Golf generally felt good about his decision to leave, he discussed feelings of guilt in regards to leaving friends behind: “like I’ve abandoned them.” Delta also expressed a similar sentiment: “I miss all the guys in my unit. We were a hard working close knit bunch.” These various losses (e.g., loss of a job, security, loss of a familiar work routine and environment, and loss of close friends), all of which are part of one’s overall identity, contributed to an sense of self loss, which the participants struggled to piece together as they transitioned to their new post-military lives.

Post-enlistment struggle for self-coherence. In reflecting on their experiences after they separated from the military, two participants (Alpha and Bravo) expressed regret or doubt about being out. Alpha noted, “Hell, I think at times I’ve tried to get back in.” Bravo also expressed doubts about leaving: “there are lots of times that I think back on my life and at times wonder if I made the correct decision.”

Two participants (Alpha and Delta) missed the daily, structured work routine they he had gotten used to. Along with that, Alpha also noted he missed the sense of purpose
that he felt from serving his country: “I miss the ‘work’ and knowing that what I did in
the world made a real difference.” Delta also talked about some of the other things he
missed, including the daily, structured work routine he was used to in the military: “I
miss all the stuff I enjoyed doing, getting up and doing some nice hard PT everyday.” But
there was a notable aspect that Delta did not miss. Delta expressed he grew tired of all the
seemingly nonsensical rules imposed on him in the service: “I didn’t really miss the
bullshit, having to deal with stupid rules that don’t make any sense or are just to appease
a specific person.”

Delta, more than any of the other participants for question two, wrote about what
it was like transitioning from the military to the college setting, and many of the points he
brought up were echoed by other participants in later questions. He noted a feeling of
uneasiness about going to school after serving: “even stranger than getting out of the
military…was starting college.” He noted he had a hard time relating to his fellow class
mates at first. In fact, he was often annoyed by them: “I don’t think a day went by the
first semester that I didn’t want to tell some little shit to just ‘shut the fuck up!’” Delta
also pointed out other differences between military and college life that he had a difficult
time adjusting to. He pointed out college students are granted unearned respect that he
was not afforded in the military: “in the Army you have to earn your respect, but once
you do you have it. At school I have to ‘give them equality.’” It was also hard for Delta
to hear college students complain about comparatively petty problems: “I would just look
at them and think, there are people younger than you…fighting a war…and [you] have
the nerve to bitch because the water in the shower…is not quite warm enough for you.”
And while Delta did note that professors at his school were not as liberal as he thought
they would be, he did point out how it was more difficult in classes where professors imposed their political views on the students: “there are a few that like to put in little jabs about the US shouldn’t be at war and stuff.” But Delta also noted as time goes by, it becomes easier to cope with the transition: “it seems to have a gotten a little easier…I’m getting used to the little shits here.”

*Question 2 comments.* For comments for the second question, the participants seemed to be getting more used to the process of commenting and also more comfortable with each other. This resulted in some more meaningful and normalizing comments, which started to create a bond among the participants. Golf commented to Alpha, “your comment about unconsciously setting standards for civilians, friends and others alike, rang true with me….Also, your comment about ‘missing out’ on the war is common.” Bravo also wrote a normalizing statement to Alpha: “it does make lots of sense to wish to be back in. It is the idea of belonging to something that is more important...I feel a lot of times that I wish that I was back in.” Delta wrote a normalizing comment to Bravo, in regards to not being able to connect with old friends: “I felt like every time I went home things should be the same as they were when I left.” Alpha wrote a consoling comment to Delta about dealing with the age gap as well as dealing with immature classmates: “Don’t stress the age thing so much….I usually found most everyone else felt about the same about morons in class bitching about stupid shit.” The participants also expressed they found inspiration and learned from reading about others experiences, as Bravo expressed in a comment to Foxtrot: “Reading this actually made me really happy because you show a trait that I wished that I could do. Being willing to take life on as it came to you and being able to get through them.”
Results of thematic narrative analysis of responses to question 3: “3rd question: Life in transition. Discuss your experiences as you were in the process of transitioning from the military and returning to civilian life.”

The main focus of the third question is the actual process of transitioning out of the military (see Table 3 for a summarized list of major themes). One of the more important issues for this process was the usefulness of the transition programs that the military offers for separating personnel. This was an issue informed by the pilot study. Many of the pilot participants discussed their experiences with the transition programs, so I added a specific, unplanned question to the pilot study in order to explore this topic further, which in turn led me to include it in this present study.

Environmental support. The participants expressed differing views about the usefulness of the military transition programs. There was near-consensus, as noted by four participants (Bravo, Delta, Foxtrot, and Golf), that the transition programs were not helpful for college bound veterans. Bravo asserted “none of the information applied to the world that I was going into.” Delta noted, “I already had plans to go to school so I just kinda sat there going, ‘this doesn’t apply to me.’” Foxtrot expressed a similar reaction: “I attended but it wasn’t going to be useful for me because my goal was to get a degree.” Even Golf, who felt the program was good, noted the program was geared toward those transitioning directly into the workforce: “there was nothing I was aware of to get soldiers into school. Since that was my objective, I was unable to take advantage of most of the…seminars and job fairs.”

Two participants (Alpha and Foxtrot) noted there were both good and not so good aspects to the military transition programs. As Alpha pointed out, “they were a mixed
Foxtrot, who felt that the program was comprehensive, also remarked that a lot of the information was not helpful to him: “the transition program was probably a good program but I wasn't going to use all their information real quick.”

Two participants (Bravo and Delta) felt that the transition programs were not very good or helpful. Bravo directly stated that the program “was pretty poor in my opinion.” Delta also reported his disappointment with the transition program: “I didn’t really find any of the transition stuff helpful at all.”

Bravo and Delta elaborated on some of the reasons as to why the transition programs were not useful. Both commented that the information felt dated. Bravo wrote, “the last time the books were updated was while I was in grade school.” Delta expressed a similar notion: “someone who retired out of the military after 20 years, is 40+ years old can’t really help a 22 year old who is getting out to go to work or start college.” Alpha also reported the sole purpose of one of the transition classes was to convince separating personnel to reenlist: “one of the classes given was about reenlisting right then and there.”

The more useful aspects of the transition programs were attributed to more practical information learned. In discussing the classes that offered instruction in how to fill out military-benefits related paperwork, Alpha found these classes much more beneficial than other, less practical classes: “I had to go to another series of classes to find out how to deal with…paperwork, [which was] way more helpful…..because I could actually use some of that information.” In reflecting back on the transition classes, Delta had realized, in retrospect, that some were more useful than he originally thought: “I wish I had taken them up on the resumé course at least, it would have been nice to have one
ready when I got out.” Golf also suggested the more practical classes were more helpful to him: “I was only able to take advantage of a…workshop to familiarize me with VA benefits and give me some instruction on how to translate my military experience to civilian language and build a resumé.”

Three participants (Alpha, Bravo, and Foxtrot) also utilized other outlets that offered them transition/readjustment assistance. Alpha, for instance, sought transition counsel from a military base after he got out. However, he characterized the experience as a negative one that ignored his specific needs and interests: “all the fuckers wanted me to do was go to college…. after I explained to them that at that point ….I couldn’t afford…college. After that, they didn’t want to talk to me.” Bravo noted he received more useful transition information outside the military: “I learned more about transitioning by talking to family and getting used to being away from my military obligations than during the entire transition process.” Bravo also wrote about the help he sought from a military transition adviser in order to see how his military job skills would translate to the civilian world. However, Bravo remarked, “when I saw this…I noticed that it was nothing that I would be interested in.” This information resulted in him feeling he was deceived during the military recruitment process:

I thought back to when I first went to see the recruiter and him telling me that I would be able to get a job that I was interested in because I worked in a field that was a good transition back to the civilian world. What a lie.

Foxtrot discussed additional career exploration activities he conducted on his own to help him decide on a college major: “I spent more than a year [conducting research using the]
Department of Labor website about different career paths and their 10 year forecast and how well that career will pay.”

It was through Foxtrot’s independent career exploration efforts that he decided to major in an area that intrinsically interested him: “there are a lot of good paying jobs out there, I just didn’t know if I would enjoy them or not. Finally I decided I would go to a school that offered Automotive and Autobody, because…I love cars.” As noted previously, Foxtrot’s choice of major helped to narrow down which schools would best fit his needs. One school was in a big city, and the other was in a smaller college town. Ultimately, finances determined which school he chose to go to: “this was a no brainer,” Foxtrot noted in discussing the school he chose, that a smaller college town was “a better choice for many reasons, cost of living, weather, and crime rate would all be better.”

The completion of the transition program brought with it the end of the participants’ time in the service. After their enlistments ended, the participants discussed some of the struggles they experienced after they returned to civilian lifestyle, as they struggled to bring their identities, which had been molded by their experiences in the military, in accord with a new working environment.

Post-enlistment and identity mismatch. Three participants (Alpha, Delta, and Golf) expressed they initially felt strange after they got out. Alpha noted he felt “pretty melancholy for awhile.” Delta suggested that being out of the military felt unreal: “I guess it was a couple months before it really even set in that I was no longer in.” Golf remarked on how he felt he did not fit in with civilian culture: “I felt I needed to level out and not be crazy anymore.”
Two participants who noted they felt strange (Alpha and Delta) also mentioned an abrupt ending to their time in the service. Alpha wrote, “One day they were there, the next and they were gone—fucking poof!!” Delta remarked on how the end felt rushed: “the Army is such a difficult place to try to leave that you don't really have time to slow down and think about it.” Delta also expressed a desire to go back after he got out: “once I got out I mostly just felt like going back.”

Two participants (Alpha and Delta) also wrote about the loss of friendships after they got out. “I missed my buddies,” Alpha noted. Delta expressed similar feelings: “I missed all the guys in my unit the most when I got out.” Delta also remarked on how it was difficult to keep in touch with friends from the military: “I kept in contact with them as best as I could, but some of them I kinda drifted away from.”

Two participants (Bravo and Foxtrot) discussed feeling afraid about returning to life as a civilian. Bravo discussed worries about college life: “of course that…scared me.” Foxtrot expressed fears about financial concerns: “my biggest fear was financial, I had no idea how much I could afford for housing or what my budget would be because I had no job.” However, two participants (Delta and Foxtrot) also expressed how they were excited to be out. Delta noted, “I guess I do remember being excited.” Even though he expressed financial concerns, Foxtrot also remarked on his feelings of excitement: “I was excited to be out there on my own, and see what I could.”

In order to counter some of the norms they had been forced to ascribe to, some participants, Bravo and Delta, rebelled and indulged in post-service freedoms. Bravo wrote, “I decided to dye my hair an odd reddish orange color as well as letting it grow out well beyond the military guidelines.” This was a way for Bravo to assert his autonomy
and independence from the military: “this was my indication...that I no longer cared.”

Delta indulged in his new found freedom in a similar way: “I remember growing my hair
and beard for 2-3 months....my little way to rebel and cut loose.”

The end of their enlistment also brought with it a new beginning. However,
transition into this new career setting brought with it new challenges that the participants
had to learn to adjust to. Many expressed the most difficult aspects of this transition was
learning how to interact with their non-veteran college classmates.

Assimilating into the college social setting. Four participants (Alpha, Delta,
Bravo, and Golf) commented on difficulties connecting with non-veterans. Alpha
remarked on how he was unable to connect with his pre-military friends: “it seemed like
nobody understood me. I tried to fall in with my old friends, and they just didn’t get it.”
Subsequently, Alpha “ditched them” and entrenched himself in working in order to avoid
dealing with the adjustment losses he was feeling: “I...started working way too much.
Not the best theory, but it paid my bills at the time and helped me not deal with shit.”
Delta noted, “it was hard meeting people in my classes.”

He attributed this difficulty meeting people to the age gap between him and the
majority of students, which also corresponded to a gap in life experience and maturity
level: “I was 22 with combat experience, they were 18 and still thinking about high
school.” Bravo also remarked on his fears of enrolling in college due to the age
difference: “I didn’t want to be an old man going to school.” Golf remarked on how he
had to re-learn how to talk to non-veterans:
I couldn't say “fuck” all the time like I was used to and couldn’t talk about shooting people in the face or whatever. I noticed too that everything I had to talk about was Army related, so it immediately alienated people who hadn’t been in. Despite the various stressors, barriers, and fears the participants had to contend with in the collegiate setting, many felt they were successful as college students. They also elaborated on some of the things that contributed to this success.

**Elements of successful assimilation.** Two participants (Delta and Foxtrot) reported they had *done well in school.* One reason for their academic success is that they approached their school work with the same mentality in which they were trained to accomplish tasks in the military. Delta noted, “I treated it like the military, get up, work out, eat breakfast, go to class, get done, find something to do.” Foxtrot attributed his success as a student to the social support he received from his family: “my family as a whole has worked very hard to pull this off.”

Three participants (Foxtrot, Delta and Golf) spoke of the importance of social support in terms of adjusting to college life. Delta and Golf wrote about the significance of joining school organizations. Delta talked about how helpful his school’s Veteran’s Club had been to him: “probably the best thing that a veteran can have to transition.” Golf also joined a school organization: “the best thing for me was to start doing Brazilian Jiu-jitsu, which is a type of ground fighting.” For Golf, Jiu-Jitsu provided him with an adaptive way to release pent up aggression: “this gave me an outlet for violence, in a safe and controlled environment.” For both, these school organizations provided them like-minded companionship. As Delta noted, “we pretty much just hang out and have a couple beers and bitch about all the little kids at school we can’t stand.” Golf expressed his
organization served a similar function: it “allowed me to…meet people that shared a common interest.”

Question 3 comments. By the comments for the third question, the participants were very used to the process, and some were using it to communicate quite often. For example, Alpha and Foxtrot had an ongoing concerning Foxtrot’s response for question three. They bonded on some issues since they were a bit older than the other participants. They asked about staying positive and balancing family life both in and out of the military. They also talked about their views on college veterans who, as Alpha wrote, “complain that school and life is hard.” Foxtrot, in turn, did not have a positive view on those who are negative: “people that complain a lot or about everything are no fun! Realistically no one wants to be around someone who complains a lot.” Golf also wrote a supportive, normalizing comment to some of the things Bravo had posted concerning his views of military skill transferability and nontraditionally aged college students: “things you have written jive with me pretty well. The main one being the minimal carryover of job skills….The other…is that you also noticed that there are more older people in school than you thought there would be.” Bravo asked Delta if he found it easy to move on after he “started to embrace being in school.” Delta replied that he didn’t, due to free time he did not know what to do with: “I didn’t really know anyone here at school so that added to the amount of free time that I had. If someone had offered to let me go back I probably would have taken it.” Delta wrote a comment to Golf that discussed difficulties he had with the Army’s transition program, specifically the lack of help if you plan to go to college after separation:
Heaven forbid you would want to go to college. They just kinda look at you funny and let you go. Then when you show up at school, the people there just kinda look at you funny, say “Thank you for your service, but I’m not really sure how to help you get your financial aid or help you adjust to the new environment.”

Results of thematic narrative analysis of responses to question 4: “4th question:
Experiences after separation. Our focus will now be changing as we begin to focus on your life experiences after your enlistment ended, you returned to the civilian world, and started your life as a full-time college student.”

The fourth question continues to explore the transition process after the veterans separated from the military (see Table 4 for a summarized list of major themes). The focus this time, however, is the way in which they adjusted to their new lives as college veterans.

Abilities and environment fit. In regards to skills acquired in the military, all the participants agreed military skills were not directly useful to college work. However, there was also consensus concerning the transferability of the military work ethic they acquired from their experiences in the military. For example, Alpha noted the military enhanced his work ethic: “I was always a hard dedicated worker, and that was only magnified by my time in.” And this work ethic, in turn, helped him with school work: “as for helping with college, I have a sense that school is my work.”

Bravo noted, “The skills that I learned in the military (technical skills) are meaningless in civilian life.” However, he noted other more practical skills he learned in the military helped him: “leadership, punctuality, and a sharpened sense of integrity. These skills I have found to be very important in my life as a student.” Delta made
similar remarks about the transferability of the skills he learned in the military: “the
skills…I learned as infantrymen don’t really transfer well to anything in the civilian
world…and they certainly don’t transfer well to college…. however, the broader skills,
discipline, duty, working hard, being motivated….transfer in anything you do.”

Foxtrot did not talk directly about military skill transferability, but he did note
how the military molded him into a hard working person, which enabled him to do well
in school: “in high school, I was a terrible student….but the military formed me into who
I am today.” Golf noted the jobs skills he learned indirectly helped him to do well as a
college student: “In high school…I was a terrible student….but now, with my Army
brainwashing, I bust my ass to make sure everything is…done well. This is only in terms
of work ethic however. My actual skill set has no carryover however.”

Age and emotional maturity were also noted as a component that contributed to
their success as college students. Two participants (Alpha and Delta) addressed this issue.
Alpha pointed out, “I don’t think that [my success as a college student] has so much to do
with the fact that I’m a vet as much as it has to do with the fact that I’m older.” Delta
noted how the age gap between him and younger, less mature students contributed to his
academic success: “my military experience is an asset to me as I go to school. If for no
other reason than ensuring I am older than my peers and therefore not worried about
where to get a drink.”

The lack of direct transferability of skills from the military environment to the
college environment illustrates the differences between the two settings. The participants
elaborated on some other differences, along with some similarities.
Similarities and differences between the college and military environments. Three participants (Alpha, Golf, and Delta) pointed out college is very different than the military. Alpha expressed there was not much that was similar about the two institutions: “from my own experiences the Corps and college are nothing alike.” Delta pointed out, “in the Army you always seem to be busy, and there always seems to be something you are working towards. In college I found myself with hours a day and nothing to fill it with.” Golf added a similar notion: “college life is much slower….in the Army I was jumping out of my ass to get everything done. Once I got out… I could make coffee and read the paper for hours. I didn’t have to do shit.”

Golf also wrote about differences in college student attitudes: “people were not as aggressive in school.” He recounted that, initially, his displays of aggressive behaviors seemed to make students uncomfortable: “I think [students] may have been put off by my style of conversation, and my general mannerisms.”

Delta discussed the lack of a rigid, structured routine in the college setting: “it was hard to comprehend that when I woke up in the morning I didn't have to do anything, hell I didn’t even have to go to school if I didn’t want to.”

Bravo, on the other hand, felt that life in the military and life as a college student were not so different: “I lived in the barracks and it really was no different than what life in a college community is like.” He did mention a couple notable differences. He now had more freedom and was not bound by a rigid, structured daily routine: “I do not have anyone telling me what I should be doing and where I should be….That is now something that I have to do on my own.” He not only remarked on how others were no
longer in control of his actions, but that he was not in control of any one else’s actions either: “there are times that I feel that I miss the ability to control what others are doing.”

The differences noted between the two environments, in turn, have an impact on veterans’ ability to adjust to the college environment.

*Adjusting to the collegiate environment.* Two participants (Alpha and Golf) felt they experienced an easier adjustment than most veterans: Alpha, for example, felt that the transition into the collegiate setting may not have been as jarring for him since he did not go straight from the military into school. He worked for five years first: “I had plenty of time between the Corps and school to not make that direct of a transition.” Golf also reported he adjusted well to his new environment: “now that I have been in school for the better part of a year…I have adjusted pretty well. It came pretty easily.” He did note others could tell he was older, but that they could not tell he was a veteran: “after my first semester was completed, I was indistinguishable from everyone else. Just a little older, but people didn’t think I had been in.” His increasing ability to relate to others students seemed to contribute to the ease of his adjustment: “I could also talk about shit other than the military that wasn’t back dated to 2002.”

Two other participants (Bravo and Foxtrot) felt they experienced a more difficult adjustment. For Bravo, the transition experience was jarring, and he continues to struggle with the adjustment: “once I left the military I had this scared feeling that to some extent I still have not fully shaken. It was such a shock being a civilian again.” Foxtrot insinuated the teamwork aspect of accomplishing tasks as a group instilled in him a sense of belongingness and meaning: “as an individual…things look or seem so
meaningless, but to look at the bigger picture, as a whole, things are different.” He concluded that, “In the Army, I was a part of a larger group and now it is just me.”

The participants also noted that programs available at their school helped them adjust to the college environment as well.

**Support offered by college programs and services.** Three participants (Alpha, Bravo, and Delta) were not aware of any transition programs at their school. Alpha noted he was not aware of any transition programs at his school when he first started: “I never heard anything about anything like that, even from the vet office up in financial aid.” He did note some programs to help veterans have recently been implemented at his school, but he did not feel they suited his specific needs: “I did recently hear about a support group…for combat vets…and I’ve seen fliers…about…vets for peace kinds of groups. Don't really fit into either group.” Bravo noted he too was not aware of any transition programs offered to veterans at his school, but he insinuated he would be interested in participating in these types of programs: “I was not aware of any services that were available to veterans to help with the process of adjusting to college life. At first I thought that this is what this [study] was going to be.” He also suggested programs to help veterans adjust would be an asset to veterans: “after understanding what the use of this information is for, I am sure there will be some better known programs that will come into existence.” Delta, too, noted his school did not offer much support to help veterans adjust to college life. Additionally, like Alpha, he also felt the campus veterans office was not very helpful: “The school, which is comprised of almost 10% veterans, does not have a single veterans transition program….and the [veterans] office on campus…can
only make sure you are certified for your GI Bill benefits.” Foxtrot remarked on the lack of help he received in adjusting to college life: “I didn’t use any program to transition.”

Golf also noted his school did not offer much help to veterans: “there really isn’t too much.” Golf, however, reiterated the importance of the school organizations he is involved with at his school that have helped him to adjust. He emphasized the social support and companionship these organizations offered him: “we have a Veteran’s Club were people get together and drink sometimes. I myself started a Brazilian Jiu-jitsu group were a bunch of us veterans get together and train. So that helps.” Delta professed the importance of social support that Veteran’s Club at his school provides: “it was so nice to have a place to go where people understood what you were having to deal with…. there is no one else on campus that can possibly understand the change in your life.” Foxtrot wrote of the importance of social support, but his social support came from his family: “I have the support of my wife and children and I couldn’t do it without them.” Alpha also spoke of the importance of being able to connect with fellow veterans: “I’ve bumped into vets in work situations and in the school world….that fact has at times made life easier, in a room of strangers I’ve had an instant confidant and or friend.”

*Question 4 comments.* By question four, while the participants continued to comment regularly and more frequently as a way to engage each other in dialogue about various topics, their comments were more concise and selective. Perhaps they were getting better at communicating through blogs, or perhaps the time constraints of the approaching midterm forced them to be more concise.

Golf identified with a statement Alpha made in regards to how combat training can be a hindrance to getting a civilian job: “I built a resumé that showcases my
experiences and abilities. But seen through civilian eyes, the notion of ‘combat’ severely damages my chances of employment.” Foxtrot wrote a comment to Bravo praising the efforts he has made to better himself as well and encouraging him to persevere: “I enjoyed your blog and especially the part about the skills that you have acquired….don’t stop with these….I would bet you have more…than you have listed.” Bravo wrote a comment to Delta that expressed his agreement concerning Delta’s view in the importance of school veteran organizations: “I definitely agree with your sentiments that every school should have an organization for veterans so that they can be around people that understand them.” He also had a question about finding such an organization: “I was curious if this organization sought you out or did you find it on your own?” Delta replied to Bravo noting how he had to seek it out: “I pretty much had to work to seek out the organization….when I came to school…they didn't bother to mention the Veterans Club.”

Delta wrote a comment to Foxtrot concerning how non-veteran students do not seem as motivated as veteran students. However, he also recognized that as he became more entrenched in the college lifestyle, he found himself identifying more with his fellow classmates: “I notice fellow veterans and sometimes even myself; slipping into this attitude I don’t know why, maybe simply because we are around it now, I don’t know. Maybe we all need a little refresher.” Bravo wrote a comment to Golf about getting along with non-veteran students and his reluctance to disclose that he is a veteran: “I did not tell them at first that I was a veteran because I wanted to find out who they were without them knowing too much about me.” Golf replied to this comment, identifying with Bravo’s reluctance:
I also tended not to tell people right off that I had been in. The only time it really comes out is when they venture a question like “so is this like your sixth year in school?” I don't want them to think I'm a piece of shit, so then I tell them.

Results of thematic narrative analysis of responses to question 5: “5th question: Experiences as a college veteran. For this last question, discuss your experiences as a college veteran, with a focus on the transition from your life in the military to your life as a civilian college student.”

The fifth question explored the participants’ experiences as college veterans (see Table 5 for a summarized list of major themes). This final question, which builds on all the previous questions, focused on the unique challenges college veterans encounter as they continue to adjust to post-military life as well as the challenges of being a college student. The question also brings the participants full circle, asking similar questions that were posed in the first question but from a different point of view.

Adjusting to a new work culture. Two participants (Alpha and Foxtrot) had to adjust to living off much less income. Alpha noted, it was a challenge to learn “to be a bit frugal and live off that money as a single guy.” This was a particularly difficult transition for Alpha, who worked for five years before enrolling in college after he separated from the military. Foxtrot wrote about how, despite the military college benefits he received in order to help pay for school and his living expenses, including retirement pay, he still had to work to be able to support his family: “balancing a life as a dad, husband, full time employee, working several jobs, maintaining a home [has been] one of my most challenging tasks of all time.”
Three participants (Alpha, Delta, and Golf) expressed negative/hostile impressions of civilians and classmates. Alpha noted his frustrations with the required general education courses, which he considered a waste of his time: “these classes were easy and mostly busy work.” He also did not feel the students in this class were very bright: “[these classes] are filled with morons that I usually wanted to beat…with a claw hammer for their stupidity.” Golf discussed his negative criticism of fellow students: “the biggest obstacle I faced was meeting people I could tolerate here at school.” He attributed his annoyances to differences in age, experience, and maturity level: “being older, and having drank plenty already, most college kids pissed me off more than anything. Society in general seemed to be petty, immature and materialistic.” Delta expressed a strong reaction to the way in which some professors imposed their opinions on his work: “a fucking teacher tell[s] the entire class that we need to change our ways because he has a Ph.D. and tenure and that the only way we are going to pass the class is if our opinions become his opinions.”

Bravo wrote that he still feels he is adjusting to his new life, post-military: “being out…and going to college still seems odd to me….I am still in a transition stage even though I have been out of the Army for better than two years.” One of the biggest obstacles Bravo discussed was letting go of socialized norms and behaviors he had gotten used to in the military. For example, he noted it was difficult to get used to people calling him by his first name: “I know that it seems really stupid but hear me out ….in the Army the only name…I heard on a daily basis was my last name. The only name…I used for [others] was their last name.” He also mentioned his pervading tendency to feel like he has to salute a flag when he came across one being raised: “I found [it] difficult to
overcome…saluting when I see the American flag being raised. There have been several days on campus that I have felt the need to stop….face the flag and salute.”

Delta remarked that it was not so much the academic challenges that were harder for him, but rather the getting used to a new environment: “the biggest obstacle I faced was the change of environment and everything associated with it.” In elaborating on this, he emphasized the social aspects of the environment, particularly having to rebuild a social network:

I managed to become pretty well known in my battalion….However when I came to school…I knew about 3 people….So here I was at school, knowing hardly anyone, and having little in common with the people in my classes. It has taken me about a year to begin to rebuild my social network.

Delta also found it difficult to adjust to losing leadership positions and not being in charge of others: “it’s like standing on solid ground and having someone pull the rug out from underneath you. It is a big change to have authority and then have none.”

Two participants (Delta and Golf) expressed difficulties adjusting to extra free time. Golf likewise noted an increase in free time. However, Golf framed this free time as an opportunity to explore things he previously could not: “the excess of free time…has let me explore new avenues.”

I had a hard time filling my days. I’d be up, work out, and then have nothing to do for 2 hours till class; sit in class for a total of about 2 ½ hours a day and then having nothing to do again.

Two participants (Alpha and Delta) noted college work was less stressful. Alpha remarked the stakes are not as high in college and, therefore, the work feels much less
stressed: “you screw up, or get an answer wrong nobody’s gonna get messed up.” He did note a similarity in submitting to the orders of those in position of authority:

All you gotta do here in school is what the professors ask, kind of the same in the military….if you don't do what the professor wants you just flunk and fuck yourself up—so I guess to a point it's kind of the same shit.

Delta felt that college work is comparatively much less stressful: “seriously, I've been shot at and almost blown up, why the fuck would I let a test stress me out.”

Bravo expressed an opposing view regarding making mistakes. For him, making a mistake in college felt much more stressful than in the military: “it is much more intimidating because there is so much on the line if I make a mistake. In the Army most mistakes are not life threatening to a soldier’s future.”

Two participants (Delta and Alpha) noted military work felt more meaningful. For Delta, college work seemed more individualistic, and, therefore, less meaningful. In the Army, for example, “it always seemed like you where working towards the greater good.” School, however, “is just people working to get a degree.” Alpha also expressed he experienced a greater sense of belongingness and meaning for the work he did in the military: “I felt a lot of times I was doing something kind of important, I was a part of something bigger than me.” Concurrently, he questioned the value of his degree due to his perception of low admission standards and the extra attention some students receive:

They seem to let anyone in with money at times….a lot of time I feel like great I have a degree, and that dude over there who was in the programs with a pile of tutors, didn’t have to take hard course, and got to take the test I took in an hour
had 2-3, got one too. Just has a different feel, like what did I really accomplish, and is it really worth that much?

Like others had mentioned, Delta also approached his school work in the same way he had been taught to carry out tasks in the military: “I came in treating this like the military; it was something I had made a choice to do…I learned to work hard and get the job done, and that can’t hurt any job.”

In their struggles to adjust to this new working culture, participants had to re-evaluate how this new environment fit with their personality.

**Personality-environment fit.** Three participants (Alpha, Bravo, and Foxtrot) remarked that college life did not fit well with their personalities. Alpha noted mixed feelings: “I don’t think that the world of academia fit me all that badly…But I have had times where I felt like I stuck out like a sore thumb.” He attributed not fitting in due to the age difference and his perception than he is more motivated than most college students: the differences are ”due more to my motivation to be here and the fact that I felt outside of the normal student population due to the age gap.” He also noted he has held on to the values he acquired in the military, and he still identifies himself as a Marine: “I don’t think any of my values have been compromised by being a college student….I am a Marine—not former or any of that shit, I earned it, I’ll be one till the day I die.”

While Bravo is also motivated to do well in school, he noted college life does not fit his personality well: “I wanted to go to college to try to make a better life for myself and my future family. At times though, I do not feel totally comfortable in the academic setting.” Foxtrot noted he felt he did not fit in due to his age: “I really didn't fit in well and that’s okay….I am 43, almost 44.”
Despite some aspects of the new working environment that some of the participants felt did not fit their personalities well, they also displayed an ability to be flexible. Some of the participants discussed how they sought out ways in which to make the new environment work for them, and, ultimately, fit better with their personalities. This, in turn, seemed to suggest that they were becoming more open to the experiences and starting to let their personalities fit this new environment.

Successful transition behaviors. Alpha noted the importance of learning how to best utilize and stretch out the education benefits he earned in the military: “massage the system….there are a lot of things even the vet centers and assistance spots will tell you if you don’t know how to ask right.”

Two participants (Delta and Golf) emphasized the importance of connecting with fellow veterans. For Delta, the Veteran’s Club at his school was crucial for serving that purpose:

I think the greatest thing for soldiers transitioning is a Veteran’s Club on campus…. some days we just need someone that understands what it was like to go from the military to college, and 98% of our “regular” college friends just can't understand.

Golf also felt school organizations played an important role in helping him to adjust: “I began running with the college non-competitive running club to meet girls and started training Brazilian Jiu-jitsu to find an outlet for violence and to immerse myself in a new sport.” Golf further added the motivation to be in school is important: “I think my transition was easiest because school is where I wanted to be. It was the next step in professional development and was absolutely necessary to do what I want to do.” He also
credits the military for providing him with some of the means to do well as a student: “the level of responsibility from the Army gave me the tools I needed to complete all of my academic tasks.”

Foxtrot noted writing about his experience helped him to realize just how significant his accomplishments as a student were: “now that I think about it, writing it on paper, it is like an impossible task has been accomplished.” He also pointed out two crucial elements that contributed to his success as a student—social support from his family and choosing a major that he was passionate about: “I had excellent family support, incredible financial support and chose a major that would be a best fit for me, something that I love.”

*Question 5 comments.* For comments in the final question, participants continued to inquire about things that piqued their interest and offer normalizing, supportive remarks. Some also acknowledged the study was coming to a close, and they offered their thoughts on the process of writing and responding to other college veterans’ stories.

Golf posted a comment to Alpha regarding some of the financial burdens college veterans face, despite the benefits they receive: “I’ve been forced to work odd jobs and have normally been a little under the gun when it comes to finances. The State pays for tuition but living expenses come out of my pocket.” Foxtrot wrote a comment to Bravo telling him how much he had enjoyed reading his blog posts: “when I read your blogs its like it takes me back (4 years) when I was still there.” Alpha also wrote to Bravo, noting he too had a tough time getting used to calling people by their first names: “The first name thing still throws me most days.” Bravo and Alpha had a back forth dialogue about how it has been hard to stay in touch and locate former military friends. Bravo also
posted a comment to Delta about getting along with non-veteran classmates: “I agree with you when you say that 98% of our ‘regular’ college friends can’t understand what it is like for us to move on to college from the military.” Bravo commented on how writing about his transition experience has helped him:

One of the things that I like about this study is being able to read the blogs that we have posted and reflect on our experiences. I know that I will apply some of the information on these blogs to help better my own transition.

Foxtrot and Alpha had another back and forth dialogue about the role their families have played in their transition. Delta wrote to Golf commenting on the difficulties all the participants have had in meeting people at school: “it seems to me, from the other veterans I know and myself, that we all seem to struggle with meeting people.” He also commented on the importance of social support: “I think we all have to find something that allows us to meet people.”

Results of follow-up questions: “Feedback on what the participants thought about this entire process.”

After the study ended, and everyone had posted their responses and comments for all five questions, they were sent an email that asked several general questions concerning their thoughts about the process in which they had participated. These emails were not shared with the rest of the group. All five of participants who followed through for entire duration of the study emailed their responses to the process question directly to me.

Question 1: “What are your overall thoughts on participating in study?” Alpha noted he had hoped for interaction and communication between the participants. He
enjoyed that aspect the most. Bravo noted his experience felt more normal after interacting with others who had been through similar experiences, and he received a lot of good advice. Foxtrot enjoyed reading others’ blogs, and that doing so brought him back to a time when he was younger. Golf, in general, emphasized how important he felt this study was:

Anything that can help people readjust to the world, and give them the tools to build a productive and healthy life….I think reintegration is a serious issue. Especially if failure sends people back into the military, which they most likely left in the first place because they hated it.

*Question 2: “What did you like about it?”* Alpha enjoyed reading others’ posts. Bravo liked exchanging stories and getting feedback from others about his experiences. Delta liked that the questions were concise and easy to answer. He also liked the honest environment that allowed him to feel comfortable to say whatever he wanted. Foxtrot liked the positive blogs. Golf felt the anonymity was critical. He also really felt it was important they were encouraged to say whatever they wanted: “to really be honest, it was necessary to let those four letter words out.”

*Question 3: “What didn’t you like about it?”* Since he was older and did not go straight to college after he got out, Alpha felt some of the questions did not fit his situation well. He did feel that the issues covered were extremely important, so he worried that no one would benefit from what was learned during the process. Delta felt a week in between questions was too long. Foxtrot did not like negative blogs.

*Question 4: “Are there things that could have been done better or more efficiently? If so, what?”* Alpha noted he could not participate as much as he would have
liked toward the end because it conflicted with his studies for midterm exams. Golf was disappointed that people dropped out.

*Question 5:* “Did you feel like you benefited in any way by participating? If so, how? If not, why?” Since he had been out longer, Alpha did not feel he benefitted. Bravo did feel he benefitted, noting, “I have gained the knowledge that I am not alone.” Delta did not feel he benefitted, noting he felt he had already worked through his readjustment issues. Golf felt it was beneficial to be able to vent, and he also felt good knowing others were going through similar experiences.

*Question 6:* “Finally, feel free to add any final comments or anything else you might want to say about participating in this study (be it good, bad, or both—honesty is key!).” Bravo noted the study helped him to deal with his feeling of loneliness he has experienced since he left the Army. Foxtrot enjoyed sharing his experiences. Golf is hopeful the information learned from this process will be used to help other veterans.

Results of the meta-thematic narrative analysis, including responses to all questions, comments, and follow-up questions.

In the previous thematic analyses, the most prominent themes were presented only for each question separately. However, in focusing on themes from a single question, other important issues discussed by each participant may not have seemed particularly relevant. Additionally, the themes for each particular question did not take into account the comments for each question, as well as the participants’ responses to the follow-up question. This last segment is intended to take everything the participants discussed into account and thus delineate the major overarching meta-themes for the entire study—themes that may have been overlooked by focusing on one single question at a time.
The focus of this collective and more generic meta-thematic analysis is on the process of transitioning from the military-to-college work setting, the obstacles the participants faced in this process, and the ways in which the participants overcame and/or coped with these obstacles. Therefore some of responses that did not directly address this process may not be as relevant as other issues that directly address the transition process (see Table 6 for a list and brief summary of the meta-themes).

*Belongingness.* The general theme of belongingness was present in some way for all the participants, and it was an issue that followed them throughout their process, influencing their reason for enlisting, fueling their fears after their enlistment ended, and contributing to their inability to connect with non-veterans both in the academic setting as well as non-veterans in general. Most of the veterans discussed how their feelings of not fitting in well with society contributed to their decision to join the military in the first place. They felt out of place in some way. They also longed for a life that was more meaningful, and the military offered them the opportunity for a more meaningful life in that they were serving their country. The more communal aspects of the military lifestyle also seemed to fulfill their need of belongingness. As many mentioned after they separated, the more individualistic aspects of college seemed less meaningful to them.

Belongingness was also an issue that affected them during the separation process. Many of the participants expressed their fears about their abilities to get along with non-veterans. Furthermore, they had concerns about their ability to connect with younger, less experienced college students. Also contributing to their anxieties about leaving was the prospect of leaving close friends behind. The participants had come to regard their military friends as family, due to the long period of time they spent with their co-workers,
as well as being away from their pre-military family for extended periods of time, including holidays.

Once the participants did enroll in school, there seemed to be consensus that they all had troubles connecting with their fellow classmates. Many held negative views of non-veterans as well as non-veteran college students, who the participants felt had not earned or appreciated their education and did not seem to take school very seriously. They also tended to feel isolated from fellow classmates because the participants felt they were immature and lazy. The participants also did not feel they had much in common with fellow classmates, and their classmates could not understand what they had experienced in the military, which further increased their feelings of alienation and isolation. This feeling of alienation and isolation was so strong that the participants sometimes expressed desires to return to the military. Some expressed negative views about professors, who the participants felt had tried to force views and opinions on them, views that did not fit well with the values that had been ingrained into them during their time in the military. This also served to make them feel like outcasts in the college setting.

*Financial concerns*. Financial concerns were another prominent theme that appeared in multiple ways throughout the study. Financial concerns were an important factor that contributed to their reason for enlisting in the first place. Whether the participants joined for a career in itself or as a means to earn money for school, when the participants enlisted, they all felt at that time that the military offered them the best means for financial security.
Financial concerns were also a factor the participants had to reconsider when their enlistments ended. They were all faced at some point with the prospect of leaving the military or reenlisting. However, some of the same reasons for enlisting also served as some of the same reasons they left the military: many expressed they felt the military was prohibitive in regards to their earning potential and advancement opportunities. Therefore, participants chose to leave and enroll in college to better themselves and increase their earning potential. Even among those who did not choose to leave, college represented the best opportunity to earn more money, although money was not the sole reason the participants joined.

However, the prospect of enrolling in school presented them with new financial challenges, and many worried whether they would be able to support themselves as full time students, especially if they had a family to support, as Foxtrot did. Their financial fears were buffered by the education benefits they had earned serving their country, and these benefits also served as an extra motivator to enroll in college.

When the participants did start school, while their military benefits did help, many found the benefits were not enough. Some noted they helped to pay for education expenses, but they did not cover living expenses. As a result, some of the participants reported they had to work in order to continue as full-time students. 

*Age differences.* Age differences between the participants and their fellow classmates served as a double edge sword. The participants talked about their fears of going to school with people who were much younger and less experienced than them before they left the military. Unfortunately, many of their fears about their ability to connect with younger people turned out to be true. The participants reported they often
felt very different and unable to connect with their fellow classmates because of apparent age differences, as well as the differences in life experience and maturity level.

Some participants expressed they were not in school to party, as it seemed many of their younger classmates were. For them, their schoolwork was their job, not a social gathering. In this respect, the participants pointed out how the age difference was an asset in terms of doing well in school. They were more mature, were tired of partying (which some expressed they had done plenty of in the military), and they were motivated to succeed in order to get well paying, rewarding jobs after they graduated.

**Social supports.** Once the participants were nearing the end of their enlistment, they attended mandatory transition programs intended to help veterans adjust to life as civilians. Some of the participants found these programs to be a joke. Others felt they served a useful function that offered some help to separating veterans. However, all the veterans from this study explicitly noted the transition programs were more geared toward veterans who were entering directly into the workforce, and therefore, they were not helpful for college bound veterans.

Once the participants had separated and began their new lives as college students, many noted the toughest part about adjusting to the college environment was not the schoolwork, but rather learning how to assimilate into the college social environment. In this regard, school programs helped to initiate them into the college social scene, and participants whose schools offered such programs felt they were crucial to their successful transition process. One participant even noted he would not have been able to adjust and remain in college without such an organization. Other participants whose schools did not offer such programs expressed they felt such a program would be helpful.
The participants who were involved in school veteran organizations spoke of the comfort of just being able to sit around, interact, and talk with others who had went through similar experiences. Besides companionship, these organizations facilitated mentoring relationships that informed veterans how to navigate successfully, both academically and socially, through the various challenges of college life. They also served an important social function in introducing them to non-veterans, and, therefore, helping newer veterans to learn how to better interact with them. This helped to greatly reduce the isolation these veterans felt in the college environment. Unfortunately, these same veterans noted it was difficult to learn about these organizations. The schools they went to did not seem to make the existence of such organizations readily available. Even the veteran administration offices in these schools did not provide them with any information about such programs.

*Freedom vs. control.* The participants also seemed to indicate they had a dual relationship in regards to freedom and control. In adjusting to life as college students, the participants were abruptly thrown into an environment that was much more open. They were suddenly comparatively free to do whatever they wanted. This contrasted with the military environment where they followed a prescribed daily routine, as well as the orders of their military superiors on a regular basis. The participants were both excited to be able to what they wanted, as well as a little frightened. This change in environment can seem rather jarring to the transitioning veterans—they had become used to and dependent upon a more rigid and structured routine.

The participants wrote about their fears of freedom and the looming lack of a predetermined daily routine that civilian/college life represented, pointing out they would
no longer have the safety of job security and shelter that military service provided. For this reason, it seemed, many participants pursued majors/careers that were similar to the work they did in the military. Additionally, their fears of freedom were, at times, reinforced by their superiors who tried to scare them into staying by asserting they would not be able to find a civilian job and would, therefore, be forced return to the military.

After separating and starting college, the participants also wrote about how they missed the security of knowing what to expect every day, such as daily physical training. They also wrote about things they found difficult to stop doing, such as saluting a flag when they witnessed one being raised. Some also found it difficult adjusting to the extra free time that the college lifestyle afforded them.

However, they also wrote about how they became fed up with the many nonsensical military rules, such as not being able to rest your hands in your pockets while in uniform. So they were also anxious to be free of the constricting military structure. For some, it became a way of declaring their own self autonomy (ironically, autonomy was also noted as a reason why some joined in the first place), and some participants asserted their new autonomy and independence by growing out their hair and not shaving (two things they were not allowed to do while they served).

But there were some aspects of military life they found hard to let go of, such as the language conventions they had become accustomed to, most notably profuse swearing, which they found was not as acceptable in the civilian world. Additionally, while the participants came to increasingly adjust to and enjoy their newfound freedoms, they noted how they missed being able to control others, as they had done in the various leadership positions they earned.
Adaptability. Despite the assurance of a familiar routine in the military, the participants also mentioned they had to constantly adapt to different duties as well as different working locations. This continual adaptation, in essence a job skill in itself, became part of the routine they became accustomed to, and it may have served as an asset that helped them to adapt to and succeed in the college environment. While the participants noted the job skills they acquired in the military were not directly transferable to their work as college students, other indirect skills like adaptability did transfer. Another skill they acquired in the military that served them well in college was the work ethic that was instilled in them. This work ethic turned some participants, who had been admittedly bad high-school students, into excellent college students. As the participants noted, they approached their school work in the same way they approached military tasks that were assigned to them.

Through their work ethic and perseverance that had been instilled in them in the military, the participants found ways to get their various scholastic and social needs met. This motivation to do well, in turn, helped them to eventually assimilate to the college environment as time passed. For example, where once they had been unsure what to do with their extra free time, they came to reframe this free time as an opportunity to explore new things, including new academic subjects, which they might not have been able to do in the military.

Writing, reading, and responding to others. In commenting on each others’ narratives, the participants became involved in each others’ stories and experiences as fellow college veterans. As the study came to a close, some of the participants began to discuss what the experience of being involved in this study was like for them.
follow-up questions the participants completed after they had finished posting their responses and comments, they had to chance to further explore their experience as participants in this study.

One of the chief functions of the reading and commenting on each other’s narratives seemed to be to help normalize each others experiences, and in turn, it seemed the participants came to feel that they were not as alone in their struggles as college veterans as they thought. Like the veteran clubs offered in some schools, this study allowed them to interact with others who had gone through similar experiences. Their comments also served to add more strength to some of the experiences the veterans discussed. In other words, in reading what someone else had experienced, other participants who validated that experience helped to give that phenomenon more credibility—something other college veterans, not included in this study, potentially experience as well.

Overall, the participants seemed to like the interactive aspect of the study. Some insinuated they had even benefitted by reading and responding to others’ narratives. For Foxtrot, writing about his transition experience in itself helped him to understand his experiences better and appreciate the benefits he earned through his hard work and persistence. Bravo noted reading others’ blogs, despite his initial reservations about the usefulness of this study, served as a learning experience that helped him in his transition process. Delta remarked the honest environment cultivated in the study enable him to feel free to express himself. Golf expressed a similar notion in regards to the anonymity of the study, which he felt was a crucial component that allowed him to “be honest [and] let those four letter words out.” Many of the participants felt this was an important issue to
study and expressed their hopes that the study will be helpful in helping other veterans transition into college more smoothly.
CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION

This study served as a starting point to begin updating the severely out of date information regarding the experiences veterans encounter as they return to civilian life and, as college students, have to adjust to a culture that is vastly different from the military culture. Reexamining and updating such information is paramount as increasingly more veterans continue to return from current wars and conflicts resulting in increasingly more veterans enrolling in college. In order to help this influx of veterans adjust to and excel in the academic environment, faculty and staff of colleges and universities need to be aware of the unique obstacles and needs of college veterans. O’Neil and Fontaine (1973) discussed some of the difficulties and stressors college veterans struggle with and asserted that schools are responsible for identifying issues college veterans deal with, as well as providing them with the appropriate services and resources that will enhance their abilities to thrive in this new environment.

However, the results of the participants’ responses in this study suggested that, according to their experiences, colleges/universities are falling short in terms of helping veterans adjust. Furthermore, the participants indicated that the higher learning institutions they attended had, in general, not provided the necessary resources in order to address the needs of this college veteran. They expressed dissatisfaction with the programs/services, if present, offered by their respective institutions, as well as a lack of information about such programs.

Extent literature, however, portrayed contrasting points of view concerning the welfare of college veterans after they separated from the military: one extreme (Crespi &
Shapleigh, 1946; Figley & Southerly, 1980; Wilson, 1980; Worthington, 1977) depicted military service as a sort of catalyst for college success, noting only minimal obstacles, such as restlessness and boredom (Crespi & Shapleigh, 1946); the other extreme elaborated on the multitude of obstacles and stressors that contribute to difficulties in veterans’ ability to adjust to the civilian and academic cultures (Borus, 1975; Faulkner & Douglas, 1977; Green, Jones, & Hinton, 1973; Myers, 1974). However, the participants’ responses did not verify either extreme. They instead expressed ways in which their experiences in the military served as both an asset and a hindrance in terms of succeeding as college students. For the most part, the participants reported they did well in their courses. As the participants in this study pointed out, however, their biggest challenges were not related to the school work. Rather, their most difficult adjustment issues were social and cultural in nature.

Veteran transition stressors

The veteran participants from this study expressed they had experienced a multitude of transition predicaments that served as hindrances to their abilities to adjust to the collegiate environment. Primary among these were their feelings of isolation (i.e., lack of belongingness) due to the differences between the military and civilian/academic cultures. An important factor that contributes to one’s ability to adapt to a career change is the similarity between the pre and post-work environments (Schlossberg, 1981).

There are vast differences between the military and civilian culture that make adjusting to civilian careers difficult for veterans. Hillin (1990) regarded these differences as a “nearly unbridgeable cultural divide” (p. 52), and, as Brooks (2001) pointed out, the military personnel internalize warrior values that are incongruent and minimally adaptive
with civilian/academic values. The participants’ responses exemplified these cultural differences, noting their fears of being able to get along with college civilians, as well as their negative and, at times, hostile impressions of their non-college classmates. Negative impressions of fellow classmates represented another byproduct of socialized military norms, including group-think and discouragement of individualism (Katz, 1990), which contributes to a general worldview in which those who do not ascribe to military norms are regarded “as outsiders and deviants” (Dunivan, 1994, p. 536).

These ingrained norms resulted in a common sentiment expressed by the participants. They all discussed difficulties making friends with their non-veteran classmates. Many participants attributed this difficulty to their perception that non-veteran students could not possibly understand what they had been through in the military or appreciate the difficulties they had endured in adjusting to the academic culture. This, in turn, further contributed to their feelings of isolation.

Another notable cultural difference expressed by the participants’ responses was the individualistic nature of their school work. While they reported doing well in their classes, they explicitly noted the work felt more secluded and therefore less meaningful. In the military, they had become accustomed to a more communal and collaborative lifestyle, including working conditions. The companionship of this lifestyle, along with the participants’ perceptions that the work they were engaged in contributed to the welfare of the nation, promoted a feeling of belongingness, which translated into the feeling that their lives had a purpose and were therefore meaningful.

The participants also had difficulties in adjusting to their newfound freedom. This too was an integral part of the cultural differences that make it difficult for veterans to
adjust to the civilian/academic lifestyle. The relationship between freedom and control seemed to be a general conflict for the participants. While they were anxious to take advantage of their post-military freedoms, they were at the same time afraid of the freedoms, since they had become accustomed to being told what their job would be and following instructions regarding what to do on a daily basis.

Snider (1999) noted strongly ingrained and enforced expectations to unquestionably submit to those in positions of authority is another element of the gap between the military and civilian cultures. In the college environment, however, the participants found themselves in a position to choose for themselves what career they wanted to pursue and to decide what to do with themselves everyday. Some participants wrote about how they did not know how to deal with the freedom to come and go as they pleased, contributing to a feeling of restlessness.

This conflict between freedom and control affected them in other ways as well. Hillin (1999) and Dunivan (1994) elaborated on another related aspect concerning differences between the military and civilian cultures. Whereas the military can be said to be generally politically conservative and rigid (Dunivan, 1994), the academic world is noted for being more politically liberal as well as morally relativistic (Hillin, 1999). The conflict between these contrasting values was expressed by the participants in a few different ways. Chief among them was some discussions about professors who the participants felt imposed their opinions on students. The participants expressed intense negative reactions about such practices. Ultimately, they would submit and write the papers that expressed opinions supported by their professors. But they resented it. They were forced to espouse values, most likely liberal values, that went against the values
they had internalized in the military. They also noted professors sometimes expressed anti-military biases. This was extremely offensive to the participants. Not only did it again contradict their values, as well as belittle what they had devoted their lives to for an extended period of time, but it also elicited strong reaction in regards to the close friends they left behind who were still serving and, in some cases, involved in combat situations.

An additional, unexpressed conflict may have added to the participants’ transition stress in these situations: they may have felt an underlying conflict to unquestionably obey the orders of their superiors, their professors, in order to achieve their objective, a good grade. In doing so, however, they were forced to endorse opinions and values that were incongruent with their own values.

Perhaps the most difficult adjustment stressors for college veterans concerned the general academic social environment. They quickly learned some of the adaptive and acceptable behaviors they had internalized in the military were not acceptable to civilians—many were clearly off-putting to their non-veteran classmates and often characterized as overly aggressive or violent, including the lingual norms in which they had become accustomed to. Language conventions and expression of aggression and violence are additional differences between the military and civilian cultures (Katz, 1990). As Agostino (1998) further noted, the military both rewards and celebrates violent and aggressive behaviors. Therefore, the participants had to suppress this aspect of themselves, and find other more acceptable avenues where they could express the more violent and aggressive behaviors that had becomes a part of their identities.
Identity and career transitions

Vocation and identity are inherently intertwined. As is often espoused by numerous vocational psychologists, career choice is influenced by an individual’s self-concept (Gottfredson, 2005; Savickas, 2005; Super, 1984). One’s vocation, in turn, influences an individual’s self-concept. A career becomes imbedded as a part of one’s identity, and therefore, a career transition entails losses that extend beyond the loss of a career or job. It also entails losses of certain aspects of the self that had been associated with that career (Bobek & Robins, 2005).

For veterans, an important aspect of the self they lose, as indicated by the participants’ responses, are the friends they made while serving, who had become like a surrogate family for them. The participants’ responses in regards to the impact of leaving friends behind is compatible with the common losses, as espoused by Faulkner and Douglass (1977), that veterans experiences after they separate, which included loss of a part of themselves and losing others they had become close to. Bobeck and Robbins (2005) also noted the loss of work colleagues and other relationships formed at one place of work is a general complication characteristic of career transitions.

However, due the nature of the intensity of the bonds formed in the service, this loss of friends is an especially powerful experience for veterans, and it contributed to the participants’ sense of isolation once they began their college school work. This too is connected with the cultural differences between the military and academic/civilian environment. The participants came to feel they had very little in common with their fellow classmates, and that, again, their classmates could not understand or appreciate them or their situation as college veterans. The nature of the college environment also
made it difficult to form the close bonds they had formed in the military. While serving, they did virtually everything with their military colleagues: the worked very long hours together and for extended periods of time (sometimes years); they woke up and went to sleep in the same living quarters; they ate with each other; and they socialized together after work. Their lives and daily routine had become intertwined with their military co-workers. They also shared similar lingual conventions, and due the multitude of experiences they shared, they had a multitude of things in common in which they could talk about.

Furthermore, the participants felt isolated and different from their classmates due to age differences, differences in maturity level, and differences in life experience. They were not in school to party or socialize, as were many of their younger, less mature classmates. To them, school was their job, and they treated it as such. The participants were also irritated by the comparatively petty complaints of their classmates. They had other friends, some younger than their classmates, fighting wars, so hearing students complain about something minor, like cold shower water, disgusted them.

The compounding losses the participants experienced, including loss of close friends, loss of daily, structured routine, and the loss of a whole lifestyle that differs in considerable ways from the college lifestyle, contributed to a general loss of meaning, which is also characteristic of career/life transitions (Bobeck & Robbins, 2005; Schlossberg, 1981). Meaning, in turn, is connected to one’s sense of self, or identity.

One of the most difficult challenges of career transitions is the ability to retain a sense of “life meaning and purpose” (Bobeck & Robbins, 2005, p. 634), which requires, among others things, letting go of an established career identity. This represented another
challenge for the participants in this study. During their military years, they had acquired increasingly more responsibility and status within their respective jobs, which they had mentioned contributed to their sense of job satisfaction. As some of the participants had mentioned, it was tough to give up this status and no longer be responsible for those who they had come to supervise and had come to mentor in ways as well, which was yet another type of relationship they had to leave behind.

By leaving the military and enrolling in college, they consequently had to give up the status they earned and, essentially, start over. Along with that, they had to give up the security offered by military service, including financial security and full medical and dental coverage, among other things.

Taken together, the participants had lost many of things they had depended for their sense of life meaning and purpose, which in turn supported their sense of self. Their identities were entrenched in the military lifestyle, and in order to successfully transition back into the civilian workforce and adjust to the academic culture, they had to re-conceptualize their identities in a way that allowed them to blend who they had been in the military to who they were becoming as college veterans.

The discrepancy between who they were and who they were becoming is characteristic of a cognitive identity mismatch (Piaget, 1977), and in order to restore one’s sense of cognitive equilibrium, an individual must either assimilate new experiences into their pre-existing self-concept or accommodate to the new experience, which requires restructuring one’s self-concept in order to fit into a new environment. Due to the extensive differences between the participants pre and post-work environments, it was more difficult to bring these opposing aspects of themselves
together in order to restore their a sense of identity equilibrium. This is similar to Erikson’s (1950) notion of the identity crisis, a term he developed as a result of his observation that veterans seemed to lack a sense of self-sameness between their past and present selves. Consistent with career transition and veteran transition research, Erikson noted their self-concepts, which had been both constructed and reinforced by the military culture, lost their sense of coherence once they had separated from that culture.

Identity coherence and story

McAdams (1993) integrated Erikson’s ideas into his notion of narrative identity, which he characterized as the way individuals impose coherence onto their life experiences: they organize experiences into stories. In other words, it is through stories, or narratives, that individuals are able to construct an identity that has unity and makes sense of the inevitable identity crises that people experience throughout the lifespan, including career transitions. These stories, however, are not created in isolation. They are collaborative stories, in a sense. The cultural context acts as co-author of the story; therefore, it can be said the collective individuals who compromise a particular cultural context and the individual from that culture are engaged in a continual dialogue with each other. It is this dialogic component of narrative identity that infuses one’s story with meaning (McAdams, 2001).

This is relevant to college veteran transitions in a number of ways. In the military, the participants noted their lives felt more meaningful. They also noted the close bonds they had formed with the people they worked with in the service. However, joining the military was a dramatic life and career transition as well. But with that transition, they had considerable social support from their peers who were going through, or had gone
through, a similar transition. They were able to share their transition stories with others, which, as McAdams noted, helped them to cope with the challenges of the transition and helped them to construct a coherent and, in turn, meaningful identity. They continued to have this social support throughout their time in the service as well, serving to strengthen the coherence and meaning of their identities. However, this meaning was highly dependent on this particular, and rather limited, socio-cultural context.

Once these veterans separated from the military and began their new careers as college students, they no longer had the social support that they had accrued in the military, and they no longer had peers who were going through a similar situation to share their transition stories with and therefore help them through this difficult identity process. This resulted in more fragmented identities for the participants, and it took them longer to bring the disparate aspects of their experiences together into a single, coherent narrative.

The subsequent isolation and inability to connect and share stories with non-veteran classmates also accounts for the ways in which the participants sought out others who were able to, at least partially, help fill that social void that resulted from their separation from the military. This is arguably the chief function and purpose campus veteran organizations/clubs served, for the two participants, Delta and Golf, whose schools offered such organization. This also accounts for the tremendous impact that the participants attributed to such clubs in regards to helping them adjust to the academic environment. These clubs provided them with like-minded individuals who had experienced similar situations and with whom they could therefore share their stories.
Sharing these stories with peers facilitated their ability to construct a coherent identity and restore their sense of meaning.

In addressing life transitions directly, McAdams, Josselson, and Leiblich (2001) elaborated further on the narrative identity, pointing out the central role that both telling and sharing stories play in meaning-making. Therefore, the telling and sharing of stories about life and/or career transitions functions to impart coherence to the disparate aspects of our identities that result from life transitions and, therefore, infuse our meaning into life/career transitions as well.

The present study provided the participants with the opportunity to explicitly tell and share their transition stories with a community of like-minded peers. And as some of the participants expressed, the process of doing so did seem to help them to reflect on their transition experience and make more sense of the transition—in essence, helping them to piece together their disparate aspects of their identity into a more coherent whole. The participants also mentioned the anonymous nature of the study was an important factor in their willingness to disclose personal information about the obstacles they encountered in transitioning from soldiers to college students.

Therefore, blogs entail an inherent, anonymous dialogic communication process that facilitates both the telling, through writing, and the sharing of stories. It is a discursive process compatible with Hermans’s (2001) notion of the dialogical self, which posits the fragmented nature of the self is in continual communication with these various aspects of the self as well as with the voices of the larger cultural context. As Kumamoto (2002) noted, the self “is a dialogical site within which personal codes for the production of meaning and discoverable, and writing becomes the highest form of witness to one’s
meaningful self” (p. 67). Furthermore, the dialogical narratives constructed in the blogging process constitute a metaphorically “threaded identity” (Hevern, 2004, p. 331), where bloggers piece together a coherent identity through the various blogs threads that are composed and shared with other bloggers.

Additionally, McAdams et al. (2002) noted the transition stories we construct help us to navigate through the challenges of life transitions and can even reduce stressors that accompany inevitable identity crises. Again, borrowing ideas from Erikson, McAdams et al. asserted we continually encounter life transitions and we are, consequently, continually adapting to these life and career transitions.

Implications for future research

As Wilson (1980) noted, a consequence of transition from the military to the civilian lifestyle entailed an extended period of psychosocial moratorium (Marcia, 1966), insinuating these adults had regressed to a less mature state of identity development, one associated with adolescence. Erikson (1950) observed similar phenomena in regards to veterans’ ego identity development. He described these identities as immature and stagnant. After their time in the military ended, their identities degenerated to a more immature state of development. However, Wilson’s (1980) application of Marcia’s (1966) identity statuses to veterans’ identity development may be incomplete. The Identity Moratorium status is characterized as the period when one is actively exploring career paths; however, the individual has not yet committed to a career or a stable, coherent identity. After careful consideration and exploration of different career paths, an individual who then commits to one of these careers is classified in the Identity Achieved status. Both Erikson (1950) and Wilson (1980) depicted veterans as having abnormally
regressed to a less mature stage of identity and career identity development. However, as Flum and Blustein (2000) explicated, exploring career options is not just relegated to adolescence; it an ongoing process that one continually engages in and reevaluates throughout one’s lifespan. Super, Savickas, and Super (1996) remarked that career transitions inherently involve both career re-exploration and reestablishment of a new career. Similarly, Marcia (2002) pointed out adults continually return to a moratorium identity status at each psychosocial stage of identity development—which in essence, entails an identity crisis and therefore a life transition—and then commit, once again, to an updated, achieved identity status. In this context, an apparent regression to what had been termed as a less mature state of psychosocial development may be normative for veterans, who are experiencing a drastic life and career transition.

However, the connection between veteran career transitions and identity statuses has not been explored. Future studies can take a closer look at this connection. To what extent do veterans regress to an identity moratorium status and for how long? How do veterans’ identity statuses impact their career-decisions as well as the majors they are considering and eventually choose? Furthermore, there may be veterans whose sense of self are more rigid, resulting in an inability to let go of their military identities. Might these veterans better fit into a foreclosed identity status, committing to a career without exploring various career options? What impact would a foreclosed identity status have on college veterans’ choices of a major, as well as their ability to adapt to the college lifestyle? Additionally, is there an association between college veterans identity status and college transition success?
The notion of college veteran transition success brings up the question of what constitutes a successful transition for college veterans. Does the term “success” even apply? As most of the participants reported, they did well academically but had multiple difficulties adjusting to the academic social and cultural environment. Future studies can, therefore, investigate the various components of college veteran transitions. How do these components impact a college veteran’s ability to do well academically? How do they impact a college veterans’ ability to adjust to the academic environment? Potential components to analyze include veterans’ attitudes toward fellow students and non-veterans, differences and/or similarities between the work they did in the military and their work as college students, social supports/programs offered by the school, feelings of isolation experienced by veterans, financial stressors, and perceived differences between age/maturity levels. Future studies can also examine the overall relationship between academic success and adjustment to the academic socio-cultural environment.

Some of the participants in this study reported an ability to eventually adjust and adapt well to the college environment, especially as time passed and they became more entrenched and accustomed to the college environment. Time, therefore, might be another factor to examine—in terms of both how long it takes veterans to adapt and how long they had served, as well as any possible relationships between the two. Adaptability in itself is an issue that seems prudent to explore for college veterans.

The participants indicated that in the service, they were constantly adapting to working situations in the military, which enabled them to adapt to and do well in the various tasks involved in their school work, but the same was not true in regards to adapting to the academic social environment—the latter was more difficult for the
participant. Savickas (1997) defined adaptability as one’s ability to change and integrate into a new environment with minimal effort. Career adaptability is characterized as the capacity and readiness to cope with the inevitable changes involved in career transitions. This involves an individual’s planfulness and preparation for the transition, as well as one’s ability to adjust to unexpected aspects of the new career in terms of both the working environment and the work itself. The participants in this study displayed differing degrees of planfulness and preparation for college life, ranging from almost none to extensive planning. The participants also noted the military’s mandatory transition assistance programs did not offer much help in preparing for the transition into the collegiate environment.

Future studies can therefore explore the impact that planfulness and preparation have on college veterans’ abilities to adjust to both school work and the college environment. The participants also differed in their readiness to transition into and cope with the college working environment (i.e., some intentionally chose to leave in order to go to school, and others were forced out of the military). How, then, does this readiness factor affect college veterans’ ability to adapt as well?

Savickas (2005) also denoted the important role of identity in adapting to a new career, discussing an individual’s ability to implement one’s self-concept into a new work role. Future studies can focus on ways in which college veterans are able to construct a coherent career identity that integrates the conflicting nature of the military and the collegiate working environments. Writing, in particular, has been recognized as a critical component in helping individuals make career decisions (Brown & Ryan Krane, 2000).
Writing encourages individuals to record their “reflections, thoughts, [and/or] feelings concerning their career development” (p. 745-746).

As some of the veterans noted, they found the process of writing and sharing their transition stories to be beneficial in helping them to understand their own experiences better. This is consistent with the finding of Neiderhoffer and Pennebaker (2002), who noted that “an inherent benefit of forming narrative involves being able to translate one’s life story into language that is both understandable and communicable” (p. 579).

. Furthermore, sharing these stories with others helps an individual to make sense and meaning out of one’s experiences. This dialogic process of identity construction is particularly conducive to the weblog medium. Furthermore, as Suler (2005) suggested, future studies can examine whether writing and sharing stories via weblogs can help college veterans to construct a more coherent sense of self as well as more coherent career identity.

Future studies can also expand on and continue refinement of the use of weblogs as a means to collect narrative-based qualitative data. The method of data collection for this study was very involved and time consuming for both the participants and researchers. Further refinements can explore methods to elicit detailed data about a phenomenon with less of a commitment from the participants, which can have an impact on recruiting participants as well as attrition. The participants also noted that the anonymity of using codenamed weblogs made them feel safer to disclose information about their transition process—a finding constituent with Suler’s (2004) notion of the online disinhibition effect. Future studies can also explore methods that further increase blog anonymity—perhaps participants can be “blindly” assigned to codenamed blogs.
after the recruitment process, whereby the researcher(s) will not know the actual identity of the participants after they are assigned to a codenamed blog.

Other methods of data collection that would reach a greater number of college veterans, as well as a more diverse sample of college veterans, could be explored as well. Surveys, for example, that participants could complete in a single sitting might attract a great deal more participants. Such a survey, however, might need to be designed in a way that would not limit participants’ responses, considering the lack of information about the college veteran transition process.

In order to increase understanding of this overlooked population, future studies will also need to study a much broader range of college veterans than was represented by the participants in this study. It would be particularly prudent to examine the college transition process for combat veterans and newly disabled veterans, including both physical and mental disabilities, particularly post traumatic stress, as a result of combat. It might be beneficial to study more homogenous groups in terms of military branch—how might the college transition process be different for veterans from different branches? How might they be similar? Future studies can also focus on a sample of all female veterans, veterans of a particular race, veterans of a particular ethnic group, and veterans of a particular sexual orientation. Veterans from a particular socioeconomic status might be another particularly important population to study since finances played a pervasive role in many of the participants’ decisions, including the reason some enlisted, the reason some left the military, and their choice of major. Other veteran populations to study include those who had been dishonorably discharged, veterans who had served in other
countries, veterans who attend schools in large cities where the cost of living is higher, and veterans who, like Foxtrot, who are older and also have a family to support.

Finally, the participants’ responses in regards to transitioning from the military to the academic culture seem similar to the concepts of culture shock and acculturative stress. Future studies can examine the possible relationship between the stressors college veterans experience and the phenomenon of culture shock and/or acculturative stress.

Practical future implications/recommendation for college veterans

As Faulkner and Douglas (1977) pointed out, veterans experience losses that are hard to cope with after separating from the military, including loss of a sense of time, loss of close friends, and a loss of certain aspects of their identities. The responses of the participants in this study were congruent with each of those losses, especially the loss of friends, who had become like a family to them, and in losing close friends, they had come to feel that part of themselves had been lost as well. Combined with their disdain for their non-veteran classmates and an inability to relate to younger, less mature college students, who they did not have much in common with, the participants struggled with feeling of isolation and meaninglessness. The impact of these losses can pose a serious threat in regards to their ability to do well in classes as well as their mental health.

Social support in terms of connecting veterans with other veterans, therefore, is the key to helping veterans adjust to the college environment. As some of the participants noted, one of the best ways to find like-minded, social support is through campus veterans clubs. In this study, only two of the veterans noted their school had such clubs, and the other veterans indicated they would welcome such clubs, along with the opportunity to connect with fellow college veterans. Colleges and universities need to not
only be aware of the sense of isolation and meaningless that veteran students experience, but they also need to offer a way for veterans to connect with each other. However, as the participant whose schools had such clubs noted, the clubs in themselves are not enough. Schools need to do a better job of making sure veterans are aware of such clubs/services. As the participants noted, the veterans’ offices at their schools were only minimally helpful. Their sole purpose seemed to be to process veterans’ benefits and other paperwork-related matters. Such offices, however, where virtually every veteran on campus must visit in order to secure their military benefits, have the potential to do much more. These offices can serve as initiation center that prepare college veterans for some of the challenges they may encounter and offer a variety of resources they can utilize to get their needs met, including the existence of campus veterans clubs.

O’Neill and Fontaine (1973) asserted it should be the schools’ responsibility to not only familiarize themselves of the issues faced by college veterans, but also to provide college veterans with the campus resources that would allow them to cope with such issues in order to adjust to the college/civilian lifestyle. College campuses, therefore, can do a better job of identifying their veterans and intentionally reaching out to them to in order to offer the assistance and resources to help them cope and thrive in the college environment. As the participants indicated, college veterans remain relatively unaware of the few resources that specifically cater to them.

Campus counselors can also serve a vital role in helping to veterans to adjust to the civilian and academic lifestyle, which would entail counselors to become more aware of the unique issues of college veterans. Borus (1973) noted specific preventative interventions that would aid college veterans in the transition process: normalization,
coping strategies, and counseling from veterans who had gone through the transition process. Normalization of the stressors that transitioning veterans experience is particularly important. As many of the participants indicated, having their experiences normalized by fellow college veterans, including veterans they interacted with in this study, really helped them to feel less alone in their struggles. Furthermore, educating veterans about successful transition coping strategies, such as the importance of connecting with fellow veterans for social support, would benefit college veterans tremendously, since they often feel isolated, especially when they initially start their new life as college students. However, not only would this entail counselors increasing their awareness and knowledge of college veterans issues, but it would also require outreach efforts to newly transitioned veterans in order for them to become aware of the resources available to them. Additionally, veterans may be resistant to the idea of counseling due to the hyper-masculine values, including autonomy and self-reliance that they may have internalized from the military culture (Brooks, 2001; Dunivan, 1994).

Counselors who are veterans and experienced the transition process might, therefore, serve to encourage veterans to seek counseling. They may feel a veteran counselor would be able to better understand and identify with their own transition stressors. However, it may be difficult to recruit veteran therapists, so it would be unfair to expect a university to employ veteran counselors—although perhaps colleges/universities can make more of an effort to recruit veteran counselors. An alternative to employing veteran counselors is to utilize the group therapy format that caters specifically to the needs of transitioning college veterans. As advocated by Yalom and Leszcz (2005), such a group could include trained peers who had been through the
transition process themselves and thus aid the group leader in helping the rest of the group members. Colleges/Universities can also have a veteran mentor system in place. Such a mentor can help a newly transitioned college veteran to adjust in a multitude of ways, including informing college veterans of available resources and veteran groups, normalizing their stressors, and encouraging college veterans to seek counseling to help them cope and adjust better to collegiate environments.

Campus career counselors can also serve a vital role in helping veterans adjust to the college environment. As Krumboltz and Chan (2005) proposed, career counseling as a field might benefit from shifting the focus of the profession to transition counseling, including all the various types of career transitions. According to Myers (1974), there are several key needs for transitioning veterans that career counselors may be particularly suited to provide. For instance, veterans are not sufficiently prepared to cope with the demands of civilian society, especially in regards to education and job training. This was a sentiment that was consistent with the participants’ description of the military’s transition assistance programs. Related to this, is the general lack of transferable military skills to the civilian job market—another obstacle the participants felt was a hindrance to their ability to adjust to civilian life. Myers also noted the civilian economy is not particularly interested in catering to the employment needs of veterans.

Career counselors can help college veterans by, again, becoming aware of the unique career obstacles and barriers of veterans. With this knowledge, career counselors will be in a much better position to inform veterans of the barriers they will face and, in turn, explore ways in which they can cope with such barriers. Career counselors can also help veterans to better understand and appreciate the strengths and abilities that they had
acquired in the military. They can, furthermore, help veterans to realize how other skills they acquired in the military, which they had originally thought of as untransferable, can be useful to them in the civilian workforce, such as leadership skills. Career counselors can also help veterans reword their military skills in a way that would be more attractive to civilian employers. Such rewording might also help them to re-conceptualize their military skills. Veterans can also be helped by increasing their awareness of the interconnection of their values, skills, and interests. In the process of exploring these interconnections, career counselors can help veterans to explore other career and majors that they might not have been aware of or considered as viable career options. Career counselors can also serve an important role in helping and educating veterans in general career decision-making skills. As the participants reported, they had a hard time adjusting with their newfound freedoms after they separated from the military, including the freedom to choose a career/major. Perhaps weblogs can even be utilized as an online method for group career counseling.

Colleges can also do outreach to high schools and help students who may be considering the military to fully understand the realities of serving—information they will most likely not receive from recruiters, as some of the participants expressed. They can also help these students to explore other career options that they may not even have been aware of. I am not advocating that colleges try to convince high students not to join; rather, I am advocating colleges provide them with the necessary knowledge and tools, so they can make more informed decision about their future.

Finally, college instructors also play a large role in the transition experiences of veterans. Many veterans expressed intense negative reactions to professors who try to
impose opinions on their students. Instructors need to work to become more aware of the power their opinions and biases, as well as the impact anti-military/war views can have on veterans who have just returned from the military and/or combat situations or who may have close friends they left behind.

Limitations

While appropriate for an exploratory qualitative study of this nature, the small number of participants provides only a glimpse of the processes involved in military-to-college transitions. As noted previously, while generalizability should be considered in qualitative research, it is a construct derived from and more applicable to quantitative research methods. Nevertheless, one can only claim the findings from the study are localized to the participants in this study. However, it is notable that findings from prior literature seemed to be applicable to many of the situation the college veterans in this study experienced.

The study also lacked in diversity. All but one participant, not including the female who dropped out after the first question, were Caucasian males. Other groups were generally not represented in this study. Furthermore, the study did not examine the roles that the various multicultural domains contributed to the participants’ transition experiences.

The sample was also limited to participants in Illinois. This was, however, an intentional choice, since Illinois veterans receive both the GI Bill and the Illinois Veterans Grant, which pays for veterans’ tuition costs. Only a few other states offer similar grants. By including only veterans from Illinois, it was my hope that this would
increase the cohesion of the group. However, it is also important to explore how veterans from states that do not offer as much educational funding manage their transitions.

The method of using blogs to collect data represents another limitation to this study. While blogs do offer unique virtues, such as anonymity between the clients and asynchronicity, as well as other general online disinhibition effects (Suler, 2004), it can serve as a hindrance for some participants. For instance, while a veteran may be eager to tell and share their transition story, the veteran may not like writing. Furthermore, the veteran may not feel like he or she is a good writer, which may also serve to discourage the veteran from participating. Also, and this may be especially true for students, the extensive reading and writing involved in this study may feel like more homework to the participants, which brings up another related limitation to this study. Most of the participants noted they were doing well academically. The heavy writing requirements of this study, in turn, may skew the perception that veterans are all good students. In other words, it is possible only motivated students, who were good students, expressed interest in participating and following through with this study.

Other limitations related to using blogs, as well as other online data collection tools in general, have to do with familiarity and accessibility to computers and the internet. This automatically leaves out veterans who may be less familiar with computers and the internet, which may also be connected to SES issues. Also, experiences written online can be misinterpreted more easily; researchers may miss out on non-verbal cues that may provide further information; those who type slowly may feel self-conscious; and, despite all the steps I took to ensure confidentiality, confidentiality using an online tool cannot be guaranteed (Suzuki, Ahluwalia, Arora, & Mattis, 2007).
Summary and conclusion

This study, which was inspired, in part by my own experiences as a college veteran, set out to begin updating the relatively sparse, severely out of date, and contradictory information concerning the military-to-college transition process. Updating such information is crucial in order to help the increasing numbers of contemporary veterans adjust to the transition stressors that result from the very different norms and values of the military and academic cultures.

The majority of the participants reported they were doing well academically. In fact, they did not even characterize academic achievement as the most difficult obstacle they faced as college veterans. School work was comparatively easy and less stressful than the demands of military life.

The most difficult aspect for these college veterans to adjust to was social and cultural aspects of college life. Many expressed that they missed the friends they had left behind, with whom they had come to form family-like bonds. They also expressed they felt guilty about leaving friends behind. This aspect of losing friends and social support corresponded to a feeling of losing aspects of themselves, which is also a general characteristic of career transitions. However, the career transition process of college veterans is intensified for veterans, who not only are changing careers, but also are changing the ways in which they lived their lives.

This aspect of losing themselves is also related to the social issues veterans experience when they enroll in college. Many participants mentioned fears about being able to adjust to civilian life and also about getting along with civilians in school. This concern about getting along with other students was further intensified by a general
mistrust and, in some cases, dislike of their non-veteran classmates. The participant often vented about the difficulties they had in connecting with classmates. From the participants’ point of view, these “kids” could not possibly understand what they had gone through in transitioning from the military to college, and they, in general, did not have much in common with their classmates.

That being said, a critical component to helping veterans adjust to civilian and college life is social support. Providing them some way to interact with like-minded people who had been through some of the same things they had been through because, again, as was mentioned repeatedly, non-veterans could not possibly understand. For some of the veterans who had not been receiving this kind of social support at their school, this study in itself helped to serve as a normalization process for them and, consequently, helped them to feel less alone. Other participants who went to schools where they did have social support, such as a veteran’s club, repeatedly emphasized how crucial and important these clubs were in helping them to adjust to college life. Not only did they help them to navigate through the administrative red tape veterans go through in order to receive the college benefits they earned, but they also provided them with like-minded companionship. This companionship, in turn, functioned to help them connect and make friends with non-veterans as well. However, as the participants in these organizations noted, it was difficult to even find out about these clubs. The information was not readily offered to them, even at their schools’ veterans’ offices.

Campuses can do a better job of identifying who their veterans are and can intentionally reach out to them to offer assistance and inform them of services that they may need. Many college veterans may also benefit from therapy and or career
counseling. However, in order to address the unique needs of this population, counselors, school administrators, and professors need to be more aware of the various stressors and barriers of this overlooked population. More studies are therefore needed to examine and further understand military-to-college veteran transitions.

Ultimately, it is my hope that the results of study will help to illustrate the importance of further research into the needs of this overlooked population and recognize it as a distinct culture with specific needs that ought to be acknowledged and better tended to.
Table 1

*Summarized themes from responses to question 1*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1st question: Why, when, where, and what? In this first question, tell why you joined, how long you served, where, and about the various jobs and duties you held in the military.</th>
<th>n = 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Antecedents of enlistment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>primed to enlist beforehand (socio/cultural influences)</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-military environment fit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>related to perception of future (i.e., college/career)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaninglessness and belongingness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feeling of purposelessness</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>belonging to something larger than themselves</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fit with military work environment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>loved their jobs</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>increased sense of responsibility and job satisfaction</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feeling of belongingness experienced in the military</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>developed close bonds with co-workers</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

*Summarized themes from responses to question 2*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2nd question: Why did you decide to leave the military? As the question suggests, tell us about your decision to leave the military and return to civilian life.</th>
<th>n = 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Antecedents to leaving the military</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to seek a better life</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>limitations: advancement/earning potential</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vocational identity moratorium</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>considered careers/majors similar to their military job</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Loss of a familiar environment</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stressed about returning to civilian life</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>financial/job-related concerns</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>social concerns (ability to get along with non-veterans)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Loss of close friends</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>concerns/guilt about leaving friends behind</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Post-enlistment struggle for self-coherence</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>missed daily, structured work routine</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>missed sense of purpose from serving country</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3

Summarized themes from responses to question 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3rd question: Life in transition. Discuss your experiences as you were in the process of transitioning from the military and returning to civilian life</th>
<th>n = 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Environmental support</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transition programs not helpful for college bound veterans</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>out of date transition information</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>practical transition information more useful</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Post-enlistment identity mismatch</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>initially felt strange</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feeling afraid about returning to civilian culture</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>indulged in post service freedom</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assimilation into college social setting</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>difficulties connecting with non-veterans</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>age/maturity level gap</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>had to relearn how to communicate with non-veterans</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Elements of successful assimilation</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>applied military work ethic to school work</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>importance of social support</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>joining school organizations</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4

*Summarized themes from responses to question 4*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4th question: Experiences after separation. Our focus will now be changing as we begin to focus on your life experiences after your enlistment ended, you returned to the civilian world, and started your life as a full-time college student.</th>
<th>n = 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Abilities and environment fit</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>military skills were not directly useful to college work</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>military work ethic was the only transferable skill</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>age and emotional maturity helped with adjustment</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Similarities and differences between work environments</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>college is very different from the military overall</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attitudes of people were very different</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more in control of self/not controlled by others</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adjusting to the collegiate environment</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>noted that adjustment was not difficult</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>found the adjustment difficult and jarring</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Support offered by college programs and services</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not aware of any helpful programs/services</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>vet office not helpful</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>involvement in school organizations that helped</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>utilizes social support to cope</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>importance of connecting with fellow veterans</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5

**Summarized themes from responses to question 5**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>5th question: Experiences as a college veteran. For this last question, discuss your experiences as a college veteran, with a focus on the transition from your life in the military to your life as a civilian college student</th>
<th>n = 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Adjusting to new work culture</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>living off much less income</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>negative/hostile impressions of civilians and classmates</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>age/emotional maturity</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>difficulties adjusting to extra free time</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College work was less stressful</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>military work felt more meaningful</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Personality-environment fit</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College life did not fit with personality</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>did not fit in due to age (older than most)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>held on to prior values/identity</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Successful transition behaviors</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>connecting with fellow veterans</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>involvement in school organizations</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>motivation to do well</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 6

**Summary of meta-themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Results of the Meta-thematic Narrative Analysis, Including Responses to All Questions, Comments, and Follow-Up Questions</th>
<th>Summary of meta-themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belongingness</td>
<td>The ways in which no longer belonging to the communal military culture contributed to feelings of isolation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial concerns</td>
<td>The pervasive impact of finances on their decisions and behaviors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age differences</td>
<td>The various ways in which age differences alienated them from non-veteran classmates.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social supports</td>
<td>The importance of various types of social supports in coping with post-military life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom vs. control</td>
<td>The conflicting feelings of enjoying post-military freedoms and simultaneously missing the structured of the military life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adaptability</td>
<td>The ways in which the military prepared them to adapt to new situations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing, reading and responding to others</td>
<td>The way in which writing and sharing stories helped them to reflect upon and make more sense of their experiences.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
REFERENCES


Brown, D. B., & Ryan Krane, N. E. (2000). Four (or five) sessions and a cloud of dust:


124

Appendix A

COLLEGE VET
TRANSITION STORIES
Friday, August 31, 2007

1st question: when, where, why and how long?

In this first question, tell us about the time period and place (or places) you served.

- Why did you join in the first place? What other career/work options were you considering?

- How long were you in the service? Where were you stationed? What was happening in the world at that time?

- What was your primary duty (include your official title, and be sure to tell us what that means)? Did you like your job you held in the military? Why or why not?

- Did you feel the military and/or your job in the military fit your personality well, or did it clash with the kind of person you are—your values, your lifestyle, etc.?

This site is intended to be safe space for college veterans to discuss their unique work experiences in the military and the processes they encountered as they left the military and started their new careers as full time college students.

Dimitrios Jason Stalides
http://mypage.siu.edu/stalides/
stalides at siu dot edu

Research Advisor
Patrick Rottinghaus, Ph.D.
rpatter at siu dot edu

Informed Consent Statement

Participant Links
Alpha (Q #5)
Bravo (Q #5)
Delta (Q #5)
Foxtrot (Q #5)
Golf (Q #5)

Inactive Participants
Charlie (Q #0)
Echo (Q #1)

Practice Participant
Juliet
1st question: Why, when, where, and what?

I am to this day still not really sure why I joined the Marine Corps. I guess the simple answer would be the fact that I didn't really want to go to college. However, that's not the complete answer and I have to back up. I was in High school when the Gulf War was going on. My Dad had been in the Navy during Vietnam and I was born at the Portsmouth Naval Hospital, a navy brat of sorts. One of my parents close friends from then had a son of the same age and the 2 mom's were in the midst of finding a place for he and I to go to in Canada when the draft started since at the time that was at least a concern of those two.

I went to a college........

1 Comment

Bravo said...

Alpha,

As I read this blog, I noticed that you said that you had a choice as to what you wanted to be in the Marine Corps, and that you choose the designation to be light armored infantry. My question is that if you could do it all over again, would you have made the same choices that you have here?

Monday, September 10, 2007 3:50:00 PM
Appendix C

1st question: Why, when, where, and what? In this first question, tell why you joined, how long you served, where, and about the various jobs and duties you held in the military.

- Why did you join in the first place? What other career/work options were you considering?
- How long were you in the service? Where were you stationed? What was happening in the world at that time?
- What was your primary duty (include your official title, and be sure to tell us what that means)? Did you like your job you held in the military? Why or why not?
- Did you feel the military and/or your job in the military fit your personality well, or did it clash with the kind of person you are—your values, your lifestyle, etc.?

2nd question: Why did you decide to leave the military? As the question suggests, tell us about your decision to leave the military and return to civilian life. Discuss some of the fears you may have had about returning to the civilian world. If you didn't have any fears about this transition, describe how you were feeling about it and why.

- What were the circumstances that led to your decision to leave (i.e., family, work, satisfaction, money, location, etc.)?
- Include any inner conflicts you may have had about leaving that may have tempted you to stay (what was informing your fears and/or other feelings about returning to the civilian world?).
- What career options were you considering post-military?
- How do you feel now about your decision to leave?

3rd question: Life in transition. Discuss your experiences as you were in the process of transitioning from the military and returning to civilian life.

- Discuss what kind of support, such as transition assistance programs, the military may have offered to help you re-adjust to civilian life, to help alleviate your fears and/or other feelings. Write about how useful you felt these transition programs were.
- Discuss and describe your very last day in the military, including the emotions you were feeling, the setting, the things you did, the things you were thinking about, etc.
- Write about the first few months of your life after your enlistment ended: How did that feel? How did you spend your time? When did you start thinking about returning to school?

4th question: Experiences after separation. Our focus will now be changing as we begin to focus on your life experiences after your enlistment ended, you returned to the civilian world, and started your life as a full-time college student.

- Discuss how transferable you felt the skills you learned in the military were/are to the skills you needed/need in order to be a successful college student.
- How did your military experience serve as an asset or as a hindrance to school work?
- Discuss the differences between the life you lived in the military and your life as a civilian college student. What did this transition feel like for you?
- Describe the services or programs at your school, if any, that help veterans adjust to civilian life and the academic setting?

5th question: Experiences as a college veteran. For this last question, discuss your experiences as a college veteran, with a focus on the transition from your life in the military to your life as a civilian college student.

- Write about the obstacles you experienced as a college veterans (and how you overcame them), as well as your successes.
- What did/do you like or dislike about your work as a full-time college student compared your work in the military?
- Did/do you feel the academic setting fit/fits your personality well, or did/does it clash with the kind of person you are—your values, your lifestyle, etc.?
- How might the similarities or differences between your work in the military and your work as a student (including the school setting) affect how "smooth" or "rough" your transition felt/feels?
- Feel free to include anything else that you may want to express/discuss about any aspect of your experience as a college veteran?
Appendix D

Follow-Up Questions

1) What are your overall thoughts on participating in study?

2) What did you like about it?

3) What didn't you like about it?

4) Are there things that could have been done better or more efficiently? If so, what?

5) Did you feel like you benefited in any way by participating? If so, how? If not, why?

6) Finally, feel free to add any final comments or anything else you might want to say about participating in this study (be it good, bad, or both—honesty is key!).
Appendix E

INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT

My name is Dimitrios Jason Stalides. I am a graduate student in the Counseling Psychology program at Southern Illinois University-Carbondale. I am asking you to participate in my research study. The purpose of this study is to explore the process college veterans experience as they transition from their military career, to their post-military, civilian career as full-time college students. Your participation may contribute to the enhanced understanding of the way in which college veterans adjust to the college setting, and it is also possible that writing about your own personal transition experiences may help you to understand yourself better. Please read the following information carefully before agreeing to participate.

If you do choose to participate in this study, it is important to understand that the study is designed to span approximately 5 to 7 weeks. You will be asked to respond to one question every week (five questions total). Using a weblog created in advance for you, you will post a response to these questions in narrative (or story) format. These questions will be posted on the main College Veteran Transition Stories weblog site (http://mypage.siu.edu/stalides/collegevetstories.htm), which also contains links to each participant’s individual weblog. Each participant will be randomly assigned one of these individual weblogs, along with a codename that corresponds to the individual weblog. Only those involved in the study (fellow participants, myself, and my research advisor) will have access to read whatever each participant’s posts on their weblogs. The codenames are intended to enhance anonymity and confidentiality between the participants. However, I, as the researcher, will be the only one who will have access to the actual identities of each participant (the codenames and data will be kept in separate locations, and the codename key will be kept in a locked file cabinet accessible only to the primary researcher). I will also be in complete control of each participant’s weblog—I will simply provide each participant with the username and password that will allow them to access the weblog. This “control” will allow me to ensure that no one changes the format of the weblogs (which have been specifically pre-formatted to best protect your confidentiality and anonymity), and it will allow me to screen out any information that may compromise the actual identity of a participant. This “control” is not meant to censor or restrict the participants’ responses, and if I do make changes to any posts or comments you write, I will inform you of the change and let you know why I made the change.

Part 1: How This Study Will Proceed

You will be asked to do two things every time a new question is posted: 1) Within the first week after a new question is posted, you will post a response to the question in narrative format that tells the “story” of your unique experience. These narratives should be at least one page long (approximately 300 words), but you are free to make them as long as you want. 2) Also within that same week a question is posted, you will be asked to read and comment on at least one narrative of a fellow-participant (a question they responded to the previous week). These comments can be as short or long as you would like them to be; you can comment to as many participants as you want at any time during the study; and you can keep the back and forth dialogue going on a topic for as long as you wish. Please do your best to keep up with the schedule. If you fall behind too much, you may be asked to discontinue with the study. Only those who complete all the questions during the entire duration of the study will receive the twenty dollar gift certificate.

In addition, I may contact you individually by email or phone if you post something that I may want you to elaborate on or clarify. I will also contact you after I stop posting new questions and have thoroughly analyzed the narratives of all the participants (which may take some time). I will compile an individual story summary for each participant, and I will contact each participant individually to make sure that I have accurately represented the participant’s story. Please feel free to comment on my interpretation of your story, and let me know if I am on track or not. Along with the individual stories, I will draft a collective veteran transition narrative that represents the entire group. I will similarly present the group with this collective narrative (possibly through the main weblog site), and I will ask for feedback concerning this group story. I will take all comments and critiques into account. In a way, all the participants will be helping me to write this study. Finally, after the study is completed, I will email each participant a final question asking them to write about their experience as participant in this study (they will email their answers to this final question to me).
Part 2: Important Information You Need to Be Aware Of
This information in this study will be used for my master’s thesis. However, it is possible that information provided by the participants in this study may be presented in a conference or even published in a professional journal. However, I will never use a participant’s actual name (I will only use the participant’s randomly assigned codename). It is possible that some of the participants may know or recognize each other. This means that it is impossible for me to absolutely guarantee anonymity between participants. If you do recognize the identity of a fellow-participant, it is important that you do not reveal any identifying information of a fellow-participant in your posts or comments. When commenting on another participant’s narrative, only refer to a participant by his or her codename and only comment on the content posted in a participant’s narrative. Also, do not attempt to contact a fellow-participant on your own during the study. If you do wish to contact a fellow-participant after the study has concluded, contact me, and I will make arrangements for the participants to exchange personal information—but only if both parties agree to exchange such information.

Part 3: A Few Last Things to Know:
- Participation is completely voluntary, and you may choose to withdraw from the study at any time (and you may also choose to have any information already provided not be considered in the final analysis of the study and even destroyed).
- Since some personal information may be communicated through email, it is important to realize that email communications are not always secure.
- If any of the information you recall and write about leads you to experience any psychological discomfort, my research advisor and I will assist you in locating the most appropriate help for your discomfort.
- If you do agree to participate in this study, I will walk you through a brief practice session that will teach you how to use your assigned weblog (you will not be able to begin responding to the study questions until you complete this practice session).

If you have any further questions about the study, please contact me, Dimitrios Jason Price-Stalides, at 618-559-8478 (email: stalides@siu.edu) or my research advisor, Dr. Patrick Rottinghaus Ph.D., Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychology, Southern Illinois University-Carbondale, at 618-453-3573 (email: rpatrick@siu.edu). This project has been reviewed and approved by the SIUC Human Subjects Committee. Questions concerning your rights as a participant in this research may be addressed to the Committee Chairperson, Office of Research Development and Administration, SIUC, Carbondale, IL 62901-4709.
Phone: 618-453-4533. email: siuhsc@siu.edu

I have read and understood the above information, and any question I asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I realize that I may withdraw from the study without prejudice at any time. By signing this consent form, I agree to participate in this study. I have been given one copy of this form to keep for my records, and one copy to sign and return to Dimitrios Jason Price-Stalides (a self-addressed stamped envelope is enclosed).

Name (print): _________________________________________

Signature: ____________________________________________

Date: _____________

I give my permission to be contacted any time during the study and at later date to receive information for checking the accuracy of the research findings. Initials: ______________
Military-to-Civilian Transition Stories

Seeking veterans to tell their story in a study that includes...

- anonymously sharing their transition experiences with other veterans
- helping other veterans learn how to successfully navigate this transition
- a $20 gift certificate (from place of choice)

For further details, contact Jason Stalides, an SIU graduate student and a fellow veteran, at the contact information below:

Phone: 618-559-8478
Email: stalides@siu.edu
Appendix G

Demographic Questionnaire

1. Gender: Male____ Female____

2. Age: ______

3. Current college status (choose one):
   a. School(s) Attending: ______________________
   b. Enrollment:
      ___ Full-Time: Number Hours enrolled: ______
      ___ Part-Time: Number Hours enrolled: ______
   c. GPA: ______
   d. Year/Month Started After Military Enlistment Ended: ______
   e. Schooling Prior to Enlistment (briefly explain): ______________________
   f. Classification:
      ___ Freshman
      ___ Sophomore
      ___ Junior
      ___ Senior
      ___ Recently Graduated: Year: ___ Major/Minor: __________
      ___ Graduate Student: Program: ______________________
      ___ Other: __________________________________________

5. Race/Ethnicity (choose all that apply):
   ___ African-American/Black
   ___ Asian-American/Asian
   ___ Hawaiian/Pacific Islander
   ___ European-American/White
   ___ Hispanic-American/Latino(a)
   ___ Native American
   ___ Other: ______________________

7. Military Information:
   a. Branch: ______________________
   b. Years served (start and end dates): ______________________
   c. Discharge Type (honorable, dishonorable, or other): __________

8. Major Information:
   a. Have You Declared A Major?: No___ Yes___
      I. If Yes, please list your Major(s): ______________________
      II. If not, please list majors you are considering:
         1st Choice: ______________________
         2nd Choice: ______________________
         Other Choices (if applicable): ______________________

9. Career Information:
   a. Career Choice Status (Choose only one):
      ___ I am undecided about a career
      ___ I am tentatively decided about my career
      ___ I have decided on a career
   b. Future career choices you are considering:
      1st Choice: ______________________
      2nd Choice: ______________________
      3rd Choice: ______________________
      Other Choices (if applicable): ______________________
Appendix H

Alpha’s summarized narratives for each question

Question 1 summary. Alpha’s initial career-decisions seemed mired in indecision, apathy about his future, and a general confusion about what he should do with his life, post high-school. And even ten years later, he was not sure why he joined. Initially, he characterized it as a way to avoid going to college. He felt like college was his only option, an option he didn’t particularly like. Consequently, the notion of joining the military, via a visit from a recruiter at his high-school, felt like a less constricting choice for him:

I was set to go to college like much of my contemporaries, but to be honest, I didn't feel real good about it….A recruiter called the house….As soon as I realized I had a choice, the idea of an education went out the window.

But he also pointed out ways in which he had might have been primed to join even before he did so. For instance, he characterized himself as a “Navy brat.” He was born in the Portsmouth, Virginia Naval Hospital. His father served in the Navy during the Vietnam War, and he had also “grown up hearing of uncles in Korea, Check Point Charley, Vietnam,” as well as “a second cousin who was a defender of Wake Island.”

And he wrote that he was impressed by the Marine Corps recruiter at his high school, for the way in which he “took a lot of shit from the kids of former hippies and admitted draft dodgers.”

He felt like an outcast at the College Preparatory high school he attended, since we “was from a blue collar family on a scholarship at a…school of the uber-privileged.”
On the other hand, he reported that serving in the armed forces as a Marine felt like he finally “found a home that [he] never knew [he] was missing.”

He further noted that he loved his job in the military. He held a few positions, including driver and gunner in a combat vehicle (LAV-25), and platoon sergeant, for which he seemed proud to be trusted with such a tremendous responsibility that was well above his pay-grade). Alpha also expressed that he felt his job was a good fit his personality: “I loved it, and it shaped me as well. I took to the work like a fish to water, and I was good, at times I would say I was the best….I never had a problem with what I was trained to do. In fact, after 9/11 I tried a couple times to get back in the Corps, or any of the services—I wanted more than anything else to go back home and do what I knew was my job.” And although he was thankful he was never involved in combat, he expressed guilt that he wasn’t, while others he knew were.

**Question 2 summary.** Alpha characterized his decision to leave as a decision that was imposed on him due to a non-combat injury he sustained while in service. This was a stressful time to Alpha, especially in light of all the financial obligations he had been accruing during his time in the service: “I was married, owned 2 cars, had all kinds of bills, and now I was gonna get kicked out. I was 22, fucked up, no real job prospects and my current job training/experience wasn't really going to translate too well into the real world. Was I scared—hell yes. Add to that I really wasn't too fond of civilians.”

Though he retrospectively noted that his initial post-enlistment fears were unfounded, his military experience has continued to affect the way he views people in general: “I still find that I have high standards for the people I know, and typically I find that people I know and start to trust ultimately let me down.
Alpha also remembers not knowing what he was going to do for a job, much less a career after he got out. It seems he tried several different things. In his initial post-enlistment jobs, he sought out positions that were similar to things he did in the service. For Alpha, that meant driving jobs, including truck driving, school bus, and utility construction work. He reported that he worked the utility construction job the longest, five years, and that he both loved the work as well as the money. But he increasingly found that the physical demands of the job were taking a toll on his body, especially his back. So when he and his wife divorced, the event forced Alpha to reconsider what he wanted to do with his life, as well as to consider the idea of a career for the first time, even if he wasn’t sure what the best career for him would be.

Alpha continued reporting feeling confused about being out of the military: “none of it makes any real sense.” He also has made several attempts to return to what he considers his real home: “I still have pretty mixed feelings about being out. I’ve talked to recruiters a bunch of times and talked with officer recruiters too. I miss the ‘work’ and knowing that what I did in the world made a real difference.”

**Question 3 summary.** Alpha recalls that he was required to attend readjustment classes six months prior to the end of his enlistment. He described these classes as a “mixed bag,” noting that “one of the classes given was about reenlisting right then and there.” He was also required to attend classes that instructed him how to fill out paper work he would come across, since he was discharged for medical reasons. Alpha reported that the second, more practical classes were more useful to him: “I could actually use some of that information, versus the former class.” Alpha also voluntarily sought transition help at a military base after his enlistment ended. He described the help he
received there as “a huge waste of time,” noting that “all the fuckers wanted me to do was go to college. This was after I explained to them that at that point I couldn't afford my life/bills and go to college. After that, they didn't want to talk to me.”

In describing his last days in the military, Alpha wrote, “The one thing I really remember doing was getting drunk and stupid, which was something I got good at doing in the Corps.” In talking about the abrupt end to serving, both for him and former friends, Alpha pointed out that “One day they were there, the next and they were gone—fucking poof!!!”

After his enlistment ended, Alpha noted that he experienced, what felt to him, like an unexplainable feeling of “melancholy.” He also writes about missing his old military friends and being unable to reconnect with his former civilian friends, from before he joined the service: “I missed my buddies, and it seemed like nobody understood me. I tried to fall in with my old friends, and they just didn't get it. They thought they were adults; in reality, they were just children with a couple of bills and a couple of crappy ‘I got drunk this one time’ stories.”

In writing further about his post-enlistment estrangement, Alpha explained he ended up ditching his former friends “and started working way too much” in order to pay the bills and also avoided dealing with his feelings of isolation, loss, and estrangement. In discussing his initial work experiences again, Alpha wrote that he bounced “from gig to gig…searching for the next better paying job, with a boss who I could work for since I can’t stand working for somebody who is incompetent.” He attributed his constant search for a better job to his wife’s expectations: he wanted to earn as much money as possible in order to make her happy. In the meantime, however, he noted that “I wasn’t really
happy. I got tired of bouncing, even more tired of working for shithead bosses.” He also reported he and his wife had intense arguments during this period in his life, which led him to consider pursuing college and utilizing his GI Bill. And when he and his wife divorced later that same year, he started thinking even more seriously about going to college. He noted that he spontaneously applied online one day after work. “It took about 5 years from me getting out, but I went to school,” he wrote. And despite that he had to give up a well paying job to do so, he does not “regret a minute” of this decision, although he does, at times “miss making real money.”

Question 4 summary. While addressing the transferability of the job skills he learned in the military, Alpha’s views were mixed. He reported his status as a disabled veteran helped him to get a foot in the door for becoming a postal worker; however, he also felt his actual experiences in the military might have prevented him from getting the job. He described psychological testing and interactions with “shrinks” that might have reflected poorly on his employability, given that his prior experience and training entailed violence: “I’m not sure that the fact that I can operate a pile of weapons/heavy weapon systems and was real good with military tactics could help me at many jobs.”

On the other hand, Alpha considers himself to have always been a hard worker, an attribute that was amplified by his time in the military: “my work ethic and the fact that I Won’t ever give up or not figure how to get something done was really ramped up.” In all the various jobs he has held, he has almost always left on good terms. In fact, he reported that former employers still call him at times to offer him jobs, and that they are now seeking potential employees who are veterans due to Alpha’s work ethic and
dependability. And knowing that he might have contributed to making it even a little
easier for veterans to find work made him feel good.

This same work ethic helps him in his school work, which he thinks of as his
current job. However, Alpha pointed out that working hard at school and taking it as
seriously as a job is not unique to veterans. He attributes that way he prioritizes his work
to being older than most students, a trend he has noticed among most non-traditional
students in general: “most of the older ‘non-traditional’ students act the same way,
they’re here for a reason—not to fuck off on mommy and daddy’s dime.”

In comparing military life to life as a college student, Alpha stated, “I think trying
to compare school and the service is kind of a fruitless endeavor…from my own
experiences, the Corps and college are nothing alike.” Alpha also talks about the
importance of the comfort found in the company of fellow veterans, especially fellow
Marines: “in a room you can pick out an old jarhead without even knowing if there are
vets in the room or not. That fact has at times made life easier. In a room of strangers I’ve
had an instant confidant and or friend.”

Alpha also remarked that the transition into college was not such a jarring
experience for him since he “had plenty of time between the Corps and school.”
However, he noted a lack of help, support, and information for college veterans at his
school. While addressing transition counseling services for veterans, Alpha wrote, “I
never heard anything about anything like that, even from the vet office up in financial
aid.” He also commented on support services he has heard of that are available at his
school, but none seemed to fit his needs: “I did recently hear about a support group the
university put together for combat vets...and I’ve seen fliers... about...vets for peace...[but I] don't really fit into either group.”

**Question 5 summary.** Alpha noted that this last set of questions felt strange to him. In discussing obstacles he had encountered as a college veteran, he noted “I don’t really think that I’ve had any real sort of obstacles as a vet who is now a college student.” He credits part of the ease of his transition to the GI Bill as well as the Illinois Veterans Grant, which, combined, afforded him enough financial security to focus on his school efforts. He did note strong negative feelings toward some of the students in his classes, especially required general education classes: “while they may be classes designed to make students better rounded—they are filled with morons that I usually wanted to beat with a claw hammer for their stupidity.” He also pointed out that he was annoyed in general about general education classes, describing them as easy and pointless busy work (although he realizes the relevance for others, especially younger students).

Alpha also remarked on the differences between being a student versus work in the military, noting that if “you screw up, or get an answer wrong nobody’s gonna get messed up.” And while this difference illuminates how, comparatively, life feels less stressful and even easy for college veterans. Alpha also noted some similarities in regards to submitting to the demands of those in positions of authority: “all you gotta do here in school is what the professors ask, kind of the same in the military...so I guess to a point it’s kind of the same shit.”

Alpha also remarked on how he misses doing work that feels important: “I was a part of something bigger than me.” In contrast, he also pointed out his frustration with the people they admit into the college: “they seem to let anyone in with money at times. Sure
some people are turned away, but honestly some people are not cut out to be college students.” This leads Alpha to question the worth of his degree: “that dude over there who was in the programs with a pile of tutors, didn't have to take hard courses, and got to take the test [in less time than I was required to].” Alpha then questions, “what did I really accomplish, and is it really worth that much?”

In directly addressing how the transition felt for him, Alpha wrote that he did not think “the world of academia fit me all that badly,” but he did pointedly note that at times “I felt like I stuck out like a sore thumb and then some.” However, he attributed this outcast feeling more to his motivation to be a student as well as the age gap between him and what he characterized as “the normal student population.”

Overall, Alpha did not feel that his values had been “compromised by being a college student.” Furthermore, the only “real” lifestyle adjustment he struggled with was living “on a small income again,” as he did while he served: “we all got the short end for a lot of years. Never once have I ever met anyone who has said they joined up for the pay.” Therefore, Alpha asserted, there is not “another group of Americans who don’t deserve a break for what they have done” more than veterans do. He also reported the importance for college veterans to learn how to “massage the system.” In other words, it is in college veterans’ best interest to really acquaint themselves with the benefits they have earned, especially the GI Bill and the IVG, in order to utilize them to their fullest extent and last as long as possible.

Ultimately, as Alpha wrote, “I don’t really think that being a vet has anything to do with my transition.” He noted this as a difference between his and some of the other participants’ experiences. For Alpha, being a Marine is an integral part of who he is: “I
am a Marine—not former or any of that shit, I earned it, I'll be one till the day I die.” But he also made clear that the Marine label is “not what defines [him] either.”
Appendix I

Bravo’s summarized narratives for each question

**Question 1 summary.** Bravo reported that he joined in order to “to go to college without having to take out a loan,” which he described as “the best way for me to go to college.” He thought of his reason for joining as “probably no different than any other person’s.” For him, enlisting in the military was a statement of autonomy: “my way of saying that I am independent and can make decisions affecting my life on my own.”

He held a variety of jobs and served in several locations during his enlistment. He cleaned dishes in Oklahoma; he computed fire data for guns and ammunition in North Carolina—a job he described as “a lot of fun” and where he also met “some of the most unique characters”—he wrote that he also “went to other posts within the US but nowhere overseas”; and before his enlistment ended, he decided to change his job to communications, which required that he move to Illinois. Bravo reported that the toughest adjustment to military life was adjusting to all the various jobs he was required to do.

**Question 2 summary.** The decision to leave the military was not an easy one for Bravo. Since he did not see his family very much while in the service, his fellow-service friends “became more of my family than my real family did.” But as his service continued, Bravo noted that he slowly “started to see [his] military family break up.”

He also noted that he missed his pre-military life at times, particularly his closest friends and family. Bravo wrote, “There were times when I wanted to try to take my life back as it was before I went to the military.” He reported that his homesick-like feelings only became stronger when he went home on leave and received letters from friends and family.
As his Army family increasingly disintegrated, Bravo found himself increasingly thinking about leaving the military. He even requested to be stationed closer to home; however he found even that was not enough, especially when he re-considered why he had joined in the first place. He then decided to “spend my last 5 years looking forward to leaving so that I could restart my life as a college student.” Ironically, as he came closer to his long time dream of leaving the military and starting school, he found himself becoming more and more afraid of the prospect: “as my remaining time began to get to the 10 month time, I was more anxious and more terrified of leaving the Army.” Bravo elaborated on his fears, writing, “I felt…I gave so much of my life to the Army…I was unsure how I could adapt to being a civilian” Bravo also noted that since he had devoted eight years of his life to the military, there was some temptation to “stay in for the full 20 and retire.”

He described meeting the woman who would eventually become his fiancé a partial relief to some of his fears, as well as an additional motivator to leave the military and pursue a college degree: “I wanted to push myself to be better than just what I could be in the military.”

He still found himself second guessing his decision to leave, but he countered his doubts by telling himself, “I made this decision, and I will deal with everything that comes my way.”

**Question 3 summary.** Bravo clearly and directly wrote that he felt his transition from “the Army life back to civilian life was pretty poor.” He attributed much of his transition difficulties to the poor quality and out of date information provided by the Army’s transition program: “none of the information applied to the world that I was
Bravo participated in the Army transitioning process, which included job fairs that he attended; however, as Bravo pointed out, “I still felt like I was lost.” He also sought help from a transition adviser who showed him a book that described Bravo what civilian jobs his military work experience would be suitable for. However, none of the suggested jobs were appealing to Bravo, which caused him to think back to when he was being recruited for the Army. He recalled how the recruiter told him he would be able to get any job he wanted, since he would be working a job that translated well into almost any civilian job. “What a lie,” Bravo wrote. “I did not want to be a construction worker, but that is all the military adviser said I could be based on my military experience.”

Bravo’s response to his disillusionment and lack of help in readjusting to the civilian world was to rebel: “I…dyed my hair an odd reddish orange color as well as letting it grow out…my indication to the military that I no longer cared.” From that point on, Bravo’s conviction to go to school made more sense. At the same time, the thought of college scared him: “I didn’t want to be an old man going to school.” But Bravo’s worries dissolved as he visited some campuses. He noticed that there were more people who looked older like than he thought there would be: “when I saw that, I knew that I could do it too.”

**Question 4 summary.** “It was such a shock being a civilian again,” Bravo wrote. Since he separated, he has had this pervasive feeling of fear that he still carries with him: “it is taking a long time for me to shake waking up at O'dark 30 in the morning.”

Furthermore, Bravo noted, “the skills that I learned in the military (technical skills) are meaningless in civilian life.” At the same time, he also recognized that other
skills he acquired in the military do serve as an asset both in life and as a college student: “the skills that mean the most and I will forever carry with me are the practical skills….leadership, punctuality, and a sharpened sense of integrity. These skills I have found to be very important in my life as a student.”

In Bravo’s comment on the transition from Army to college life, he noted, “college life was not all that different.” He pointed out how living in the barracks is not so different from living in a college community. In both, according to Bravo, “there are different ethnicities, languages, and plenty of beer and alcohol to help dull the feeling of being away.” The biggest difference Bravo noted was “that I do not have anyone telling me what I should be doing and where I should be at during different times of the day.”

Concurrently, he also does not have to be responsible for others, an aspect he finds he misses as times: “I miss the ability to control what others are doing but, it passes.”

Bravo noted that he was not aware of any programs at his school to help college veterans in their transition. He insinuated that such a program would be appealing to him, since he initially thought that the purpose of this was to assist veterans in their transition to college life. He is hopeful that information from this study, and others like it, will be helpful to other veterans.

**Question 5 summary.** Bravo considered himself to still be in a transition stage, even though it has been over two years since he’s been out: “going to college still seems odd to me.” Bravo noted he had difficulties adjusting to civilian and college life, and he found it difficult to let go of internalized military, such as being called by his first name and not having to stop and salute a flag when it is being raised.
In discussing his experiences as a student, Bravo noted he does not consider himself a book person, but he is motivated to excel “to try to make a better life for myself and my future family.” He did note that he does “not feel totally comfortable in the academic setting.” He explained that he is used to doing things the “Army way,” which he described as being able to react to a situation as it happens. College feels different for him in that he has to prepare for things well in advance, instead if reacting “on the fly.”

However, Bravo both loves the challenges of college life and is intimidated by them at the same time. For him, it feels like “there is so much on the line if I make a mistake.” As he noted, “a below average semester can cost you an opportunity with a great company.” Mistakes in the Army, on the other hand, as Bravo noted “are not life threatening to a soldier’s future.”
Appendix J

Delta’s summarized narratives for each question

Question 1 summary. Delta reported that he had “always wanted to join the Army.” As child, he recalls he “would get to do all the ‘cool’ stuff,” but as he got older, he “wanted to serve and set himself apart from [his] peers… something elite that [he] would be able to take pride in.” He never even considered other options, although he did report that he would go to college someday, but after he joined the military.

He first sought out a recruiter at age 16, and when he finally enlisted, a little under two months after he graduated from high school, he signed on for a “concurrent admissions program which pre-enrolled [him] for college.” He enlisted as an infantryman, and “arrived in Hawaii about 2 months before the invasion of Operation Iraqi freedom began.” He recalled his “unit felt a little left out because the country was at war…and [they] were sitting in the tropics training and hanging out.”

Delta reported that he “wasn’t exactly happy in the military during the first half of [his] enlistment.” But he also pointed out he didn’t hate it: “I was ready to get out and find some more responsibility.” His initial jobs included stints as a rifleman, automatic rifleman, and a radio telephone operator. However, Delta noted a turning point after he was promoted to Sergeant and, subsequently, was put in charge of a firing team: “I imagine it was as close as someone can get to having kids without actually having children.”

It was around this point during his enlistment that Delta began to realize he loved being in the Army. He eventually came to love it so much that he “opted for the Green to Gold option, which gave [him] an early honorable discharge with orders to report to the
ROTC battalion of [his] choice for school,” along with a federal scholarship. Now that he has been out of the military and enrolled in a university for over a year, he reported that he is struggling to fit in to the civilian/college lifestyle.

**Question 2 summary.** As Delta noted, “The only reason I left the Army was that I wanted to go to school.” The heavy time commitment of being in the infantry made it very difficult to do any schooling while he served: “It seemed pretty hard to get any school in, and almost impossible to get a degree in a timely manner.” As the end of his enlistment came closer, he was encouraged to enroll in the Green to Gold program. The Green to Gold program was an ideal fit for Delta. Not only would he be able to go to school and get his degree, something he really wanted to do, he would still be able to maintain his connection with the military. Furthermore, he was offered an additional incentive to enroll in the program: “Let’s just say that I had a hard time passing up $10k cash just to go do what I wanted.” Delta applied and was admitted into the program. He noted, “I'm not completely a civilian now. I still have a contract but it’s kinda on hold for the next couple years.”

Regardless, he was living as a civilian/college veteran student at his school. And this was a difficult adjustment for Delta. He thought he would be happy to get out for a while, until he actually did get out: “It was exciting, but I missed it.” His missed his “buddies in Hawaii and [his] unit.” He missed “all the stuff [he] enjoyed doing,” including “getting up and doing some nice hard PT everyday,” among other things. However, he noted, “I didn't really miss the bullshit, having to deal with stupid rules that don't make any sense or are just to appease a specific person.”
Delta also remarked that “even stranger than getting out of the military…was starting college.” The age difference, and probably maturity level, was an issue for Delta: “I was a freshmen and 22 in classes with people from 17-19 kids. I don’t think a day went by the first semester that I didn’t want to tell some little shit to just ‘shut the fuck up!’”

He reported difficulties in relating to and understanding most of his classmates, due to his experiences in the military, which caused him to miss his life in the military. He noted that one had to earn respect in the military, whereas in college this was not the case. He felt students were given unearned “equality.” He also found it hard to relate to what other students might consider offensive: “I don’t give a shit if you find something offensive, get a thicker skin!” Additionally, he found what he considered to be petty complaints and fears of his fellow students to be irritating and even insulting to a certain degree: “there are people younger than you on the other side of the world fighting a war and you…have the nerve to bitch because the water in the shower... is not quite warm enough.” Although, he is pleasantly surprised that the professors at his school aren’t as liberal or anti-war as he expected: “a few that like to put in little jabs about the US shouldn't be at war…but for the most part they seemed pretty down to earth.”

He noted that he still feels same as he did the day he left: “I miss all the guys in my unit.” But he also noted things have gotten easier or him as he has continued to adjust to life as a college veteran: “either I'm getting used to the little shits here at school or they are learning to say things that are less stupid.”

**Question 3 summary.** In regards to separation transition services, Delta remarked “I didn’t really find any of the transition stuff helpful at all.” He remembered that he was required to go to transition classes, but since he already knew what he would be doing
once he got out, he “just kinda sat there going, ‘this doesn't apply to me, it’s for the shit bags that get chaptered out.’” Although, in retrospect, he wished he had “taken them up on the resumé course at least.” Overall, however, Delta realized they were trying to be helpful, but also noted that, “someone who retired out of the military after 20 years…can’t really help a 22 year-old who is getting out to go to work or start college.”

Delta remembers being excited when it finally came time to leave the Army, but once he was out he noted, “I mostly just felt like going back.” He started school only sixteen days after his separation, but being out felt unreal: “it was a couple months before it really even set in that I was no longer in.” He did indulge, somewhat, in his new freedom: he grew his “hair and beard for 2-3 months, which is a long time for someone who used to shave everyday and get their haircut once a week.”

Delta recalled how he missed the guys from his unit and made attempts to keep in touch. But, as Delta noted, “they seemed to have written me off.” But he didn’t seem upset about this, noting that this was a norm for separating service members: “I think that is one thing the Army does well, it moves on. Two weeks after a person leaves the unit, you can barely remember their name. I became that person.”

When classes started, Delta “treated it like the military, get up, work out, eat breakfast, go to class, get done, find something to do.” However, it wasn’t the school work that seemed hardest for Delta, it was, instead, “finding stuff to do” and “meeting people.” In pointed out the differences he felt between himself and his classmates, Delta wrote, “I was 22 with combat experience; they were 18 and still thinking about high school.” One thing of note that was crucial to helping Delta adjust to college life was the Veteran’s Club at his school, describing it as “probably the best thing that a veteran can
have to transition.” He found it difficult to explain why such a group was so important to him and other veterans, but it seemed that just being with others he could relate to provided comfort and a sense of belonging: “we pretty much just hang out and have a couple beers and bitch about all the little kids at school we can’t stand.” The organization also allows veterans to interact with other non-veteran classmates: they organize and participate in “socials with the sorority and other clubs on campus.”

**Question 4 summary.** In discussing transferable skills, Delta noted that after his four years in the military, he barely had any transferable college credits, much less civilian job skills. As he readily admitted, “the skills and field craft I learned as an infantryman don’t really transfer well to anything in the civilian world”; however, he is also clear in affirming that “the broader skills, discipline, duty, working hard, being motivated….transfer in anything you do.”

Delta described his military experience as an asset, in regards to his school work, but not just because he is a veteran: “I am older than my peers and therefore not worried about where to get a drink.” For him, transitioning from the military to college life is like “running a long fast race and then going to a baseball game.” Life, overall, is much less busy and much slower paced, which was hard for him to adjust to: “it was hard to comprehend that when I woke up in the morning I didn’t have to do anything, hell I didn’t even have to go to school if I didn’t want to.”

As for transition assistance programs offered at his school, Delta noted there is not a “single veteran’s transition program.” He also voiced disappointment with the veteran’s office at his school, pointing out how they “can only make sure you are certified for your GI Bill benefits.” However, according to Delta, if there are any
problems with your benefits, they offer little to no help. But again, he noted how important and beneficial the Veteran’s Club has been to him:

This club has no agenda, aside from giving veterans a place to interact with other veterans…probably the only thing that kept me sane my first semester…It was so nice to have a place to go where people understood what you were having to deal with.

The organization also provided guidance for dealing with veterans’ benefits paperwork, and they serve a larger social function in the school, including “an opportunity to support school sports as a ‘Peach Blossom,’ and helping the community through service projects.” Delta concluded that “every school should have a Club or organization for veterans, because…there is no one else on campus that can possibly understand the change in your life.”

**Question 5 summary.** For Delta, the biggest obstacle he faced as a college veteran was not academics, but rather “the change of environment and everything associated with it.” The core of his adjustment process was social in nature: in the Army, he came to have many friends and felt very well known, but when he started as a college student, he noted that he only “knew about 3 people” and had “little in common with the people in [his] classes.” Delta also felt he did not know what to do with all the free time he now had as a college student: “I had a hard time filling my days. I’d be up, work out, and then have nothing to do for 2 hours till class; sit in class for a total of about 2½ hours a day and then having nothing to do again.”

Delta also noted that he had a strong reaction to instructors who he felt used their authority to force their opinions on you. He pointed out he didn’t “mind learning new
things and hearing other people opinions,” but he become very offended when a “teacher [told] the entire class…we need to change…because he has a Ph.D. and…the only way we are going to pass…is if our opinions [became] his opinions.”

As far as excelling as a college student, Delta used his past experience in the military as a motivator and to put things in perspective: “I’ve been shot at and almost blown up, why the fuck would I let a test stress me out…I learned to work hard and get the job done, and that can't hurt any job.” Another thing that was difficult for Delta to adjust to, was not having authority over others, as he did in the military: “it’s like standing on solid ground and having someone pull the rug out from underneath you. It is a big change to have authority and then have none.”

Delta reiterated the importance that the Veteran’s Club has played in his transition, calling it “the greatest thing for soldiers transitioning [into college].” He summed up the reason why the Veterans Club is so crucial, noting, “some days we just need someone that understands what it was like to go from the military to college, and 98% of our ‘regular’ college friends just can’t understand.”
Appendix K

Foxtrot’s summarized narratives for each question

**Question 1 summary.** Before Foxtrot joined the Army, he was a dishwasher. He was motivated to join the Army in order to provide a better life to the woman who was his girlfriend at the time. He took the first job he was offered, a helicopter repairman, and reported to his first duty station in Ft. Campbell, KY. He was in charge of his own aircraft by the time he was 20, and he advanced in rank fairly quickly within his first three years. He decided to reenlist for the second time due to a reenlistment bonus that was offered at that time, which would come in handy since he had a wife and child to support.

He spent the next three years in Germany, which he loved, and he was entrusted to lead his own platoon squad. After his three years in Germany, he reenlisted again and was eventually deployed to Saudi Arabia during Operation Desert Storm. He recalled this as a harsh time in his military career: “I slept in tents and endured sand storms, rainy season, winter, and very hot summers.” From there, he was stationed in Alaska for a few years, working as a maintenance team leader.

By 1995, he found himself back in Ft. Campbell, KY, where he worked as a maintenance Platoon Sergeant and a Flight Platoon Sergeant for three years. After that, he was selected to be an Army recruiter for three years in Clarksville, IN. He recalled it was during 9/11 when he was being processed for his last duty station in at Hunter Army Airfield in Savannah, where he worked as a technical inspector supervisor mostly and a company financial officer. When he was eligible for retirement two years later, he chose to end his career in the military. At this point, his job had “stalemated,” so he was no longer being promoted.
In reflecting back on his career in the military, Foxtrot noted, “I enjoyed the Army for the most [and] loved everywhere I’ve ever been.” He also concluded, “the Army was very good for me, a kid with no direction.”

**Question 2 summary.** As Foxtrot pointed out, he decided to leave the military was a matter of choice: “I was an E6 with 20 years, so it was mandatory retirement. You have to be E7 to do more than twenty years.” He writes that he was disappointed, as well as anxious at the prospect of being a civilian again: he wondered “what kind of job I’d get…what I'd do…where I'd live.” During the time his enlistment was ending, the Army allowed personnel who hadn’t previously signed for the GI Bill when they first joined to “buy into” the program. Foxtrot took advantage of that opportunity. Combined with the Illinois Veterans Grant, he decided “[he] was going back to Illinois to take advantage of an education that [he] hadn't been prepared for after High School.” But despite the financial support Foxtrot received from the military to fund his education, as well as his retirement income, he still had to work in order to support his family.

Foxtrot chose to attend the school that offered the very particular programs Foxtrot was most interested in, “Automotive Technology and Autobody,” something he intrinsically enjoyed as a hobby and “had nothing to do with a career choice.” Later, however, he re-conceptualized his hobby as viable career: “I heard about [an] Automotive Technology program and believed a bachelor’s degree might prove an important career choice.” After finishing his bachelor’s degree, he continued with school to earn a degree in Autobody as well.
Even though it was “hard leaving the Army knowing a lot of [his] friends were going” to the Middle East, he did feel he was “ready to leave,” and he “did not want to deploy back to the Middle East.” Foxtrot concluded, “this is my time to go home.”

**Question 3 summary.** In regards to Foxtrot’s plans after he separated from the military, he wrote, “way before retirement, [I decided] I was going to school.” He noted that one of the more difficult challenges he faced was in trying to decide on a major: “I spent more than a year [researching the] Department of Labor website about different career paths,…their 10 year forecasts, and how well that career will pay.” And while he did find plenty that were well paying jobs, he had concerns about whether or not he would like those jobs. So he made a decision: instead of following the money, he followed his passion: “I decided I would go to a school that offered Automotive and Autobody because that is where I love to spend my time and money.”

Foxtrot characterized the decision to enroll in the program in the smaller college town was as a “no brainer” for various reasons, including “cost of living,” which would allow him the best opportunity to use his military benefits to pay for school and still manage to support his family. A larger city, in other words, would not offer this same financial security.

In regards to the transition program offered by the Army, Foxtrot noted that it was “was pretty extensive” and included “all kinds of classes/training and resumé building classes.” However, Foxtrot also pointed out how “everything the Army offered…wasn't going to be useful for me because my goal was to get a degree.” Overall, however, Foxtrot remarked, “I think the transition program was probably a good program, but I wasn't going to use all their information real quick.”
Foxtrot also wrote that getting out was both an exciting and frightening time—his biggest fear were financial concerns. And even though he had lost the financial security and many of the things he enjoyed about being in the Army, he was “excited to be out there on [his] own, and see what [he] could do out there.” Now that he has been out of the Army and has been living as a student for four years, Foxtrot wrote, “I am waiting to see what I am going to be when I grow up.”

At the same time, Foxtrot wrote about how well he has been doing, as both a student and in supporting his family. He is living in a rented house with his family; he has been working full-time for the last three and a half years, and he has held other jobs to earn extra money whenever he can. His wife also works full-time to bring in extra income: “my family as a whole has worked very hard to pull this off.” Now, after having finished his bachelors and on the verge of completing his second degree, Foxtrot often wondered how he was able to pull it all off: “I wonder how all this has worked out and how we have gotten through this part of our life. I believe we have been very blessed.”

**Question 4 summary.** Foxtrot started off talking about an old Army saying: “we’ve done so much with so little for so long, I think we can do anything with nothing.” It’s a saying that Foxtrot has seemed to internalize and has applied to other situation in his life, including transitioning out of the military and to his school work. He described the teamwork and what it was like to be part of a larger group: “if you knew your job and everyone else knew theirs, we as a unit could accomplish great things. As an individual soldier, only looking at what you are asked to do, things look or seem so meaningless.” Foxtrot further remarked, “in the Army, I was a part of a larger group and now it is just me.” That is part of the change in mindset it seemed that Foxtrot was still dealing with.
But he was not totally alone: “I have the support of my wife and children, and I couldn't do it without them.”

Foxtrot didn’t talk directly about how transferable his skills are in regards to his school work. But he did point out that in high school he “was a terrible student and barely graduated.” He further remarked that his grades in high school had nothing to do with how intelligent he was, but rather with other things he was more interested in at that time. So when he graduated and he faced the prospect of college, Foxtrot was understandably “really scared.” It was the Army, however, that had molded Foxtrot from a nineteen year old “punk kid, with no direction” into the motivated person, dedicated husband and father, and successful college student he is now.

**Question 5 summary.** As an admittedly poor high school student, Foxtrot remarked that “receiving a bachelor's degree and working towards another...degree, is a major accomplishment.” He pointed out all the challenges he faced and has successfully navigated through: “facing off with professors, their lectures, assignments and tests….balancing a life as a dad, husband, full-time employee, working several jobs, maintaining a home.” All of this has been what Foxtrot considered to be “one of my most challenging tasks of all time.”

Foxtrot also noted some elements that were crucial to his success as a college student, primary among them is “the help and encouragement of [his] wife.” The financial support from the military, including the GI Bill, the IVG, and his retirement pension helped. But he also noted his retirement payments aren’t that much, and in order to support his family, he worked as well.
But overall, Foxtrot wrote that he enjoyed college life, a feeling he attributes to the major he chose: “I chose a major that I am truly interested in, and I don't know if I could have accomplished it without this being true.” However, he also noted aspects of college life he did not like: “I…really didn't fit in well” due the age difference. “I am 43, almost 44.” He continued, noting, “most of these kids on campus won’t talk, smile or even give [me] the greeting of the day.” And while that can be hard to cope with, Foxtrot also remarked that he does understand: “these are younger people, and I was there once believe it or not.”
Appendix L

Golf’s summarized narratives for each question

**Question 1 summary.** Golf wrote that he joined mostly because he didn’t like school and because he felt his life was purposeless. During his first year as a college student in 2001, the event and aftermath of 9/11 had an effect on his eventual decision to enlist: “I was in podunk Illinois reading about it. I felt like a little bitch, like I should be a part of this.” As Golf noted, “the military offered a purpose I was lacking.”

Golf worked as an infantryman in the Army and served in many places and capacities. He describes Basic Training at the Infantry Center in Fort Benning, GA as “a shithole” where he developed Mono and “caught all kinds of…viruses,” which delayed his graduation by two months. After he did graduate, he was “deployed to an Air Assault (Helicopter borne) Infantry company in Korea,” where he “volunteered for their Scout Platoon and was accepted.” He considered his fourteen months in Korea to be “a great opportunity to work with professionals,” which also made him feel “professionally valuable.” After Korea, he was stationed in “Fort Campbell, Kentucky” and assigned to an infantry unit that Golf described as “traditionally the most professional unit on post, but the shittiest to work for.” Despite the hard work, he felt a bond to that unit, and he continues to “feel some affinity for.”

As for the specific jobs and positions Golf held, he worked as a “Scout, Radio Telephone Operator (RTO) and Team Leader.” He elaborated some on the extra responsibility that came with being a Team Leader: “this gave me 3 subordinates and some small level of authority in the platoon and company. It was my responsibility to
lead them…and basically be their fucking dad. But…I found I liked solving people's problems.”

His enlistment was also involuntary extended for 465 in which he was deployed to Iraq. In reflecting on this, he wrote, “surprisingly, now that I am out this fact doesn't piss me off at all.” He recalled that his unit’s main mission there “was offensive operations against Al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia and other Sunni insurgent groups.” While in Iraq, he noted he had acquired “a good reputation for reliability and intelligence,” which he was proud of, but which also entailed many “random tasks that needed a competent leader, but no one with rank wanted to do.”

Overall, Golf reported that he liked his job, mainly because it gave him a sense of “professional fulfillment.” But he also noted that there were a lot of “ass clowns in leadership positions,” which “compromised this satisfaction.” He also expressed disappointment regarding advancement in his particular filed of work: “there was also a limit as to how far you could go in the military. The highest enlisted rank, Sergeant Major, doesn’t do shit.”

Golf also reported that aspects of the military lifestyle both did and did not fit his personality. The aspects that he described as “perfect” for him included “the need for professionalism…the physical fitness, the general atmosphere of righteous violence, the opportunity for travel and adventure.” But he also noted that other aspects made him “furious.” He seemed to be especially disenfranchised by the “ass clowns in charge because they had just been in the Army for a while.” He was expressed his frustrations with “unnecessary procedure that…affected our operational efficiency and in some ways made it unnecessarily difficult to accomplish the mission.” Remarking on one of these
unnecessary procedures, Golf wrote, “I have pockets, I'm gonna put my fucking hands in them!”

**Question 2 summary.** Golf wrote that “first and foremost” among the things that influenced his decision to leave the military “was the limit that a career in the military has.”: “as an enlisted man, the highest rank achievable, Sergeant Major, had no responsibilities that interested me.” He was also not happy with the income potential: “the pay after 20 years was still shit.”

In discussing some of his fears about leaving the military, Golf remarked about a “campaign of fear” from some of his superiors “about how there wasn’t shit out there for you.” He recalled being told that since there were no jobs “you’d be back in…a few months.” And even though his plans were to return to college, he had concerns that about being able to financially support himself as a student, and “that somehow [he] would fail and be forced to return.” He also discussed the guilt he felt about leaving “[his] joes behind”: “they still had years left…and would no doubt be deployed again. Only this time, I wouldn't be there to take care of them.”

As for Golf’s post-military career plans, a criminal investigator job appealed to him for two specific reasons: “job security [and] a certain level of autonomy and professionalism.” He liked the prospects of “solving problems without micromanagement,” and he felt that “career path would suit [him] well.”

**Question 3 summary.** In discussing the Army’s transition program, Army Career and Alumni Program (ACAP), Golf noted that he took “advantage of a two day workshop” that helped to familiarize him with the various VA benefits he would be entitled to, as well as offered him “some instruction on how to translate [his] military
experience to civilian language and build a resumé.” He characterized the program as good and helpful, but he also noted that it was more geared toward veterans transitioning straight into the civilian work force; and therefore, not as helpful to college bound veterans: “there was nothing I was aware of to get soldiers into school. Since that was my objective, I was unable to take advantage of most of the ACAP seminars and job fairs.”

Golf felt that his last days in the military were uneventful and anti-climatic, not the best of his life, as it was rumored to have been. He began school only six weeks after he got out, and he realized he “needed to level out and not be crazy anymore.” He also realized that some of the behaviors and language conventions he had become accustomed to in the military would not suit him well in this new environment: “I couldn’t say ‘fuck’ all the time like I was used to, and….everything I had to talk about was Army related, so it immediately alienated people.”

Golf also wrote of an outlet that he found to be very helpful to his transition process: “Brazilian Jiu-jitsu….gave me an outlet for violence, in a safe and controlled environment. [It] allowed me to pursue individual competitive goals and meet people that shared common interests.”

**Question 4 summary.** While acknowledging that the skills he learned in the military had no literal “carryover,” as far as the skills he needed to be a successful college student, he had acquired a general work ethic: “I believe…the military prepared me well for school. All the time I spent doing things I hated conditioned my brain to hammer through unpleasant busywork. The high standards I had been setting for myself carried over nicely to schoolwork.” He elaborated on the point further, noting, “the physical suffering that I endured…has definitely been a great help…I can compare everything to
that….If I’ve got hundreds of pages of reading to do over the weekend, easy, just go to Starbucks and sit down with it.”

Golf did have a harder time adjusting to the slower pace of college life. He also talked about how he had to learn to talk and behave in a less aggressive manner: “people were not as aggressive in school. I think they may have been put off by my style of conversation, and my general mannerisms.” But he noted that he has adjusted pretty well and that it came easy for him: “after my first semester was completed, I was indistinguishable from everyone else. Just a little older, but people didn't think I had been in.” He also noted the change in his lingual behavior: “I could also talk about shit other than the military that wasn’t back dated to 2002.”

As for programs at his school that helped veterans adjust, he remarked that “there really isn't too much.” The Veteran’s Club and the Jiu-jitsu group (which consists of mostly veterans) help, but, as Golf concluded, “other than that there really isn’t much catering specifically to veterans.”

Question 5 summary. Golf considered the biggest obstacle in regards to adjusting to college life to be “meeting people [he] could tolerate.” He noted age, experience, and maturity level as an important factor of this obstacle: “being older, and having drank plenty already, most college kids pissed me off more than anything.” He also noted that “society in general seemed to be petty, immature and materialistic” compared to his life in the military. But he noted that “there are good people around. You just have to find them,” which Golf did intentional set out to do. He got involved in clubs and sports that introduced him to like minded, more mature people and also provided him with an adaptive, healthy “outlet for violence.”
Overall, he felt college life has been beneficial to him: “it has toned me down a lot. The excess of free time as well has let me explore new avenues.” He further noted that the college environment “meshes perfectly” with his personality at times, especially “when I have smart professors and students in the class…. [and] the discussions are good and everyone has something to contribute.” He was frustrated, at times, with the immaturity of many college students, but he also expressed that he had been that way when he was younger.

He pointed out that a really important factor to his transition success is due to his motivation to be at school: “it was the next step in professional development and was absolutely necessary to do what I want to do.” And he credits, again, the work ethic he learned in the military to his success as student: “the level of responsibility from the Army gave me the tools I needed to complete all of my academic tasks.”

Golf is aware of a stigma that seemed to make “non-Army people…uncomfortable.” He feels that many people think of those who served as killers: “I can tell in their tone and body language, [they] think I have murdered dozens of people.” At the same time, he concluded how he understands where they may be coming from: “I can understand it would be a frightening…to be having a…conversation with someone…you might think did lots of awful things.”
Appendix M

Echo’s summarized narratives for the first question

**Question 1 summary.** Echo reported that she was differed from her peers as a kid in that she aspired to be a “Marine Sniper.” She remembered being told she could not be that because “girls don’t do those things.” It seemed her aspirations were inspired by her upbringing in a “military household, on bases and on a firing range,” which left her feeling quite comfortable with the prospect of enlisting in the military. She initially approached an Army recruiter, but she reported the recruiter “pissed” her off, so she instead joined “the Navy to serve with the Marines as a corpsman.” At this time, she was also contemplating college, as she reported, she had a “free ride,” but at this point in her life she decided she had “no idea what [she] wanted to be when [she] grew up.”

Echo reported she served in several different duties stations as a Hospital Corpsman (HC), including Puerto Rico at Roosevelt Roads Naval Hospital, National Naval Medical Center (NNMC) Bethesda, MD, Branch Medical Clinic Washington Navy Yard (BMC-WNY), and onboard the USS John C. Stennis CVN 74 out of San Diego.

She noted that during the time she served, “the USS Cole was attacked in Yemen,” “September 11 happened,” and “the Anthrax cases in D.C. occurred.” Also, during her time onboard the Stennis, the ship was “almost deployed to North Korea to suppress any nuclear threat.”

As a HC, Echo was a combat medic and noted that the “job consisted of assisting doctors with patients and running the day to day operations of a hospital or clinic.” But specific duties changed as she moved to different departments and duty stations; therefore, Echo served in a wide range of position in her role as am HM: “I worked in
OB/GYN…sick call, optometry, the laboratory, and…medical readiness and vaccinations.” She also noted that HM’s “could see [their] own patients, make diagnoses, prescribe meds, order X-RAYS and lab work, manage wounds and perform minor ‘surgeries.’” Additionally, she also worked as “an ambulance driver/EMT, a health records guru, a front desk person, and treatment room (a ship’s version of an ER) staff.”

She wrote that she loved her job but not the “bureaucracy of the medical field.” She noted that “officers and upper enlisted were very good at screwing over the people who worked their asses off.” But despite this, she was clear in where her energy: “I worked for my patients. I did it for them…I treated everyone equally. Some liked that, other didn't.” She concluded that “Being Doc was great,” but “the politics and stupidity of individuals…made it stressful and angering.”

*Echo did not continue with the study after she responded to the first question.*
VITA

Graduate School
Southern Illinois University

Dimitrios Jason Stalides Date of Birth: March 3, 1975

110 S. Walnut, P.O. 224 College Street, DeSoto, Illinois 62924

Southern Illinois University Carbondale
Bachelor of Science, Forestry, May 1987

Western Illinois University Carbondale
Bachelor of Science, Psychology, July 2003
Bachelor of Arts, English, July 2003

Thesis Title:
College Veteran Transition Stories: The Use of Weblogs to Explore Military-to-College Transition Narratives

Major Professor: Patrick Rottinghaus, Ph.D.