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# In and Out of Uniform: The Transition of Iraq and Afghanistan War Veterans into Higher Education

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IN AND OUT OF UNIFORM:  
THE TRANSITION OF IRAQ AND AFGHANISTAN WAR VETERANS  
INTO  
HIGHER EDUCATION

by

VIENNA MESSINA

A dissertation submitted to The Graduate Faculty in Psychology in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, the City University of New York

2014

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**Approval Page**

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Psychology in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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**Abstract**

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by

Vienna Messina

Advisor: Professor Colette Daiute

With the exit of US combat troops from Iraq in 2011 and the subsequent drawdown of forces in Afghanistan, much public attention became focused on the reintegration of veterans of these wars into all aspects of civilian life. Record numbers of returning veterans enrolled in higher education. Abramson (2012) reported that, since 2009, when the Post-9/11 GI Bill became effective, more than 860,000 Iraq and Afghanistan veterans had used its generous provisions for further education and projected that, by the end of 2013, that number might reach more than 1,000,000. According to the Department of Veterans Affairs website, more than sixty percent of student veterans who were enrolled in higher education attended two and four year public institutions.

This study explores the transition of student veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars from the culture, discourses, and practices of military life into those of academic life in public higher education. The study is designed to consider transition as an activity-meaning system, a

research approach in which the unit of analysis is the interaction of cross-context relationships and perspectives among stakeholder actors having varying interests, these stakeholders being both persons and institutions (Daiute, 2010; 2014). Although my primary interest in this study is student veterans' interpretation of transition, as this does not occur in a vacuum, I have sampled meanings expressed by other stakeholders with whom they interact.

Considering student veteran transition as an activity-meaning system places focus on the dialogue of the institutional perspectives of the military, veterans advocacy organizations, public institutions of higher education, and of student veterans themselves with their own unique perspectives, across contexts disparate enough as to constitute separate cultures. I regard institutional policies and individual activities as enactments of cultural values. The design affords the opportunity to explore the interplay of these values, both implicit and explicit, in narrative materials expressing the perspectives of all the involved stakeholders.

Choosing a sample of culturally determined materials, the study analyzes military websites and training materials; the websites of public institutions of higher education as they address student veterans; and the websites and publications of veterans' advocacy groups for values expressions. In relation to these values expressions, I examine the interviews of twelve student veteran participants from a large northeastern urban public university as to whether they uptake, resist, or transform these institutional values in their cross-context narratives about their experiences of military and academic life.

Results indicate institutional stakeholder tensions with some widely divergent values expressed among them. Military values expressions focus on living a purposeful life guided by ideals, selfless service, and teamwork. Advocacy values expressions focus on addressing psychological trauma as a paramount concern in veteran transition, the superiority of peer to peer

support, and service through giving. Academic values expressions focus on acting as liaison to veterans' benefits and resources, diversity in learning communities, and the construction of knowledge. Student veterans' values expressions interact with these in diverse ways.

The student veteran narratives predominately reflect uptake of military values across both academic and military contexts, with relative silencing of those of advocacy and especially those of academia. Values in military and advocacy materials are expressed explicitly while those of higher education are generally implicit. Because of the implicit nature of academic values expression, learning what's important and how to fit in academia may present a more challenging, developmentally complex task for student veterans. A plot analysis of student veteran narratives reveals clear disjuncture in the focal issues addressed across contexts and the use of full resolutions in military narratives and tentative resolution strategies in academic narratives, leaving those narratives open and subject to revision through further experience and reflection.

I discuss the implications for psychological and educational research and practice of my findings that student veterans may continue to be guided by military values while participating in academic life and may be challenged in understanding and adapting to academia, a culture whose values are often less transparently expressed than those of the military.

Look ahead.

You are not expected to complete the task.

Neither are you permitted to lay it down.

The Talmud  
Pirkei Avot, 2:16



## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my grandparents, Giuseppa and Francesco Messina, who instilled in me a belief in the transformative potential of higher education.

## **Acknowledgements**

I thank my advisor, Dr. Colette Daiute, for the gift of her theory and method of dynamic narrative inquiry. As I've often mentioned to her, the opportunity to use her approach in the fashioning of this dissertation made the holy grail of psychology, an understanding of person in context, truly come to life. I also wish to thank her for her unfailing patience with me and for giving me confidence I could complete this work when I periodically lost faith.

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## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

This study explores how student veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan negotiate transition into higher education. Any human activity is better appreciated through an understanding of its socio-cultural and historical antecedents (Lather, 1990). Accordingly, the study's introduction offers a brief summary of the socio-cultural history of our treatment of military veterans, with particular attention to the veteran cohorts of World War II, the Vietnam War, and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and their transitions into higher education in order to offer an understanding of the meaning of the differences among them.

The transformations of veteran entitlements under the GI Bill of Rights are presented as metaphors for public appraisals of each cohort of veterans, reflecting societal valuation of how well or poorly the conflicts in which they participated have served the national interest. The summary then addresses how veterans of all these wars are positioned in multi-vocal discourses about them, highlighting discourse regarding their transitions into higher education. It then considers how these time-sensitive discursive constructions, including the privileged discourse of post-traumatic stress disorder, act as collective narratives to frame perceptions of the character, abilities, and disabilities of each of these cohorts of veterans and become determinative of public policy toward them.

Following a closer focus on the still emerging discourses about veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, I consider recent qualitative research presenting the narratives of student veterans of these wars in transition to higher education. I then introduce my rationale for the present qualitative study which advocates a developmental approach locating meaning in the

construction of self and values through language and social interaction. I thereby broaden the scope of inquiry from giving voice to student veterans in transition to consideration of their voices in interaction with the cultures and discourses of both the military and academia.

### **A Socio-cultural History of Veteran Transition into Higher Education**

Since the years following World War II, Americans have maintained the conviction that military service, especially in time of war, confers upon its veterans some entitlement to financially supported higher education. The bases for this conviction reach deeper than simple acknowledgement of the need to offer economic reward for military service or the need to address the potential for social disruption posed by returning veterans who fail to successfully reintegrate into civilian life. Most significantly, the conviction reflects an understanding of higher education as a locus where veterans can engage in practices of “cultural conversation,” conversation made imperative by their exposure to the differing cultures of military and civilian life (Luecke, 2005).

### **The GI Bill of Rights and Its Transformations**

A *New York Times* article of October 18, 1943, recounted an address by then President Roosevelt in which he enlisted Congressional support for post-World War II educational benefits for its veterans by stating, “We have taught our young men how to fight, we must now teach them how to live.” A 1945 newsreel, now available on YouTube, marketed the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944, commonly known as the GI Bill of Rights, to the American public by characterizing higher education as “the American way to take one’s place in the community.” Awareness of the potentially transformative character of higher education was reflected in President Truman’s charge to the 1946 Commission on Higher Education to fully explore its meaning in a democracy about to assume world leadership (Zook, 1947).



The GI Bill was formalized through negotiations which incorporated a dialogue among members of the government, legislative bodies, special interest groups such as the American Legion, and the American public at large. Successful passage of the Bill required broad-based discourse on the purpose of higher education in general and its appropriateness and relevance for the recent war's victorious veterans in particular. Bennett (1996) argued that its passage heralded the shift of American Society to a knowledge economy and culture. Clearly, the Bill, and the negotiations around its passage, altered perceptions of not only who might go to college, but also what they must be taught (Clark, 1998).

Over fifty percent of eligible veterans, approximately 7,800,000, took advantage of the Bill's provisions to finance additional training or education (Schmaedeke, 1995). The Bill offered very generous benefits equivalent to the cost of full tuition at any public or private institution of higher learning, room and board, and a living stipend if a veteran had completed four years of qualifying military service. Military service of just ninety days qualified a veteran to receive eighteen months of benefits.

The education and housing provisions of the Bill are widely believed to have been the principal catalysts for an unprecedented reshaping of the social and political landscape which took place in post-World War II America (Luecke, 2005). The Bill made advancement into the middle class, through subsidized home ownership and the acquisition of more lucrative employment through higher education, a realistic expectation for a majority of Americans. It extended opportunity in ways never before considered possible, its influence later resonating in the aspirations for equality pursued by social movements for the rights of minorities, then the rights of women, and finally the rights of the disabled (Bennett, 1996).

Challenging an unreservedly positive valuation of the Bill, Mettler (2005) argued that while white males were later able to demonstrate their appreciation of the opportunities opened to them by the Bill through greater economic and civic engagement, this was not the case for some marginalized groups. She charged that female and black male veterans, due to biased local administration of the Bill, had difficulty obtaining benefits or utilizing them, and were thereby denied access to the Bill's transformative potential. The Bill, being a product of its time, did not include language barring discrimination in its implementation (Frydl, 2000).

In the two decades after the Bill's inception, its generous benefits were gradually eroded through successive legislative action. During the period of most intense engagement in the Vietnam War, over 3,000,000 men were conscripted (Daliessio, 2000). Because of escalating anti-war sentiment, its veterans, both during and after the War, paradoxically faced widespread public disapproval of their participation in a war in which they generally had not chosen to fight. Perhaps as an expression of this disapproval, they were additionally perceived as disinterested in using their benefits to advance their educations upon their return (Kubey, 1986). Despite this characterization and the diminished benefits available to them, the Vietnam War veterans interviewed by Walck (2008) regarded the Bill as the single most important resource making possible their graduation from college and their subsequent consideration of their lives as successful.

After conscription ended in 1973 ([www.sss.gov](http://www.sss.gov)), the Bill's benefits were no longer framed as a reward for service (Livingston, 2009). The promise of benefits was repurposed as a tool for recruitment (White, 2004). Teachman (2007) concluded that there was substantial belief that its presentation as such would be particularly appealing to the new pool of recruits for the

all-volunteer military whose most distinguishing characteristic was their lower socioeconomic status.

The Montgomery GI Bill of 1979, the first iteration of the Bill to provide benefits for an all-volunteer military, was far less generous than its 1944 predecessor, offering, on average, only seventy percent of tuition costs at public institutions of higher education and thirty percent of tuition costs at private institutions. This Bill also enacted a stricter standard of qualification of at least two years of active service for any benefits to ensue. Additionally, veterans needed to have invested in the educational benefits program through pay deductions while in active status.

In order to remedy this lack of historical parity for the all-volunteer forces urgently needed to continue the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Iraq/Domestic Appropriations Bill was passed, offering veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan serving after 09-11-01, benefits comparable to those available to veterans of World War II. The Act addressed the changing nature of the military in a number of ways, e.g., by allowing educational benefits to devolve upon qualified veterans' offspring. The provisions of the new Bill became effective on 08-01-09. Alvarez (2008) likened the Post-9/11 GI Bill to its World War II predecessor in its power to democratize and transform higher education from a privilege to a right.

### **Iraq and Afghanistan War Veterans in Higher Education**

Analysis of the literature concerning contemporary student veterans underscores the entanglement of student veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan in two ongoing controversies about their participation in higher education. The first centers on the activities of some educational institutions profiting from military enrollments, including those of student veterans, whether these institutions are adhering to appropriate educational standards and providing effective

supportive services. The second centers on the student veterans themselves and if and how they are benefiting from, persevering in, and succeeding in higher education.

### **The Controversy over Higher Educational Services to Student Veterans**

Widespread questioning of claims of “military friendliness” on the websites of postsecondary institutions soliciting enrollment by military students has generated recent Congressional interest in regulating the conditions making such a designation appropriate and even in trade-marking the use of the term “GI Bill” (Pope, 2012). These activities represent expressions of both the desire to protect military students, including student veterans, from misleading advertising, particularly from for-profit institutions with demonstrated low rates of graduation, and the desire to strengthen governmental ability to enforce appropriate educational standards before allowing direct funding to postsecondary institutions through the Bill.

Citing reports of aggressive and deceptive targeting of military service members, veterans, and their families by some educational institutions, on April 27, 2012 President Obama issued Executive Order 13607 listing Principles of Excellence to be followed by postsecondary institutions to ensure that the military groups referenced have the information needed to make informed decisions about the use of their educational benefits and that these benefits are appropriately distributed. In summary, cooperating institutions were charged to provide the military student community with meaningful information about the true cost, potential debt, and educational options offered; to prevent fraudulent and deceptive recruitment practices and misrepresentations; to guarantee readmission to students in good standing if they are redeployed; to ensure accreditation of new academic programs developed prior to their offering; and to designate contacts for academic and financial advisement and provision of supportive services for military students. Most significantly, it charged cooperating institutions to provide the

Federal government with plans for these students to fulfill all necessary educational requirements and to provide an expected timeline for completion of these requirements. The Secretaries of Defense, Veterans Affairs, and Education were charged to develop outcome measures, largely through reliance on existing data courses, to avoid involving the institutions themselves in data collection.

### **The Controversy over Student Veteran Performance**

Mirroring the historic dialogue after World War II about the value and effectiveness of higher education for veterans, there is currently significant controversy over the academic achievement, retention, and graduation rates of student veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Tillman Foundation, in a 2011 pilot study of seven public senior colleges judged to have enhanced support services for them, found that student veterans had higher grade point averages and better retention rates than their traditional collegiate counterparts. Less sanguine data had been reported by the Arizona Veterans Education Foundation in 2010 when it found that, nationwide, the student veteran retention rate might be as low as six percent and the graduation rate as low as three percent on some college campuses. In addition, the Department of Education, in its estimates of all recent students who had pursued bachelor's degrees, found that only ten percent of veterans graduated within six years as opposed to thirty-one percent of non-veterans ([www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov)).

On October 5, 2012, David Wood, referencing an MSNBC online news report, wrote in *The Huffington Post* that eighty-eight percent of student veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, despite the generous financial support provided by the Post-9/11 GI Bill, did not complete their first year of higher education. He cited research completed by the Colorado Workforce Development Council, an affiliate of the Colorado Department of Labor and

Employment, as the source of this statistic. Veteran advocacy groups, most notably the Student Veterans of America, a group incorporated in 2008 primarily to lobby for passage of the Post-9/11 GI Bill and the only national association of military veterans in higher education, attacked this estimate of student veteran achievement as a politically motivated attempt to provide a platform for those who would cut back their educational benefits. The group contested the Wood report by criticizing the issuing agency as obscure and its methods of data collection as marginal at best. In March of 2013, Student Veterans of America made a rebuttal claim of a sixty percent graduation rate for student veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan based on data compiled from the 2010 National Survey of Veterans and the Census Bureau's American Community Survey, only belatedly acknowledging that these instruments did not parse the veterans surveyed by the wars in which they had served.

On June 20, 2012, the House Committee on Veterans Affairs heard testimony on "The Value of Education for Veterans at Public, Private, and For-Profit Colleges and Universities." Michael Dakduk, Executive Director of Student Veterans of America, testified before the Committee, his stated purpose being to "dispel or substantiate" reports of low student veteran graduation rates. Mr. Dakduk attributed conflicting reports on student veteran postsecondary academic completion rates to methodological weaknesses inherent in the prevalent practice of using data culled from Federal databases and national surveys, data collected for purposes other than to draw conclusions about student veteran academic progress and attainment.

He testified of the Student Veterans of America's brokering of a partnership between the Department of Veterans Affairs, which, remarkably, had never before collected data on student veteran academic trajectories, and the National Student Clearinghouse, to create the Student Veteran Attainment Database for the express purpose of tracking and reporting on student

veteran postsecondary progress and outcomes. The Clearinghouse, a non-profit organization with enrollment data on over ninety-five percent of America's student population excepting only those attending institutions that do not participate in Federal financial aid programs, conducts verification and research services for its 3,300 member colleges. Fain (2013) characterized its database as "near census" in its coverage.

A report from this collaboration is projected to be released in late 2013 or early 2014. By avoiding the drawbacks inherent in using data collected for other purposes, the Database should more accurately measure and track student veteran postsecondary achievement and completion rates. Its forthcoming data on the characteristics of student veterans relevant to their academic progress, when analyzed in conjunction with data about their institutions of enrollment offered to comply with the Principles of Excellence, may shed light on any possible interaction between these two problematized areas of concern, the individual and the institutional. Most important, the report should offer vital information to guide future research by identifying critical periods over the course of student veteran academic participation when intervention and support measures might be of most assistance, and, ultimately, help in the evaluation of the effectiveness and success of programs already in place and the planning of programs for the future.

### **The Emergence of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder as an Explanatory Discourse**

Wessely and Jones (2004) identified the Vietnam Era as a time when changing public attitudes about the War led to a gradual inflation in traumatic memories reported by its veterans. A claims-making process (Spector and Kitsuse, 1977) between the veterans, an aggrieved group censured at homecoming because of anti-war sentiment, and responsive groups in power promoted the emergence of PTSD as an explanatory discourse for the failures these veterans experienced in reintegrating into civilian life.

At the conclusion of his ethnography in which he traces the evolution of the concept of traumatic memory into the psychological syndrome of post-traumatic stress disorder, Allen Young, at the time of writing in 1995, surmised that as veterans of the Vietnam War aged and the groups advocating for them found new concerns, attention to the disorder identified to describe these veterans' war experiences and their subsequent transitional difficulties would recede. He could not have foreseen that the series of wars in the Middle East, already begun in 1990, would continue until the present and would encourage the restoration of PTSD to its former prominence as an explanatory discourse for the psychology of veteran transitional challenges.

### **The Construction of PTSD as a Disorder over Time**

As long as individuals have participated in war, they have suffered from memories of intense fear and horror, sadness and irretrievable loss, and guilt and remorse. Bracken (1998), in describing the origin and progression of theories of traumatic memory, traumatic memory of war experience, and post-traumatic stress disorder, characterized their development as rather recent social constructions which gave new meaning to such disturbing memories and their potentially debilitating effects. The theorization by medical practitioners in the later part of nineteenth century of traumatic memory, knowledge hidden from the self as memory divorced from consciousness, gave authority to a new class of psychological experts who could claim access to painful memory contents unavailable to individuals themselves (Young, 1995). By extending the new theory of traumatic memory to disturbing memories of war, the physiological and psychological dimensions of these memories were thereafter catalogued and investigated as dissociative experience, initially called soldiers' heart, then battle fatigue, shell shock, and combat neurosis.



Interest in traumatic war memory waned after World War I until a revival in the early 1940s at the beginning of World War II when Kardiner (1941) began the organization of its diagnostic criteria, notably describing a delayed onset and chronic form as well. The diagnosis entered the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual I in 1952 as gross stress reaction, but received little attention until 1980, after the Vietnam War, when as post-traumatic stress disorder, it entered DSM III. Psychiatry's efforts, begun much earlier in the 1950s, to gain prestige by abandoning psychoanalytic assumptions about symptomatology in favor of psychometric understandings, came to fruition with the completion of DSM III.

Over the intervening decades, the discipline had gained new status as a knowledge-making science (Decker, 2013) and this attribution of more scientific practice afforded it the ability to represent the formerly marginal and diversely manifested psychological phenomena experienced by some after trauma as a unique and unified disorder. The entry of the disorder at this time proved transformative as it functioned well socio-politically to explain the difficulties Vietnam veterans were experiencing in their efforts at transition and reintegration. After several reorganizations of its diagnostic criteria over interim iterations of the DSM, since the publication of DSM-5 in May of 2013, a diagnosis of PTSD must include symptom clusters which describe exposure to a traumatic event, recurrent re-experience of that trauma, avoidance of associated stimuli and emotional numbing, hyper-arousal, and significant social impairment lasting more than one month.

### **Psychiatric Critique of PTSD as a Diagnosis**

The entire enterprise of classification and diagnosis of disorders through DSM is now being critiqued by the National Institute of Mental Health. In the NIMH website's Director's Blog of 04-29-13, Dr. Thomas Insel declared that all DSM classifications lacked validity because

they rely on consensus about symptom clusters and characterized such classification through symptom description as a nineteenth century method of defining disorder. He called for the establishment of a new nosology to describe psychopathology based on investigation of mental disorders as biological entities. He indicated that NIMH would no longer support research based on DSM categorizations and announced the creation of Research Domain Criteria (RDoC) as a new framework for a ten year endeavor to search for biomarkers and study the genetics and cognitive circuitry of mental disorders through brain imagery.

This turn toward exclusive reliance on distinctive biological mechanisms to define disorders such as PTSD was forecast by Young (1995) in highlighting a *New York Times* report of June 23, 1990 quoting Dr. Denis Charney, then a Yale psychiatrist and director by the National Center for Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, an institute supported through the Veterans Administration. He recounted Dr. Charney as saying that recent discoveries about changes in the brain chemistry of those who have experienced trauma led him to conclude that, “Victims of a devastating trauma may never be the same biologically....The discovery of brain changes are (sic) finally putting to rest a dispute over whether there is such an entity as post-traumatic stress.”

### **The Construction of PTSD Prevalence**

In 2008, the Rand Corporation’s Center for Military Health Policy Research published the results of a population-based study to establish the prevalence of post-traumatic stress disorder among previously deployed US Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans. Despite indications that the PTSD Checklist (PCL) had been found to have differential validity from structured psychiatric interviews and tended to over-report the prevalence of the disorder (Ruggerio, Rheingold, Resnick, Kilpatrick, and Galea, 2006), the Rand study used this self-report measure

to assess its 1,938 participants and estimated the point prevalence of PTSD in this population to be 13.8%.

On 10-21-12, Jaime Reno of *The Daily Beast* reported that a Veterans Administration study, recently posted without fanfare on the VA website, contended that nearly thirty percent of the 844,463 Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans treated at Veterans Administration hospitals and clinics had been provisionally diagnosed with PTSD or received a diagnosis of potential PTSD. The report's only information on the way in which these diagnoses were made or how any data analysis had been performed was a statement that the data sources were electronic inpatient and outpatient records from the Veterans Administration and Veterans Centers. In response to the news website's request for explanation of this surprising finding (more than doubling the Rand estimate of 13.8% made only four years prior), Josh Taylor, a spokesperson for the Veterans Administration, indicated that an in-house review of the PTSD literature showed its point prevalence in the general population of Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans, i.e., including those not seen in hospitals and clinics, to be approximately twenty percent.

The obscure manner in which this new prevalence estimate was publicly presented, the puzzling nature of its explication, and the use of "provisional" and "potential" diagnoses to inflate an estimate already suspected of over-report, all indicate a discourse being awkwardly constructed anew and re-instituted for a new generation of veterans returning home. The profession of such steeply rising prevalence rates provides evidence of intent to broadly offer the diagnosis of PTSD as a "benefit" to veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, albeit a one categorizing them as disordered and potentially disabled, much as this "benefit" had been offered to veterans of Vietnam some forty years before.

The lack of clarity in studies about PTSD prevalence led Richardson, Frueh, and Acierno (2010) to conduct a critical review of the literature on prevalence estimates for multi-national veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, including United States veterans. They cited numerous factors as contributory to the wide variability in estimates, the factors identified being both methodological and conceptual. The methodological factors included differences in sampling and measurement strategies; inclusion and measurement of DSM IV clinically significant impairment criteria; timing and latency of assessment, potential for recall bias, and differential combat experience including pre, peri, and post deployment factors; and course, chronicity, comorbidity, and symptom overlap with other psychiatric disorders. The socio-cultural factors identified included disability-seeking by veterans and media and popular expectations that veterans were likely to be so disordered.

As Kaylor, King, and King (1987) had found in their meta-analysis of Vietnam Era PTSD studies that virtually any position on prevalence could be supported by some data. Richardson et al. came to a similar conclusion in their critique of the PTSD studies of Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans. They indicated that, interestingly, there was a significantly lower prevalence of PTSD reported for United Kingdom troops participating in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, believed to be attributable not only to lesser combat exposure and more intensive military training, but to sociopolitical factors as well, including healthcare system and governmental disability policies that did not encourage or reward the profession of psychiatric illness.

Richardson et al. concluded that the great majority of US Iraq and Afghanistan war veterans do not suffer from PTSD, with the actual point prevalence rate being between four and seventeen percent, and that, by extension, psychological impairment is not a necessary or expected outcome of participation in these wars. They cautioned that further research in

understanding PTSD prevalence for any population should be carefully designed to consider the influence of both methodological and conceptual factors.

Burr and Butt (2000) argued that the increase in the number of individuals diagnosed with PTSD and those who self-label as such, as well as the recent proliferation of newly constructed psychiatric syndromes, may be attributable to the expansion, in both lay and professional circles, of ways of narrating experience. Narratives offered by the media may encourage inaccurate memories and also glamorize psychological suffering by veterans as they attempt to reintegrate into civilian life (Bowman, 2006). Friedman (2004) concluded that assessing the potential for expression of PTSD symptomatology in veterans of any war requires deep attention to and analysis of the unique socio-economic-cultural contexts shaping their transitions and adaptations.

### **A Turn in the PTSD discourse**

In an artful recasting of the tension between two prevalent but paradoxical discourses on veterans, one constructing them as invincible warriors and the other as damaged and disabled casualties of war, President Obama, at an August 26, 2013 ceremony, posted the same day as a White House YouTube video, presented the Medal of Honor to Staff Sergeant Ty Carter. The President drew a parallel between Sergeant Carter's combat heroism and his admission to post-traumatic stress. In eliding the word "disorder" from his description, the President signaled discursive movement away from the construction of PTSD as pathology and disability and brought it into greater congruence with an alternative discourse on veterans as invincible warriors and heroes.

After the ceremony, Sergeant Carter was interviewed by Peter Martin, CBS National Security Correspondent, about having identified himself during the ceremony as suffering from PTSD. Sergeant Carter stated, “I don’t like the ‘D’ on the end. I don’t believe in calling it a disorder. I believe that it’s your body and mind’s natural reaction to something traumatic.” He added that those who suffer from post-traumatic stress “are not damaged, they are just burdened by living while others are not.” On the same day, Thomas Raum, reporting for *The Associated Press*, recounted the President’s comments adding the term “syndrome” to the President’s characterization “post-traumatic stress.” His use of “syndrome,” a fairly arcane term whose association with pathology may not be as readily available to a general audience as the more familiar “disorder,” has recently come into greater usage and itself offers a more covert construction of pathology.

Discourses are not static and these incidents of movement away from the construction of post-traumatic stress disorder as pathology, with its inferred meanings of damage and disability, provide evidence of very recent changes in the discourse of PTSD, despite heavy investments by the Veterans Administration and other governmental agencies in the prior. This movement is appealing because it feels morally right and is readily associated with desire to have veterans avoid stigma in admitting difficulties and provides encouragement and support for help-seeking. But such linguistic reworking most strikingly allows veterans affected by symptoms previously presented as pathological and disabling to remain psychologically whole, invincible warriors.

In 2005, the Veterans Affairs Office of the Inspector General reported that, from 1999 to 2004, PTSD claims emerged as one of the most prevalent disability claims. During that period, claims for PTSD increased 79.5% while all other disability claims increased only 12.3%. At present, new claims for disability compensation for PTSD, along with pending reviews of prior

denials of such claims, have more than doubled the volume of the much discussed and decried Veterans Administration claims backlog from 400,000 to more than 800,000 (Friedman, 2013), a backlog that President Obama has promised to clear by 2015.

This very recent turn in the discourse may be reflective of a need for change that was suspected earlier on, but could not be voiced until recently, that policies and practices of the Veterans Administration have encouraged the profession of psychiatric illness and disability (Shepherd, 2001). Thus, the reframing is both a method of finding and/or rejecting pathology and also a time sensitive social process through which experience is interpreted and filtered through current norms and values, including current socio-economic and political realities (Burr, 1995). The turn may, therefore, reflect both current economic realities with an attendant desire to restrict future disability-seeking and, more significantly, represent an attempt to conclude ambivalent public valuation of the largely unknown veterans of seemingly endless war.

### **Affordances and Constraints of the Discourse**

There are affordances and constraints inherent in the adoption of any discourse about psychological phenomena and this overview of the social construction of PTSD is meant neither to trivialize or portray as unreal the suffering caused by the symptoms ascribed to the disorder nor to disparage the efforts of those who attempt to alleviate that suffering using a clinical model. But there are significant liabilities in the adoption of such an interiorized, medicalized discourse, in that, it lends a presumption of underlying psychological damage to any conflict experienced by veterans in transition and, when privileged, becomes the almost singular orientation to their difficulties as they attempt reintegration into civilian life. It captures discursive space which might be otherwise occupied by other narratives, depressing their serious consideration, as in this study, of non-pathologically based ways of constructing veteran transitional experience. Most

important, a diagnosis of PTSD, especially in its delayed onset and chronic forms, may foster assumptions that veterans so diagnosed have suffered an irreversibly negative transformation, are never to be what they were pre-trauma, are unable to cope with any change or conflict, and should now be regarded as more or less “damaged goods” (Summerfield, 2004).

### **What is at Stake?**

This summary has contended that PTSD as a psychological entity is an historical product constructed over time through the collective narrative of discourse. Its constellation of symptoms, in being defined as a distinct disorder, has been shaped by a powerful narrative which, when privileged, becomes ever more likely to constitute experience for individuals as they reproduce the discourse. As Dobbs (2000) maintained, media attention to PTSD as a phenomenon and fluctuating estimates of its prevalence rates have made questions of its validity highly contested both within the field of trauma studies and in general socio-political discourse because the stakes over interpretation are so very high. The discourse about veteran psychology proving ascendant over time will become determinative of the allocation of scarce Veterans Administration resources for research funding and supportive services for veterans, private funding for these purposes by individuals and advocacy groups, standards for disability qualification, and perceptions about the character of veterans themselves and their future possibilities.

When there is a preferred argument that the potential for successful veteran transition is determined biologically or that the parsing of the distinction between normality and pathology holds over-riding evaluative importance, consideration of which socio-cultural conditions might support transitional success is hindered through a pervasive orientation to perceived deficits and failings. This study, which has documented the rise of an intensely privileged, medicalized and



even biologized approach to veteran psychology, will offer argument for the need of a complementary approach which considers focus on their development across differing socio-cultural landscapes as critical to any understanding of veteran transition and reintegration.

### **Who and Where Are Student Veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan in Higher Education?**

With the official exit of US combat troops from Iraq in 2011 and the present drawdown of military forces in Afghanistan, record numbers of returning veterans are enrolling in higher education. Abramson (2012) reported that, since 2009 when the Post 9/11 GI Bill went into effect, more than 860,000 veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan had already used its generous provisions to further their educations and projected that, by the end of 2013, the number might reach more than 1,000,000.

A Department of Veterans Affairs website, created by the National Center for PTSD, and last updated on 11-06-12, provided the demographics listed below (<http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/studentveterans>). It should be noted that these data were developed from a US Department of Education National Center for Education Statistics profile of April 2009 which drew its analysis from an existing broader data source, the National Postsecondary Student Aid Study for the academic year 2007-2008, a study predating the implementation of the Post 9/11 GI Bill. According to the US Department of Veterans Affairs National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics website, updated on 06-25-13, there is neither more recent information available on the usage of VA educational benefits and demographics of the undergraduate student veteran population nor more recent information exclusive to student veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan (<http://www.va.gov/vetdata>).

Except in one instance, the demographics reported did not distinguish between the participation of student veterans in undergraduate education, whose first-time transition across military and academic cultures provides the focus of this study, and the undergraduate participation of other military personnel, active service members and reservists, who are not proposed to be engaged in such a transitional experience. The report also failed to identify the military conflicts in which this undergraduate population has served.

In the single instance in which these groups were discriminated, the data indicated that student veterans, numbering 660,000, comprised three percent of the undergraduate population of institutions of higher education, while active service members and reservists, numbering 215,000, comprised another 1%. The demographics which follow now refer to the combined military undergraduate population. The majority attended public institutions of higher education, 43.3% attending two year public institutions and 21.4% attending four year public institutions. Not-for-profit institutions enrolled 13.5% of the population and for-profit institutions 12.4%. Only fifteen per cent of military undergraduates were traditional age college students between 18 and 23, with 31.4% aged 24 to 29, 28.2 % aged 30 to 39, and 24.9 % older than 40. Only 35.5% were unmarried and without dependents. Although men comprised seventy-three percent of the population, women were over represented in the balance as they comprised only about twelve percent of active duty military personnel at that time.

In a more recent report, although still based on the same 2007-2008 data, Radford and Weko, (2011) offered a description of the racial composition of military undergraduates and described their selections of academic majors or concentrations. The students were identified as 60.1% white, 18.3% African American, 12.3% Asian, and 5.75% other. Among the academic concentrations ranking the highest, twenty-five percent of military undergraduates were found to

concentrate in general or applied studies, nineteen percent in business, eleven percent in health care, and nine percent in computer science or information technology. In the only instance located of more recently collected data about student veterans, The National Center for Analysis and Statistics reported that military undergraduates have decreased from eighty percent to sixty percent of the military student population from 2000 to 2010, while postsecondary vocational trainees have risen from twenty to just under forty percent (<http://www.va.gov/vetdata>).

No data could be located describing the geographic distribution of student veterans, although veterans, in general, have been reported to be most highly represented in rural and non-metropolitan areas of the country (Richardson and Waldrop, 2003). Teachman (2012) described how the location of most veterans in rural areas not only increases their isolation from the supportive services which could be offered them, but also contributes to their “invisibility” to the civilian world.

A more timely and finely discriminated report disambiguating the characteristics of undergraduate student veterans from those of all military undergraduates, discriminating the conflicts in which they served, and reporting on demographics that are solely referent to undergraduate student veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan is much needed and anticipated. The issuance of such a report will help to provide a fuller understanding of who student veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan are and where they are located within undergraduate education.

### **Student Veterans Narrate Their Transitions**

DiRamio and Jarvis (2011) characterized the available narrative research about student veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in transition to higher education as “first wave” qualitative efforts. In a seminal multi-college study, DiRamio, Ackerman, and Mitchell (2008)

interviewed twenty-five full-time student veterans, recently separated from military service, sixteen of whom were making first-time transitions into academia. The authors sought to discover emergent themes and constructs through content analysis and to determine whether these themes could be fit to a model of transition by Schlossberg (1984).

Evans, Forney, and Guido-DiBrito (1998) indicated that the Schlossberg model has been pre-eminent in guiding research on adult life transitions for over two decades. In the current model, elaborated from its initial formulation in 1984, the process of transition is theorized as a linear one, consisting of movement in, movement through, and movement out of transition. Within each stage of movement, differently allocated ratios of assets to liabilities in four identified factors of situation, self, support, and strategies must be positively balanced in order for an individual to move forward to the next stage and complete transition successfully (Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering, 1989).

All the identified themes of their study were adjudged by DiRamio et al. to be a good fit to the Schlossberg model, the authors having theorized enlistment in the military as “moving in,” deployment as “moving through,” military discharge as ‘moving out,” and the initiation of transition into higher education as ‘moving in” once again. In a study summarizing the results from their interviews, Ackerman, DiRamio, and Mitchell (2009) identified four major themes of enlistment in the military, redeployment, participation in combat, and transition into academia. The reasons identified for enlisting in the military were the desire to be patriotic and do one’s duty after 9/11, a wish to be eligible for later veteran benefits and entitlements, and a desire to escape their lives as then constituted. Participation in combat was identified as affording both an asset, the development of discipline and maturity, and liabilities, lack of fit of the military orientation to civilian contexts, the loss of friends in war, and physical and psychological

disabilities sustained. Redeployment was identified as a major disruptive force and transition into higher education as a difficult period experienced as little supported by institutional help from either the military or academia.

Zinger and Cohen (2010) interviewed ten full and part-time student veterans, surmised through multiple readings of the study to be making first-time transitions into community college, a community college which, co-incidentally, is part of the university system in which this study's data were collected. Using an unspecified theoretical frame, they identified four themes of reasons for enlistment, crises in military experience, post-deployment coping, and difficulties in academic transition. The reasons for enlistment were identified as poor high school performance, family stresses, immaturity and lack of focus, and romanticized visions of the military. The crises in deployment were identified as actions which violated moral codes, numbing and desensitization to experience, and feelings of vulnerability. Post-deployment issues were identified as the need to cope with PTSD, depression, and physical injury; lack of structure in civilian life; difficulties in social functioning; facing negative public opinion about the war or undeserved reverence for their service; changes in goals; and drug and alcohol abuse. The challenges in transition to academic life were identified as feelings of isolation, feeling disapproval from faculty, their disapproval of and difficulties with other students, problems in focusing, and lack of financial aid support services. In their discussion, the authors implicated post-traumatic stress disorder as the determinative factor shaping the difficulties experienced by their participants in transition, offering an extensive description of the disorder to advise educational practitioners.

The Schlossberg model provided the framework for the three qualitative thesis or dissertation level studies, published between 2010 and 2011, which address, at least, in part,

through the interview of some participants, the experience of student veterans who are making first-time transitions into higher education. These studies are presented in summary below, as, along with the 2008 DiRamio et al. and the 2010 Zinger and Cohen studies already discussed, they provide the virtual totality of the available qualitative research about contemporary student veterans in the process of initial transition to higher education at the time of this writing.

Normandin (2010), using the Schlossberg model as a guide to the construction of an interview protocol and as an overall theoretical frame, interviewed eleven community and senior college student veterans about their transitional experiences. Four of those interviewed were first-time matriculates, with the balance comprised of student veterans who had transferred from other educational institutions or were completing second bachelor's degrees or master's degrees. A thematic analysis of the interview content led to the identification of both positive and negative factors influencing student veteran transition which were subsequently fitted to the factors of the Schlossberg model.

The positive themes identified were the benefits of a hiatus between discharge from the military and college enrollment, of having functioning social support systems in place at transition, of having a sense of purpose derived from military service, and of having an understanding of the need for discipline. The negative themes identified were experiencing abrupt transition from military to academic life, having to reconfigure personal support systems at the time of transition, having to arrange institutional support and financial resources at the time of transition, experiencing psychological stress at transition, and having to redefine oneself. In discussion of the Schlossberg model, Normandin indicated that not all the study's results could be restricted to the confines of the model and that transition was found to be an

individuated and complex process with some factor effects fluid across stage boundaries and integrated into the whole of the transitional process.

Lackaye (2011), using Schlossberg transition theory as a partial framework, focused on the effect of experience in a combat zone on student veteran transition. Eight student veterans from a large northeastern private university were interviewed and five participated in a follow-up focus group. No further description of the participants was given explicitly, but close reading of the participant interview excerpts seemed to support a conclusion that some four of the student veterans interviewed were making first-time transitions into academia. The study explored student veteran experiences prior to their enlistment in the military, during deployment in a combat zone, and at transition into higher education through a thematic analysis.

The pre-military theme identified a desire to escape lives seen as unsuccessful and enjoy opportunities for change. The deployment theme identified living at “combat tempo”, i.e., in constant activity, and the resultant shaping of a preference for action over inaction. The transition theme identified the challenges that such a “combat” orientation presents upon entry into higher education, an institution promoting reflective practice, and the engendering of feelings of exclusion and a veteran separatist orientation inhibiting integration into the broader community.

Wheeler (2011) employed the Schlossberg model as the theoretical frame to construct an interview protocol and fitted case studies of nine participants interviewed to this frame. The participants were all first-time, full-time community college student veterans who had deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan. Wheeler reordered the stages of the model to better reflect the student veteran experience of transition from the military to academia, reframing the stages as “moving out” of the military, “moving through” civilian transition and “moving in” to academia. A

thematic analysis yielded three themes of academic experiences, personal relationship and connections, and benefit bureaucracy.

The issues mentioned supporting the academic theme were lack of academic success in high school, discomfort with traditional students, and the college bureaucracy, the impersonal atmosphere of a large community college, feeling infantilized by the college's approach to non-traditional students, and goal directedness enhanced through military discipline. The issues mentioned supporting the theme of personal relationships and connections were lack of family understanding of their experiences, disengagement from pre-military friends, the importance of military friends, poor interactions with other students and disdain for their inexperience, discomfort with negative attitudes toward their military service, and inappropriate questions regarding their war experiences. The issues mentioned supporting the benefit bureaucracy theme were frustration with negotiation of their GI Bill benefits and receiving treatment through the VA health system.

The value of the finding of significant correspondence across these studies of some issues mentioned in support of the thematic analyses, e.g., student veteran dissatisfaction with their lives prior to enlistment, their disengagement from traditional students, and their perceptions of a lack of personal and institutional support, must be acknowledged. However, with the exception of the Wheeler study, because of the manner in which analyses are offered, it is difficult to separate the perspectives of student veterans in first-time transition to academic culture, the focus of this study, from those with experience and understanding of the culture through prior attendance.



It should also be noted that the majority of the interview protocols for the studies discussed were mapped to a specific model of transition. When the results elicited were subsequently compared against the model, they were found, quite unsurprisingly, to be quite easily fitted. Chan, Berven, and Thomas (2004) argued that such models are favored by those in counseling and higher education administration, as are the authors of four of the five studies presented, because they seem to provide canons readily applicable to practice. As Normandin (2010) found, setting up expectancies for any linear or “normal” path for transition may deny the complexity of individual negotiation of transitional processes and deny that it may be found to be accomplished without reference to any select, predetermined factors.

## **Chapter II:**

### **Rationale and Theoretical Framework**

This study addresses student veteran transition from the military into higher education and argues for an alternate discourse about veteran transition from that previously documented. This alternative approach advocates an understanding of transitional development as negotiated within and across the cultural landscapes of military and academic life, made meaningful through the use of language and narration. Considered as the cultural tools of meaning making are institutional public discursive activities and personal narratives, personal narratives being the means by which individuals connect themselves to the cultures they traverse and consider possibilities for change. The approach will present the narratives of student veterans not as static accounts of information to be later organized by the researcher and perhaps fitted to a preconceived framework, but as activities in which student veterans use language to create self and mediate their transition, sensitive to and in virtual conversation with multiple interlocutors including the researcher herself.

More broadly, the study interrogates how individuals understand their experience and develop across cultures of shared meaning that may radically differ from one another. It conceptualizes development not as a stage-like progression, but as a collaborative process, in which individuals and cultures are dynamically interrelated, mutually influenced and influencing (Daiute, 2010; 2014). This conceptualization utilizes interdependent analyses of expressions of institutional values and personal narratives to elucidate the understandings promulgated by the cultures within which personal development occurs and to illustrate the meanings taken up by the individuals who negotiate this process. The research objective is to analyze the ways in which

the use of cultural tools achieves these ends and to offer recommendations to promote changes in practice.

### **Development through Social Interaction in Cultures**

Sampson (1993) contended that psychological research should center less on the study of the interiorized individual and concentrate its efforts on understanding the ways in which persons develop through socio-cultural practices and relationships with others, processes which, in any case, precede the formation of any internal representations. Taylor (1989) held that all such prototypical human activities are comprised of value-laden interactions with others in shared practices. In order to understand any human activity, it is necessary to investigate the cultural, social, and historical conditions in which the activity occurs (Kvale, 1992). Such contentions about the importance of culture and activity in human development lend urgency to the need for inquiry to illuminate how such ideas play out in the discourses and activities of a culture.

Such socio-cultural understandings also support the advancement of an alternative discourse to excessively interiorized and biologized discourses about human development, one which promotes the understanding of individual development as embedded in and is transformed through practices and interaction with others in socio-cultural settings (Kirschner, 2011). This study theorizes the development of individuals as constitutively bound to interaction with others in shared practices in cultural contexts, both persons and cultures richly endowed with histories of their own. Framing the study in this way avoids violation of the intertwined nature of relational psychological and socio-cultural phenomena and also avoids minimization of the importance of historical, socio-cultural, and political forces in shaping psychological lives (Kirschner, 2011). This socio-cultural research framework supports a non-dualistic analysis

enabling an understanding of both individuals and their experience in the value-laden worlds which they inhabit.

Recognizing the necessity for serious consideration of development as enmeshed in specific circumstances, the study is guided by a preference for knowledge that is based in local and particular occurrences, intentionally forgoing the search for any non-contextualized universal laws or grand theory thought to operate irrespective of the specific time and place of inquiry (Chaiklin, 1992). The framing of this study has not been chosen to express an attitude of dismissal toward the importance of other levels of explanation of human activity or in denial of the reality that our bodies and brains influence our experience of the world. It is, instead, a statement of the conviction that a primary goal of psychological study should be the achievement of an understanding of individuals' interaction with their social worlds.

### **Language as a Cultural Tool**

Holzman (1996) illustrated how Vygotsky considered language the quintessential cultural tool, describing both its function in social interaction and its position as a function of social interaction, explaining that "a sign is always originally a means used for social purposes, a means of influencing others, and only later becomes a means of influencing oneself." (1981, p. 157). Individuals acquire the psychological skills and discursive abilities which give rise to the experience of a self capable of engagement with the world through their social interaction with others already so discursively skilled (Kirschner, 2011).

Mead (1934) argued for a similar understanding of social and relational meaning-making, asserting that individuals become aware of themselves as both object and subject through their perceptions of others' responses to them, both verbal and gestural, using this awareness to

modify further transmissions from themselves. Holstein and Gubrium noted (2000) how his interactionist approach resounds within any socio-cultural and narrative orientation to research. Wittgenstein (1953) demonstrated that language gains meaning only through its use within ongoing forms of interaction, that is, through joint action of playing by the rules within a given tradition of social practice. Language is the practical means through which meanings of shared intelligibility, collective interpretation, and sense-making are transmitted. By most post-modern constructions, these linguistic capacities are relational, interdependent, and coordinated understandings that come about through participation in a culture. More broadly, language makes up cultural worlds and assists in engendering and maintaining cultural practices (Gergen, 2001).

The use of language and linguistic construction critically informs the individual about the constraints and possibilities of social life (Daiute 2010; 2014). The interest of discursive psychology is in how language does these things and in how it is implicated in the delineation and creation of knowledge of self and others and in the creation of social realities (Bloome, Stuart-Faris, Carter, Christian, Madrid & Otto (2008). Recent efforts within the discipline have extended research objectives beyond the elucidation of patterns of discourse to significant consideration of the social-relational and ideological consequences of such patterning (Gergen, 2001). In this view, discourse may be viewed to function as attempts to keep vulnerable understandings in good repair because the message and its recipient are both always in the making and subject to change and development. (Shotter and Gergen, 1989).

## Voices in Dialogue

Lakoff and Johnson ((1980) contended that understandings of self are in continuous reconfiguration through interactions with others in social worlds. The self is both social and dialogical as it can only come into being through mutually allowable discourse (Day & Tappan, 1996). In his (1929/1973) analysis of Dostoevsky's *Poetics*, Bakhtin explained the concept of dialogism stating that personal meaning, such as a thought, must be embodied before it can engage dialogically. Once embodied in a "voice" it can engender utterances which can then be meaningfully related to the utterances of other "voices." In essence, Bakhtinian "voice" is a dynamic construct of relationship representing a speaking consciousness (Holquist and Emerson, 1981). Only when a thought becomes embodied in a "voice" and in a personal position in relationship to other "voices," do dialogical relationships emerge.

Just as the novelist expresses a position by speaking through characters, the self is demonstrated in the ventriloquation of the voices of others. Bakhtin proposed that the self acquires both its aspect of individuality and its unique life course only because of the specific others it encounters and is afforded the opportunity to ventriloquate (Wortham, 2001). The voices of dialogism combine not into a singular voice, but in unique patterns of combination and assimilation. By this account, Bakhtin offered resolution to apparently contradictory arguments for a self that is both unique and dialogical (Clark and Holquist, 1984).

Bakhtin (1935/1981) explained how the self is shaped dialogically in his description of "centripetal" forces of internality and "centrifugal" forces of externality which render the self neither entirely psychological nor entirely social. He depicted the self as a creative entity, "the

hero of its own story,” ventriloquating others in complex combinations and engaging in struggles against monologic discourse (Wortham, 2001).

Using the Bakhtinian polyphonic novel as metaphor of the self, Hermans, Kempen, and Van Loon (1992) extended this understanding to narratives as expressions of an intricate, ever changing dialogue among the many voices of the self. In narrative, these many voices interrelate, each of a different nature and evocative of separate domains, their dominance and subordination in continual creation and dissolution in response to the demands of contextualized experience. Hermans et al. argued that selves must be situated in relational contexts for dialogism to emerge because the multi-vocal self reflects voices appropriated from society and from significant others. Thus, while selves function dialogically, they arise socially through experience, and are realized in a “society of mind” where voiced positions are involved in interchange with multiple “I” positions. The multi-vocal self is thereby constructed at the nexus of the personal and the social as a narrative of relationships (Shotter, 1997).

In experiencing differing cultures, individuals are engaged in inescapable conversations with multiple social worlds (Tappan, 1998). As student veterans grapple with experience across military and academic cultures, contradictions may occur between “I” positions of internality and the voices from differing external interactions engendering uncertainty, ambivalence, or conflict. Centripetal forces of unity and centrifugal forces of multi-voicedness may contest each other within the self, creating both narrative coherence and counter-coherence. When cultural shift and conflict form the nexus of experience, contradictions within dominant voices may function as critical mechanisms of higher order thinking, inspiring reflection and action to mediate knowledge of the self (Daiute, 2010).

## **Narration as a Social Relational Process**

Competence in the use of narrative appears early in development and may be regarded as a cultural universal, with narrative structure being a characteristic of human consciousness (Mancuso, 1986). Narrative process is organizational as it gives meaning to temporally configured events by connecting them as part of a plotted structure (Polkinghorne, 1991). Schiebe (1986) argued that narrative structure is antithetical to stasis and that narratives must describe individual movement through particular cultural environments, each with distinctive configurations of beliefs and values. The ways in which narrative events are situated historically and socially influences how they are interpreted (Polkinghorne, 1991).

Vygotsky (1978) described language and symbol systems as cultural tools for mediating relations between selves and society, a tool with which to both interrogate and understand the world. Daiute (2014) identified narration as a social-relational process for sense-making whose meaning resides within its expressive structure. Narration performs a critical function in not only organizing self-understandings but also in opening a window onto human developmental processes (Sarbin, 1986). An affordance of the use of language in narrative activity is its power to transform generally thoughtless and automatic focus on things experienced into a deep reflective process (Taylor, 1989). The communicative complexity and critical positioning which emerge from this reflective engagement in narrative activity offer access to individual developmental processes (Daiute, 2014).

Despite its emphasis on authenticity and voice in narrative inquiry, the approach to narrative characterized by Daiute (2014) as narrative report must struggle with a theory and method which conceptualizes narratives as simulacra of real world experiences thought to underlie their telling. The approach isolates narrative content from its form, employing content



analysis as the analytic tool to examine the literal constituents of the narrative and provide some linkage to the development of essentially researcher-constructed themes. But much of the meaning in narrative may lie not in its literal constituents, but in the enactment of knowledge and meaning through its linguistic and expressive features. The message of narrative is often contained not only in what is told, but in how it is told, and the participant understandings that researchers so ardently seek may go unexpressed, be overtly denied, or silenced in the social relational process of narration in which participants are always sensitive to their multiple audiences.

The narrative report approach also places much emphasis on narrative coherence. But narration is much more a process of cultural mediation guiding participant perception, interpretation, and an account of development and not a simple reporting of events. Emphasis on the importance in the finding of coherence may inhibit the acknowledgement of diversity and conflict in the narrative of individuals and limit understanding of the potential for critique and development arising out of such complexity.

The narrative genre offers access to what individual narrators think needs critical focus and how they make sense of and negotiate these exigent circumstances (Daiute & Lucic, 2010). The circumstances that participants find of worth to narrate are generally those which challenge them greatly, substantially gratify them, or those that serve some other notable function at the time of telling. Narrator choices of what to narrate may be implicit or intuitive, but dynamic processes utilize these problematized narratives to work things through and out.

Appreciation for greater interest in narrative inquiry in psychology must be tempered by the recognition that this interest brings with it need for a theory and method beyond that of

narrative report and content analysis. If the meaning of narrative is in language and language is a social phenomenon, then any meaning gained from it will always be embedded in social relational situations and dilemmas needing to be addressed through the analytic process. In recognition of this necessity, Daiute (2014) offered a systematic theory of narrative design and analysis centered on the dynamic processes through which narrative inquiry might address activity meaning systems such as the transition which is the focus of this study. In this theoretical orientation, narratives are defined and analyzed as activities; they are seen as always doing something, whether helping the narrator make sense of something or adjust to or challenge the contexts and realities of his or her life. Narrators are always doing something in the narrative situation as well, choosing to offer differing presentation of self depending on context and audience.

Bakhtin (1986) indicated that narrators must address multiple interlocutors both proximal and distal. Daiute (2014) expresses this constraint as ‘happenings between narratives or between texts’ which influence how narrators consider and select what to narrate in light of their perceptions of what might appeal to audiences and allow them to avoid taboo topics. Because of the demands inherent in these issues of self-presentation and the necessity to address multiple interlocutors, narrators enact their meanings through linguistic devices and through narrative structure in the ways they set out the plots of their narratives.

Understanding narrative as the site of activity brings the interaction of the individual and the social to center as an appropriate focus of inquiry. Of primary interest to this study, is an understanding of how student veteran narratives depict individual understandings of experience across the cultures of the military and academia and how these understandings are interactive with external institutional multi-centered discourses. The inclusion of the public discursive

positions of the cultures within which these interactions take place offers greater understanding of the ways in which the narratives of student veterans interact with these discourses and may take up, resist, and transform their meanings.

### **Transition as an Activity-meaning System**

This study is designed to consider the transition of student veterans from military to academic life as an activity-meaning system. Daiute (2014) identifies an activity-meaning system as one in which the unit of analysis is the interaction of cross-context relationships and perspectives among stakeholder actors having varying interests, these stakeholders being both persons and institutions. The activity-meaning system of student veteran transition examined herein addresses the dialogic interaction of the institutional perspectives of the military, veterans advocacy organizations, public higher education, and of student veterans who hold their own unique perspectives on their relationships to these institutions and organizations. The design thus seeks to avoid privileging either personal voice or institutional discourse in its consideration of how the process of meaning-making is integrated within the activity-meaning system of transition.

### **The Role of Values in an Activity-meaning System**

Rogoff (1990) defined values as specific ways of knowing, feeling, and acting arising from environmental, economic, and social conditions. Daiute (2014) elaborated this description as culturally specific understandings of what is important and how to act in accordance with this knowledge. In such a view, both the activities of individuals and the policies promoted by institutions and organizations are regarded as embodiments and enactments of values.

The dialogical self is scaffolded upon judgments of which values and goals are socially appropriate and useful (Adams & Marshall, 1996). With time and activity in varying contexts or cultures, individuals' value sets diversify enabling them to select or combine from among differing available culture-sensitive understandings. Abbey (2004) indicated that the dialogical self is, over time, increasing ordered by principles reflecting a sense of which understandings are important, or alternatively expressed, by what it means to lead and live a good life. But individuals develop enmeshed in social landscapes of competing discourses inscribed with inequalities of power relations (Gregg, 1991) and it is within and under these conditions, that a dialogically-created self constructs the present and imagines future possible selves. The values promoted by social institutions holding greater or lesser power direct the construction of the matrices within which participating conscious social actors make sense of their experiences (Eagleton, 2007)

### **Why This Study Matters**

With the continuing economic downturn, student veterans, buoyed by the financial incentives offered by the Post-9/11 GI Bill are becoming an ever growing presence on college campuses, particularly those of public institutions, throughout the country. It is probable that their participation in higher education will engender changes in their understandings of themselves. Student veterans, will, however, not simply participate in academic life, but will also play a significant role in changing academia as they engage in its practices.

The aforementioned lack of recent quantitative data describing student veterans and investigating their academic transition, retention, and completion rates is, when paired with, until quite recently, disinterest on the part of qualitative research in student veteran transition into higher education, an indicator that this population has been underserved by both quantitative and

qualitative research efforts. This socio-culturally and discursively-based study of their transitional development was completed in the hope that it will contribute both to qualitative literature on adult developmental transitions in general and to the nascent qualitative literature on student veteran transitional development and perhaps prove of mutual benefit to both student veterans and the academy.

## **Chapter III**

### **Methods**

#### **Research Design**

This study explores the transition of student veterans of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan from the culture, discourses, and practices of military life to those of academic life in public undergraduate higher education. I began this inquiry in the belief that the cultures of the military and of higher education are oppositional in nature and provide fertile ground for conflict in personal meaning-making, with the military espousing goals of structured action in respectful response to authority and higher education espousing goals of independent reflection and critical thinking in preparation for informed participation as citizens in a democracy.

I believed that participation in both cultures would lend shape to how student veterans would understand their past and present and imagine their futures. The ultimate goal of the study is in-depth understanding of complexities of meaning across these particular cultures of opposition.

#### **Research Questions**

1. How do student veterans make meaning of their transitions from military to academic life?
2. Do student veteran perceptions of conflict in their shifts from military to academic life shape their narratives?
  - a. How do they define and enact each culture?
  - b. What are the similarities and differences in their accounts of their military and academic experiences?

3. What values do the military, veteran advocacy groups, and academic institutions express in their cultural products?
4. How do student veterans uptake, resist, or transform these expressed values in their narratives?
5. How will a socio-cultural and discursive exploration of student veteran struggles with and management of transition and its potential conflicts contribute to our knowledge of adult development?
6. What implications for future psychological research and educational practice will emerge from such knowledge?
7. What implications will emerge from this research that might contribute to our understanding of other adult developmental transitions, such as military to work transitions?

### **Research Sample**

The student veteran participants interviewed in this study were recruited from the nation's largest urban public university which encompasses eleven senior colleges, seven community colleges, and eight specialized or graduate schools. It is estimated that over three thousand student veterans are presently in attendance across these campuses, about two-thirds of whom are full-time students (<http://www.theticker.org>). The university is expected to aggressively recruit students from among the thousands of veterans now returning to its geographical area due to the troop drawdown now in progress in the Middle East.

When this study was in the proposal stage, a personal contact was made with the then Director of the Office of Veterans Affairs for the university. He stated that, among the student veteran population at the undergraduate level, approximately sixty percent were attending the

system's senior colleges and forty percent were attending the community colleges. He indicated that most of these student veterans were between the ages of twenty-four and twenty-seven and that approximately twenty-five percent of them were women. He reported that data were not collected by the university on the racial composition of the student veteran population nor on student veteran marital status or number of dependents.

He further indicated that the majority of student veterans were Army veterans, the next greatest number being Navy veterans, and the next being veterans of the Marine Corps. He stated that the favored concentrations or majors for undergraduate student veterans were business, engineering, nursing, information technology, and criminal justice. Although an urban sample, the available demographics for the university's undergraduate student veteran population and the particulars of their academic enrollment appear to map fairly well onto the limited national demographic data available about student veterans as previously described in the introduction to this study.

A decision to sample across both senior and community colleges within the system was made in the belief that distinctively different student veteran transitional experiences might occur across these levels of higher education. The community colleges considered as potential recruitment sites, as open admissions institutions, were theorized to act as bridge institutions to close a gap between secondary and higher education. The goals and purposes they promote were seen as being, of necessity, more pragmatic than those of senior colleges, and oriented towards meeting a greater variety of educational needs including developmental instruction, career and vocational training, as well as liberal arts and general education (Cohen and Brawer, 2003). The theorized differing educational mandates and student body characteristics of the senior and community college level institutions were believed to raise the possibility of disparate



research results across the institutions along with differing implications for psychological research and educational practice. Based on this belief, efforts at participant recruitment were made across both types of institutions in an attempt to make the study as broadly representative as possible, remaining mindful, however, of the study's exploratory nature and the limited number of participants to be sought for enrollment.

### **Recruitment Process**

Recruitment efforts were delayed by the necessity for a six month process of negotiation to obtain both University-wide Institutional Review Board approval and separate approvals of each of the colleges selected as recruitment sites. In the end, only one community college of the four intended community college sites remained resistant to recruitment of student veterans from its campus and recruitment efforts were approved by the University-wide and local Institutional Review Boards at four senior colleges and three community colleges. Recruitment efforts at these seven institutions included on campus, in-class recruitment appeals, recruitment visits to student veteran clubs and organizations providing supportive services to student veterans, and distribution of the approved recruitment flyer through physical postings and over listservs.

Twelve student veterans who met the study qualifications of being first-time, full-time students who had completed at least two semesters of undergraduate education and a prior full tour of duty in military service in either Iraq or Afghanistan, were ultimately recruited. All interviews were conducted in a space affording privacy at the researcher's academic institution. All twelve of those recruited appeared for interview, gave their signed consent, completed the interview process, and were given a research stipend. They chose the pseudonyms by which they are identified in the participant matrix below.

Table 1: Participant Demographic Matrix

	AGE	GENDER	ETHNICITY	ENROLLMENT	SERVICE	STATUS
DANIEL	26	MALE	WHITE	COMMUNITY COLLEGE, PSYCHOLOGY	ARMY	SINGLE
EDUARDO	23	MALE	LATINO	COMMUNITY COLLEGE, UNDECIDED	ARMY	SINGLE
IZZY	24	MALE	LATINO	COMMUNITY COLLEGE, CRIMINAL JUSTICE	AIR FORCE	SINGLE
HENNY	28	MALE	LATINO	COMMUNITY COLLEGE, CRIMINAL JUSTICE	ARMY	SINGLE
HEAVENLY	41	FEMALE	LATINO	COMMUNITY COLLEGE, PARAMEDIC	ARMY	TWO CHILDREN
JN	25	MALE	ASIAN	SENIOR COLLEGE, BUSINESS	ARMY	SINGLE
JOHN	29	MALE	WHITE	SENIOR COLLEGE, CRIMINAL JUSTICE	MARINES	MARRIED
KENNY	25	MALE	BLACK	COMMUNITY COLLEGE, CRIMINAL JUSTICE	ARMY	SINGLE
KH	40	MALE	BLACK	COMMUNITY COLLEGE, MUSIC	ARMY	MARRIED, FOUR CHILDREN
MARINA	29	FEMALE	LATINA	SENIOR COLLEGE NURSING	NAVY	THREE CHILDREN
NICK	33	MALE	WHITE	SENIOR COLLEGE, NURSING	ARMY	SINGLE
TRINITY	33	MALE	BLACK	COMMUNITY COLLEGE, MUSIC	ARMY	MARRIED, ONE CHILD

## **Protocol**

The twelve participants responded to questions about their military and academic experiences and to the conversational measures listed below:

What made you decide to become a service member? What was it like? What surprised you most about being in the military? Has being a service member changed the way you see yourself? If so, how has it changed you?

What were your best and worst educational experiences before coming to college?

What made you decide to become a college student? What is it like? What surprised you most about academic life? Has being a student changed the way you see yourself? If so, how has it changed you?

Was your life as a service member different from your life now as a student?

How do you see your future?

Is there anything else important that I should have asked?

What do you think I really wanted to know?

Following a protocol developed by Raggatt (1998), all participants were then asked to identify two figures that had positively influenced them and two figures that had negatively impacted them. For both the positive and negative figure identifications, they were prompted to choose figures from two separate domains, one from their personal lives and the other from either public life or fiction, and further prompted to say why these figures had strongly inspired or deterred them, occupied their thoughts, or guided their actions. Participants were asked to

imagine conversations with these figures and to identify the settings and mood of these imagined interactions.

Participants were also asked to recreate or imagine a similar set of conversations, one with an authority figure from their military service and another with an authority figure from their academic life. Participants were prompted, “Thinking back on your experiences in the military, please tell me about a conversation you have had or imagine one you would like to have had with someone about you in the chain of command.” They were then similarly prompted, “Thinking about your experience as a student, please tell me about a conversation you have had or imagine one you would like to have had with a figure in authority at your college, e.g., an instructor or administrator.”

Finally, participants were asked to respond to a print military recruitment advertisement showing either a mother and daughter dyad (for the women participants) or a father and son dyad (for the men participants) depicted in the advertisement as in discussion over whether the daughter or son in the ad should join the military or attend college and to create their own conversation between the figures about the issue.

### **Interviews with Participants from Multiple Perspectives.**

After multiple readings of the narratives of the participants, the researcher selected the question asking participants to compare their experience of their lives as service members with their experience of their lives as students to develop a taxonomy of expressions of these experiences across the participants. Both the multiple readings and the development of the preliminary taxonomy were performed to offer assurance that the subsequent selection of participant narrative excerpts by the researcher from across all the questions offering multiple

perspectives in all the interviews did not violate the integrity of the meanings expressed by the each participant in each of the interviews. In this interpretive study, the researcher, as the situated listener and later reader, selected these excerpts as those most evocative for her of each participant's experience of each culture. The excerpts selected in this manner comprise the student veteran narrative materials utilized in the plot analysis which follows in the next chapter and are partial narrative data in the values analysis in the following chapter.

The first analytic chapter reports the results of a study of plotment as found in the aforementioned narratives excerpts. This analysis of plot structure involves the identification of an initiating event, a focal point or story pivot or conflict, and a resolution or the identification of a strategy to move the plot toward resolution. In the operation of plot structure, the social and cultural contexts in which actions take place were theorized to influence the narrator's understanding of these events.

### **Review of Institutional Websites and Published Materials**

Institutional values were identified from their expressions in public discourse documents of the military, veteran advocacy organizations, and institutions of higher education including higher education documents directly addressing student veterans as current participants in institutional activities. Chosen for this sample of culturally-determined materials or products were Armed Services website recruitment appeals and a military training manual; the websites of public institutions of higher education as they addressed their general missions and as they directly addressed the inclusion of student veterans in academic life; and the websites, mission statements, and publications of veteran advocacy groups offering services to veterans. An analysis of explicit and implicit values in these documents was performed followed by an examination of the narratives that student veteran participants used to make sense of and

negotiate their transitions. Observation was then made of how the participants positioned themselves in taking up, resisting, or transforming the identified institutional and organizational values in their narratives. The following table illustrates the study’s conception of the activity meaning system of transition and organizes the cultural products whose analysis is offered to increase understanding of the dynamic interactions amongst the stakeholders.

Table 2: Activity Meaning System Design for Student Veteran Transition

(\*Narrative analysis process and results are based on Daiute (2014, p. 64).)

Dimension of Activity and Meaning	Global-societal Sphere of Activity	Relevant Institutional Actor-stakeholder	Other Institutional Actor-stakeholder	More Interactions among Actor-stakeholders	Individual Actor-stakeholders
Research Focus and Relevance of Stakeholders	Student Veteran Transition from Military to Academic Life	Military	Higher Education	Veterans Advocacy	Student Veterans Negotiating Transition
Relevant Stakeholders and Activities		Armed Services	Public Colleges and Universities*	Veterans Organizations, Advocacy Groups, Private Consultants	Student Veteran Participants
Stakeholder Expressions		Mission Statements and Websites; Military Training Manual	Mission Statements and Website Material Directly Addressing Veterans	Mission Statements and Websites, Publications	Participant Narratives about Military and Academic Life
Stakeholder Interactions				<Mediates Military and Academia>	
Analyses		Values Analysis	Values Analysis	Values Analysis	Values Analysis; Narrative Plot Analysis

\*Seven of the public institutions of higher education selected were identified from a 2011 report from the Pat Tillman Foundation as among those optimally responsive to the needs of student veterans for support. The public institution where the data were collected is also included in the sample.

Only public institutions have been chosen to sample as they are the most frequent choice of student veterans upon entry into higher education (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2010).

### **Method of Locating Values**

A value was determined to be in evidence when it was explicitly expressed in the text of a document or in implicit expression based on assumption by the institutional stakeholder of what constituted important information to be disseminated either to a general audience or the student veteran audience in particular. Expressions of both explicit and implicit values were coded using ATLAS.ti7 with the purpose of examining these expressions both within and across the text of all documents of all the institutions sampled. Once coded, expressions were then organized and grouped together under the rubric of a code family; these code families once created constituted a specific value, whether the value's expressions were located in the text of documents representing only a single institution, several institutions, or across all those sampled.

This analytic process allowed an exploration of the negotiation of meaning as represented in values across all the institutional actor stakeholders in the selected cultural products. The analysis demonstrated whether there was a uniformity of values across stakeholders or significant tensions among them, thereby identifying both shared and differing meanings within the system. This analysis later informed the examination of which value sets student veterans addressed and how they expressed or silenced them in their personal narratives.

## **Reliability**

On 3/9/12, the focal points and resolutions or resolution strategies that I had identified for fourteen of the twenty four student veteran military and academic narrative excerpts were reviewed with my advisor. At that time, one hundred percent agreement was reached on both structural features across these fourteen narrative excerpts. A recent values analysis by Daiute, Kovace-Cerovic, Todorova, Jokic, & Ataman (2013) found ninety-two percent agreement on sentence-level coding. On 1/22/14, a member of this group performed a reliability check on ten percent of this study's values-coded data, resulting in an eighty-eight percent rate of agreement on the coding as presented.



## **Chapter IV:**

### **Within Person Cross-culture Results**

#### **Plot Analysis**

Riessman (2003) warned of the limitations inherent in regarding narratives as transparencies for thematic content and Daiute (2004) warned of the loss of meaning which occurs when narratives are analyzed separated from their forms of expression. In this chapter's narrative plot analysis, I remain mindful of these cautions and explore my participants' narratives beyond the referential meaning conveyed in their words to examine what is implicit within the structure of what they have said. I use the tool of plot in a dynamic narrative analysis (Daiute, 2014) to consider narration as a social relational cultural device and to uncover both explicit and implicit meanings based on understandings of how language works.

#### **Plot as a Tool of Analysis**

Plot analysis offers a systematic way to identify the deep structure of narrative meaning which may go undetected in a surface analysis of only what is said (Daiute, 2010). Bruner (1986) described this juxtaposition of structure and meaning in narrative as landscapes of action interwoven with landscapes of consciousness. Because plot, its elements and organization, is not consciously planned by narrators, access to implicit meanings not immediately available to narrator awareness, is opened to examination through consideration of plot structure. As narrative emplotment is commonly accepted in everyday life as an expression of a narrator's perception and understanding of life events, such acceptance may be productively extended to its use as an analytic tool to explore meaning in narrative inquiry.

## **Emplotment**

Referencing literary theory, (Ricoeur, 1983/1984) described emplotment as a method of sequencing temporal markers of narrative expression to convey the significance of the narrative to the teller. Plot describes the essential framework of narrative and orients the listener towards the important issues that the narrator is addressing. Plots are both material and dynamic, connecting the narrator's physical and social environments to the ways in which the narrator perceives them (Daiute, 2010). They also function as vehicles for self-presentation as narrators use them to respond to expectations of and injunctions against what may or may not be said.

Plot structure most simply time-orders events from start to middle to end, constructing a scaffold with sufficient flexibility for the narrator to enact experience as he or she chooses. Typically, a plot moves a protagonist through rising, problematized initiating events to a climatic pivot or focal point and then, through the falling action of resolution or resolution strategies, to an end.

## **Participant Narratives across Contexts**

I am using the dynamic narrative strategy of plot analysis to examine my participants' narrative understandings and self-presentations of their transitions from military to academic life. This approach enables an exploration of the meanings of individual participant narrators in both contexts as well as a comparison of the similarities and differences in those meanings across contexts. The twenty-four narrative excerpts, along with their analyzed climatic pivots or focal points and resolutions or resolution strategies, are drawn from the complete interviews of my twelve student veteran participants and, as previously described, have been chosen as those most evocative of each participant's negotiation of both contexts.

## Example of a Plot Analysis across Contexts

### Marina's Military Narrative

Well, the one that actually popped into my head right now is, um ... when I was in, in like Iraq, Kuwait—like I was between those two, I don't remember which one I was actually in at the time—but that's when, um, I took the advancement exam. So I was actually an E4 when I got there. So I took the exam and I made E5. I also got my SCWS pin which is the Seabees Combat Warfare pin; um, so I qualified for that. And um—that, um ... that I, um ... that I know all my stuff for combat and stuff like that. Yes, but you have to, like, you know, take a test, go before a board and draw up, like a fire plan and do all these things. So it's, it's kind of hard and not ... everyone does it; it looks good if you do it. And I was juggling that and studying for advance at the same time. And everyone told me not to, but I did it anyway—and I got them both. Um, so ... then I get my evaluation—'cause when you make, when you're advanced, you know, they give you like a eval—a frocking eval is what it's called—and when I looked at my eval, all I had was 'must promote' and the highest you can get is, um, EP which is 'early promote.' So, I see, 'must promote' and I'm thinking, 'must promote,' 'must promote!' And I went up to, to my chief; I'm like, I'm like, "Chief, I, I don't understand; how am I getting a 'must promote?' I advanced, I got my SCWS pin, I did everything I could do, and yet all I'm getting is a 'must promote?' And I just didn't understand; I'm like, short of me walking on water, I don't know what else I could do! (*Focal Point*)

So he, he explained to me how the eval system works. Again, I made rank very quickly, so I didn't understand; all I knew is I wanted the x in EP box; that's all I need. But he explained to me how, how things ... how it works. And I mean, 'cause now that I was an E5, these evals are going to be really important for E6. So he said, "You always want to show progression, not

degression.” He’s like, “I’m not saying that your next eval you’re going to get lower.” He goes, “But if we put you, like, in an EP now and for some reason your first real eval is MP, a ‘must promote’—that doesn’t look good. But if we put you as a ‘must promote’ now, and then next time around you’re at least a ‘must promote’ or if not an EP, that looks better; it shows that you’ve grown in your leadership and in your roles and stuff like that.” So that kind of made sense, but ... I still didn’t like it, but—it made sense. I understood, you know, where he was coming from. Plus he did mention, he, he’s like, “You’re still very junior. Regardless you have the rank,” he said, “You don’t really know what what’s going on.” [laughing] Which is true, because by that point, I had only been there like two years? And I was already an E5, which other people, it takes them like years to get to that point. So he wanted me to ... to kind of go slower. You know, not just go jumping—he’s like, “You’re FLYING through,” he’s like, “just relax.”

Yes! You know, and it, it—I know he wasn’t doing it to like, hold me back; he just wanted me to ... you know, to take my time, to actually properly grow as a leader rather than just having to be thrown into it and go, “Oops, now what?” You know? So I was like, “Okay, okay,” and then I took the opportunity to tell him, “You know, Chief, I also want more responsibilities; I, I want to do financials.” And financials was really big in my command; like everyone wanted to do it, ‘cause everyone knew: you did financials, you got EPs, right? So ... um, I didn’t think he’d give it to me, ‘cause I had just put on E5 ... um, and there were other people senior to me who wanted it. Um, but he gave it to me. And that pissed off some people ... but I was like “Yay, me!” And I’m glad that he gave me that opportunity to prove myself—and I did a really good job. I got awards out of it; they sent me to other commands to help them with the financials ‘cause I just did really good. Like, I took it and I improved on the program and

everything; so everyone loved me ...when it came to the job. And, um, I'm thankful that he took a chance on me, because he could have been, like, "No ... you, you don't know what you're doing! We're going to put someone who, who knows a little bit more." But I told him, I took the initiative to tell him what I wanted to do, and listened to what he told me. And I think he saw that I was taking a step in the right direction, because I'm asking now, "Okay, I want more responsibilities; help me grow, basically. I can't grow if you don't give me something. And, so, I think that's why he said, "Okay." and he gave it to me. (*Resolution*) So I thought of that, that just popped into my head.

### **Marina's Academic Narrative**

Okay, 'cause I'm taking religion which is the nature of religion. And ... my professor ... she's very knowledgeable. But ... I feel that if you ... don't see things the way she does, you're wrong. So, I would like to go up to her and tell her, "Professor ... why ... these things are not math—you know, two plus two equals four; yes, there no way around it: does it really equal five? Could it be three? No, it is what it is, But in religion you're reading, like, old passages, you're reading creation myths from other cultures; why is it that I can't see that THIS is like THAT, but only you saying it's this, therefore if I don't see it this way, I'm wrong?" Because when people raise their hand and they say what they think, she'll go, like "No, No." and then she'll pick on someone else—and then it's like, holy crap! You know? I don't like to raise my hand, 'cause now I'll feel dumb; you know, you told me no, and ... um.... So I understand, like, what she's saying; it makes valid, it, it makes lots of sense. You know, but , however, I sometimes, I see things a little bit different, or I get something different—you know, it's kind of like with literature; it's open to interpretation. I believe religion should be the same way, you know? Because you can't impose your beliefs on a class, regardless of what's written. You know ...

that why it's open to interpretation.**(Focal Point)** So I, I wish that I could tell her that; however, she, I don't want her to fail me or anything like that—so I couldn't say that. But I wish I could tell her, like ... you know, let us have our opinion! **(Resolution Strategy)** You know, maybe we could have some new insight and maybe you didn't, you know, see the first time.

Examination of the plot structures of Marina's narratives reveal that, although both plots pivot on conflict with an authority figure over a desired goal, they resolve very differently. In the military context, Marina narrates the focal point:

And I went up to, to my chief; I'm like, I'm like, "Chief, I, I don't understand; how am I getting a 'must promote?' I advanced, I got my SCWS pin, I did everything I could do, and yet all I'm getting is a 'must promote?' And I just didn't understand; I'm like, short of me walking on water, I don't know what else I could do!

She resolves her disappointment in not receiving an evaluation from her chief that she feels is reflective of her achievements:

But I told him, I took the initiative to tell him what I wanted to do, and listened to what he told me. And I think he saw that I was taking a step in the right direction, because I'm asking now, "Okay, I want more responsibilities; help me grow, basically. I can't grow if you don't give me something. And, so, I think that's why he said, "Okay." and he gave it to me.

In the academic context, Marina narrates the focal point:

You know, but, however, I sometimes, I see things a little bit different, or I get something different—you know, it's kind of like with literature; it's open to interpretation. I believe

religion should be the same way, you know? Because you can't impose your beliefs on a class, regardless of what's written. You know ... that why it's open to interpretation.

She attempts to resolve her anger and frustration that her interpretations are not accepted by her professor passively:

So I, I wish that I could tell her that; however, she, I don't want her to fail me or anything like that—so I couldn't say that. But I wish I could tell her, like ... you know, let us have our opinion!

As Sladkova (2008) found in her study of adults undergoing a different type of transition, narrative activities across contexts allow individuals to express differing knowledge of settings and differing self presentations (Daiute, 2010). Marina narrates the military context as a setting whose structure affords her a sense of confidence and flexibility in negotiating with an authority figure for a desired outcome. In an interaction with context, in the academic setting, she narrates herself as vulnerable and potentially defeated. She is unable to confront her instructor with her disappointment at not being heard and is unable to embark on a negotiation with her professor towards a better understanding. Paradoxically, it is in the military context, generally considered the more restrictive, that Maria present herself as resourceful and agentic, free to seek her goal.

### **Analysis of Focal Issues and Resolutions**

In this analysis, I focus on two elements of plot structure, first, the climatic pivot or focal point and, then, the resolution or resolution strategies offered by narrators to organize their plots. The climatic pivot or focal point is particularly significant as it moves the listener to joint attention with the narrator to what is critical in what is being said. The ability to jointly attend to an object, present from early in our social development, allows the direction of mutual attention

to what is important about an object of shared regard (Tomasello, 2005). The focal point also marks the end of initiating actions within the narrative and presages the beginning of the resolution or resolution strategies to be offered by the narrator. The resolutions and resolution strategies, ways of bringing about narrative outcome, are equally significant as they allow narrators to interweave past events and present understandings of experience to connect events in ways that make them meaningful to both themselves and their listeners. The tables below illustrate focal issues expressed by the participants in each context and then categories of focal issues compiled through observing the similarities and differences in the focal points of the participant narrative excerpts across both contexts. These tables are then followed by a description of the categories and the focal points on which they are based.



Table 3: Focal Issues by Participant

Participant	Military Culture	Academic Culture
Daniel	Surreal nature of combat	Threat to success
Eduardo	Betrayal/misrepresentation	Critical thinking
Heaven	Betrayal/misrepresentation	Individuality
Henny	His lack of respect	Others' lack of caring
Izzy	Abstract learning	Threat to self-regard
JN	Invulnerability	Threat to success
John	Statelessness	Others lack of discipline and respect
Kenny	Respect through status	Surprising success
KH	Respect through status	Threat to success
Marina	Negotiation of status	Being silenced
Nick	Death of a friend	Others' lack of discipline and respect
Trinity	Threat to life	Threat to success

Table 4: Focal Issues across Contexts

(X Indicates the Context in Which the Issue Appears)

Focal Issues	Participant	Military	Academic
Respect	Henny Kenny KH	X X X	
Deception	Daniel Eduardo Heaven	X X X	
Alienation	Henny John Marina Nick		X X X X
Mismatched Struggling	Daniel Izzy JN KH Trinity		X X X X X
Clarification of Self	Eduardo Heaven Izzy JN Kenny Marina Nick Trinity	X X  X X X	X X   X
Reciprocal Obligation	John	X	

## **Identification of Focal Issues across Contexts**

The patterning of focal issues which emerges through observation and is tabulated directly above indicates that the issues about which participant narratives pivot are not common across contexts, but context-sensitive in nature. Focal points pivoting upon issues of respect, deception, and reciprocal obligation appear exclusively in participant narration about the military context while focal points pivoting upon issues of alienation and mismatched struggling appear exclusively in participant narration about the academic context. The focal points of only one issue are split across contexts, those of the issue of clarification of self or finding of one's voice, with a predominance of mention in participant narration about the military context. Below, I offer a description of the dimensions of expression of focal issues offered by participants in both contexts.

### **Military Context Focal Issue of Respect**

In the first of the two most frequently identified issues in the military context, three narrators organize their plots around the focal issue of respect, or deferential regard, and use their narration to describe a range of situations in which there is either failure to offer respect, there is disrespect shown, or there is a delayed affordance of respect.

Henny tells of how his immaturity leads him to fail to recognize the importance of respecting authority:

“Cause at the end of the day, no matter—when I was still seventeen, eighteen ... it still didn't click in my head, *let me respect these figures*. It was, *I'm from New York, I don't care*.”

Kenny tells of how his appearing in uniform prompts some civilians to show him disrespect:

“And then there are those people, you know, that see you and they curse you out, but—you know.”

KH tells of how a protégé’s being in uniform affords him the respect ordinarily denied him because of racial discrimination:

“They’ll see this black man in a uniform, and it’s like, ‘Oh, thank you, son!’ You know?”

### **Military Context Focal Issue of Deception**

In the second of the two most frequently identified issues in the military context, three narrators organize their plots around the issue of deception, deceit, or trickery as it is manifested in outright lying, misrepresentation, and illusion.

Eduardo tells of the deceit practiced by a military recruiter who promised him construction as a military occupational specialty:

“But, in reality, when I went to training for it, um ... I ended up making bombs and this kind of stuff and doing mines, like clearing mine fields, and I thought, “Oh, this is not what I want to do.””

Heaven tells of how she feels the justification for the war in which she participated was distorted by the President: “He has an obli—as a commander in chief, you have an obli—obligation to make sure that when you send troops, and, and the death rate could be potentially high—like in this war in these two wars—that, you know—we have a right to the truth!”

Daniel tells of the behavior of a dying enemy combatant whom he regards as having illusory beliefs:

“And it’s like, I’m thinking to myself, like ... ‘You probably think you’re going to be some big hero ... you now ... you’re going to get your virgins in heaven—or whatever is your, your motivation in this, to do this. But you’re going to be dead and none of that is going to be true.’”

### **Military Context Focal Issue of Reciprocal Obligation**

A single narrator organizes his military context plot around the issue of reciprocal obligation of self and country or appreciation rendered for protection offered:

John alludes to the harm becoming a stateless person caused a beloved family member displaced in a previous war and chronicles his relative’s efforts to find a greatly appreciated refuge in this country:

“So that’s where my grandfather became a refugee ... he couldn’t go to Poland, ‘cause he’d get arrested, so he, he had some traveling to do then.”

### **Academic Context Focal Issue of Mismatched Struggling**

In the most frequently identified issue in the academic context, five narrators organize their plots around the issue of mismatched struggling, their efforts to meet unfamiliar or overwhelming academic challenges. The manifestations of the issue include description of the

pressures of testing, expression of doubt about having the necessary academic ability to succeed, and reflection on the meanings of academic failure.

Daniel tells of being interrupted while taking a test by the entry of another student:

“And, uh, I’m like, I’m like, ‘Hey! We’re taking a test—what are you doing?’ She’s screwing me up now. I’m like, I’m like, I had a thought process going on, you know?”

JN tells of his discomfort with academic testing:

“Um ... testing—it’s just the fact they call it tests ... it kind of stresses me out.”

Izzy tells of doubt about his academic ability:

“And I got in, you know, and that—I’m still like ... I don’t know, it’s like ... it doesn’t make a difference, you know? Yeah.”

KH tells of an academic failure:

“Like, um, college algebra and trig—not my friend. Not my friend at all. So, I’m going to have to retake that class. [laughing] You know?”

Trinity tells of why he attempts to overcome academic challenges:

“So ... it’s kind of frustrating, but, you know, I know I’ve got to do it because I want to at least to have a degree, just for my son could see that Daddy have a college—no matter what, even it’s a two-year.”

## Academic Context Focal Issue of Alienation

In the second most frequently identified issue in the academic context, four narrators organize their plots around the issue of alienation or estrangement with expressions of isolation, self-distancing from others, feeling silenced, and feeling apart because of a perceived lack of accountability.

Henny tells of the necessity to “go it alone” as a student:

“It’s pretty much ... in college, it’s pretty much every man for himself.”

John tells of his anger at the behavior of other students:

“But, you know, I look at these kids I’m in school with now, and, you know, they’re eating food in class, they’re texting in class, and I’m looking at them, like ‘What the hell are they doing?’”

Marina tells of feeling silenced by her instructor because of unconventional views:

“You know, but, however, I sometimes, I see things a little bit different, or I get something different—you know, it’s kind of like with literature; it’s open to interpretation. I believe religion should be the same way, you know, because you can’t impose your beliefs on a class, regardless of what’s written.”

Nick tells of his frustration that he has no recourse over misbehavior in academia:

“Here, I have no authority over any body. I can’t tell anybody what to do. And I see people behaving in just atrocious ways all day. And I can’t, there’s no one that—”

### **Cross-context Focal Issue of Clarification of Self**

As previously noted, the issue of clarification of self or finding of one's voice is the only issue identified by participants across both the military and academic contexts. Eight participants organize their plots around this issue, five in the military context and three in the academic context.

The five participants who place the issue within the military context describe a broad range of dimensions of the issue from experience of practical instructional success, to a sense of ease within the military collective, to success in persuasive negotiation, to change in valuation of human life, to successful challenge to a superior officer.

Izzy tells of his successful military training:

“But, over there, it's just ... the, you know, they'll give you the instruments, they'll show you. Yeah. And, and physical, I think learning-wise is better.”

JN tells of finding ease after meeting the structured demands of life in the military:

“You, um ... just get the job done; that's what, that's what it's ... and people are laid back.”

Marina tells of her persuasive negotiation with a superior officer:

“And I think he saw that I was taking a step in the right direction, because I'm asking now, ‘Okay, I want more responsibilities; help me grow basically. I can't grow if you don't give me something.’”

Nick tells of how he changed his valuation of human life after the death of a friend:

“And I couldn't believe it—and I understand it now. I, five months after Nick Robinson got killed, and I would kill every single Afghan.”



Trinity tells of how the disloyalty of his immediate superior created risk and led him to report his superior in violation of change of command:

“And, um, at the point now, I felt like ... a soldier’s life was in jeopardy.”

The three participants who place the issue within the academic context express a narrower range of dimensions from learning to think differently, to regaining focus in a caring environment, to experiencing unanticipated academic success.

Eduardo tells of his experience of a new critical stance:

“The one thing I enjoy from being a college student is that I don’t take for, for face value anymore.”

Heaven tells of gaining a better sense of focus through the support of professorial caring:

“They care, they, they know that ... I don’t know, they drive me to, to be focused, but in so much more of a positive way.”

Kenny tells of being surprised by his unanticipated academic success:

“So I went to, um, Job Corps in New Jersey—Plainfield—and I surprised myself.”

### **Patterns of Meaning in Focal Issues**

The focal issues expressed in these narrative excerpts clearly demonstrate substantial differences in sense-making by participants across contexts. The qualitative differences in the nature of the issues expressed in the military context (respect, deception, and reciprocal obligation) and the issues expressed in the academic context (alienation and mismatched struggling), and the clear disjuncture of these issues across contexts, suggests the participants

may be experiencing a conflictual process of transition over contexts that may rightly be considered to constitute separate cultures with attendant differences in beliefs, practices, goals, and values. In the excerpts below, obvious contrast in the presentation of the focal issue of respect across military and academic contexts, lends support to the supposition that student veterans might experience conflict in contexts with such differing orientations to the importance of requiring respectful conduct.

Henny's military focal point centers on his initial failure to offer appropriate respect due to his immaturity:

“Cause at the end of the day, no matter—when I was still seventeen, eighteen ... it still didn't click in my head, *let me respect these figures*. It was, *I'm from New York, I don't care.*”

John's academic focal point centers on lack of respect shown by immature peers and the sense of alienation it engenders in him:

“But, you know, I look at these kids I'm in school with now, and, you, they're eating food in class, they're texting in class, and I'm looking at them, like, ‘What the hell are they doing?’”

It is notable that while participants tended to center their narration in the military context intra-personally as above, they were more likely to center their narration about the academic context extra-personally, often implicating the actions of others in negative assessments of the academic environment. It is interesting that the one issue that is split by participants across contexts is that of clarification of self. As previously described, five participants ground their finding of voice in narration about the military context and three ground their finding of voice in narration about the academic context. Such a division in the issue may be reflective of tensions

inherent in the complex, ongoing, and developmental nature of transitional change. The examples below show how the process of self-clarification may be differentially enacted across military and academic contexts which promote conflicting methods and understandings of knowledge acquisition.

Izzy's focal point of self-clarification in the military context concerns his unexpected success through military training methods:

“But, over there, it's just ... the, you know, they'll give you the instruments, they'll show you. Yeah. And, and physical, I think learning-wise is better.”

Eduardo's focal point of self-clarification in the academic context concerns his appreciation of the ability to think critically:

“The one thing I enjoy from being a college student is that I don't take for, for face value anymore.”

### **Identification of Resolutions and Resolution Strategies across Contexts**

In table below, I categorize the resolution and resolution strategies that my participants use to address or attempt to resolve the focal issues in their narratives. As previously noted, these plot elements function pragmatically to bring closure to tensions created within the narratives at the climatic pivot and offer narrator perspectives on the appropriate ways in which these tensions might and should be settled.

Table 5: Resolution and Resolution Strategies across Contexts

(X Indicates the Context in Which the Strategy is Used)

Resolution/Strategy	Participant	Military Context Narrative	Academic Context Narrative
Communicative	Kenny Marina Trinity	x x x	
Conforming to or Learning the Rules	Henny Izzy JN Nick	x x x x	
Fate Intervening	Eduardo	x	
Psychological Expressing Disapproval	Daniel John	x	x
Expressing Alienation	Heaven Henny Marina	x	x x
Expressing Frustration	Nick JN KH Trinity		x x x x
Expressing Gratitude	John	x	
Feeling Valued	Heaven Kenny KH	x	x x
Reflecting	Eduardo Izzy		x x
Acting Menacingly	Daniel		x

Below I describe the resolutions and resolutions strategies used by participants by frequency of use in context and discuss the meanings which have emerged from observing the patterns of use by participants of these plot elements. The examples comprise the dimensions of variation in participant use of these resolutions and resolution strategies

### **Military Context Action Resolution of Conforming to or Learning the Rules**

Four participants resolve their narratives through the action of conforming to or learning the rules, all in the military context. They use these resolutions to bring to closure issues from the negative outcome of insubordination, to success in military training, to finding ease in becoming part of a military collective, to gaining an understanding of the personal costs of combat.

Henny recounts how his initial lack of respect for superiors resulted in difficulties for him:

“So ... for like the first year in the Army, it really didn't go well for me.”

Izzy finds that he is able to learn successfully through the methods used in military training:

“It's, you know, like construction, you know; you can learn how to do construction when you physically do it, you know ... rather than just reading it and not doing it.”

JN enters into the collective understanding of what is required in the military:

“You know, when you're done with work, you're not working or wherever, you're not doing anything—so, yeah, whatever.”

Nick changes his valuation of human life through the loss of a friend in combat:

“If it saves American lives, you have to make a line somewhere in war; which lives matter? You have to make a line in war. Our lives matter; theirs do not. That’s it.”

### **Military Context Resolution of Communicative Action**

Three participants resolve their narratives through communicative action, all in the military context. They use these resolutions to bring to closure issues from deflection of hostility, to success in persuasive negotiation, to effort undertaken for the protection of others.

Kenny responds to the disrespect shown him when he appears in uniform:

“But, you know, I say, ‘You know what, man? I’ve got to do what I’ve got to do,’ you know?”

Marina reports her negotiation for a better military assignment:

“But I told, him, I took the initiative to tell him what I wanted to do, and listened to what he told me.”

Trinity ends his dilemma of whether to report a superior’s misdeeds and violate the chain of command to protect others:

“I had to go to my sergeant and ... and take to him and ... let him know what was going on.”

### **Military Context Resolution of Fate Intervening**

One participant resolves his narrative in the military context by attributing the outcome to an act of fate. Eduardo explains his removal from a distasteful combat assignment to an assignment he had been falsely promised:

“And I’m like, ‘Alright, I’ll just stay here.’ And I did it and, luckily, ended up in a unit that just did construction. So, I ended up doing just what I wanted to, even, um ... by luck. Yes. It was just luck.”

### **Academic Context Action Resolution of Menacing**

One participant resolves his narrative in the academic context by becoming menacing in reaction to stress. Daniel describes threatening a female student who disturbs him while he is taking at test:

“Then, ‘Balalalala!’ going off at the mouth with me, and I’m like, ‘look, little girl, get your boyfriend or your father, until then, shut the fuck up. You know, ‘cause I’m not going to hit *you*. Get somebody that I can hit for you. And then we’ll talk business, lady.’”

### **Academic Context Resolution Strategy of Expressing Frustration**

Four participants draw their academic context narratives towards resolution using the psychological strategy of expressing frustration. They use this strategy to bring toward closure issues of perceived lack of collectivity, academic challenge and failure, and perceived lack of accountability.

JN decries his feeling of not being part of a greater whole:

“It’s just, it’s more for you, like, to undergo—not as a collective, collective group.”

KH considers a failure:

“Sometimes, you have to take a step backwards to move forwards, so maybe I need to take a little remedial and then we’ll look ahead and move forwards.”

Nick talks of feeling adrift without structure:

“It feels like, it feels like, in the Army there was such a direct chain of command, and out here, nobody’s in charge. Nobody can be held accountable for anything. It’s ... the exact opposite and it drives me nuts.”

Trinity considers the stress of being a first generation college student:

“So I’ve got to break that bond. I’ve got to break that, you know so—yeah, so ... that’s why now I ... I’m working, working so hard for this. But ...“

### **Academic Context Resolution Strategy of Reflecting**

Two participants draw their academic context narratives toward resolution using the psychological strategy of reflecting. They use this strategy to bring toward closure issues of new understanding and failure to gain understanding:

Eduardo references his developing capacity for critical thinking:

“I try to see, *why would they want me to think that way? Or, why are you telling me that?* I actually look more in depth into things.”

Izzy attempts to come to terms with his difficulties with abstract learning:

“Yeah, school is hard, difficult.”

### **Military Context Resolution Strategy of Expressing Gratitude**

One participant draws his narrative in the military context toward resolution through the psychological strategy of feeling gratitude. John uses this strategy to bring toward closure his account of his family’s finding refuge in this country:



“And so, I, felt an urge to give back to, to everything that I was provided, and that’s what made me feel that, well, okay, you know, I should do the military, and ... then it was a matter of what military am I doing?”

### **Resolution Strategy of Expressing Alienation Split across Contexts**

Three participants draw their narratives toward resolution through the psychological strategy of expressing alienation, two in their academic context narratives and one in her military context narrative. They use the strategy to bring toward closure issues of lack of morale, lack of caring, and feeling silenced.

Heaven describes feeling poorly used regarding the rationale for the war in which she is fighting:

“So, I really think that I saw a lot of soldiers lose moral, morale, when they, when they started feeling somewhat—cause we discuss it all the time.”

Henny reacts to his perception of a lack of caring in academia:

“So, it’s like ... you have to, in college, you really have to be for yourself, ‘cause if you’re not ... if you’re not putting in the effort, no one’s really going to hold your hand through it.”

Marina wishes she could respond to feeling silenced in class:

“So I, I wish that I could tell her that; however, she, I don’t want her to fail me or anything like that—so I couldn’t say that. But I wish I could tell her, like ... let us have our opinion!”

### **Resolution Strategy of Feeling Valued Split across Contexts**

Two participants draw their narratives in the academic context toward resolution using the psychological strategy of feeling valued and one participant uses it in his military context narrative. They use this strategy to draw toward closure issues of renewed personhood, success, and devaluation through racial discrimination:

Heaven describes her renewed feeling of being an individual:

“So ... um, I just feel like, now being a student, it’s like I’m a person again. Like I’m ... you know, someone with feelings, like what I feel matters, makes, you know, makes a difference, you know?”

Kenny enjoys an unfamiliar sense of accomplishment:

“I started doing a business technology course and I was top in my class. I completed a six month course in two months. You know? The GED was supposed to take six weeks. I did it in one.”

KH reflects on his protégé’s new status of acceptance:

“Uh, yeah. Anybody who sees Mook will, oh, wow ... you know, but you put that uniform on and ... you know, you’re good to go, you know.”

### **Resolution Strategy of Expressing Disapproval Split across Contexts**

Two participants draw their narratives towards resolution using the psychological strategy of expressing disapproval; one participant uses it in the military context and one in the academic context. They use this strategy to draw toward closure issues of combat involvement and interaction in academic life:

Daniel addresses a dying enemy combatant:

“And, you know, like looking at this over here, ‘Dude, you’re retarded. I mean you’re going to die—for what? You shot at a bulletproof truck, you idiot.’”

John characterizes his interaction with other students:

“And I might have looked odd to them, but ... they looked odd to me.”

### **Patterns of Use in Resolution and Resolution Strategies**

The categorization of these resolution and resolution strategies reveals that resolutions of action predominate in the military context while psychological strategies predominate in the academic contexts. Resolutions of action involving communication and conformation to or the learning of rules are offered by six participants in the military context, with an additional participant resolving his narrative in the military context through the device of acceptance of an act of fate. A single exception, an action resolution in the academic context, involves menacing behavior by the participant, aggression in response to frustration.

In an extreme illustration of learning the rules in the rules-based context of the military, learning the rules being the most common action resolution chosen by six of the twelve participants in their military context narratives, Nick tells how he learned to feel and act in combat:

“If it saves American lives, you have to make a line somewhere in war; which lives matter? You have to make a line in war. Our lives matter; theirs do not. That’s it.”

The psychological resolution strategy of expressing frustration is conveyed by four participants in the academic context and that of reflecting by two participants in the academic

context. The strategy of experiencing gratitude is offered by one participant in the military context. The expression of the balance of psychological strategies is split across contexts. The strategy of expressing disapproval is narrated by participants once in each context. The strategy of expressing alienation is divided between one participant narration in the military and two in the academic. The strategy of feeling valued is expressed inversely, with two participant narrations in the military context and one in the academic context.

In an illustration of the psychological resolution strategy of expressing frustration, expressing frustration being the most common psychological resolution strategy chosen by four of the twelve participants in their academic context narratives, Trinity tells of his academic struggles as a first generation college student:

“So I’ve got to break that bond. I’ve got to break that, you know so—yeah, so ... that’s why now I ... I’m working, working so hard for this. But ...”

Dauite (2010) explained that transition into a new social context, particularly one as radically different from past experience as to constitute a new culture, involves time and participation to gain insight into what is most essential in the new context. Therefore the pattern seen of participant use of resolution and resolution strategies is not an unexpected one. As participants have already completed their military service, but are currently negotiating academic life, the use of full resolution through action in their military narratives and the use of more tentative resolution strategies in their academic narratives become even more readily understandable. The use of psychological strategies does not completely close the narrative and leaves the narrative space open and flexible and subject to revision through further experience and reflection.

Examples offered in illustration of the patterns of action resolutions and psychological resolution strategies are supportive of an assumption made in this study that the culture of the military would encourage an action and rules oriented understandings and higher education would be more open and welcoming to psychological processes such as reflection and to critique. Finally, contrary to initial expectations, no differences in the focal issues or resolution or resolution strategies between senior and community college level participants was observed. This finding must be tempered with the recognition that only twelve student veterans offered their narratives and that of these twelve only four were senior college students.

## **Chapter V**

### **Values Analysis**

This study is designed to consider the transition of student veterans from military to academic life as an activity meaning system. Daiute (2008; 2014) identified an activity-meaning system as one whose meaning contains within it social context and in which the unit of analysis is the interaction of cross-context relationships and perspectives among stakeholder actors having varying interests, these stakeholders being both persons and institutions. The activity meaning system of student veteran transition examined herein addresses the dialogic interaction of the institutional perspectives of the military, veterans advocacy organizations, public higher education, and of student veterans who hold their own unique perspectives on their relationships to these institutions and organizations. The design this seeks to avoid privileging either personal voice or institutional discourses in its consideration of how the process of mean-making is integrated within the activity-meaning system of student veteran transition.

### **Narrative Values Analysis**

Individuals become part of a culture by sharing the values which are instantiated in the principles by which the members of the groups live their lives. Values are in particular flux at times of cultural change and experienced as in dialogue when individuals are transitioning across cultural contexts and interacting with disparate values. Values are often demonstrated, though rarely directly expressed, in cultural products such as narrative and discourse. Daiute (2014) explained how, although they generally remain implicit or inferred, values guide and organize narratives and discourse and how they are enacted in the narrator activity of selecting what is expressed, emphasized, or silenced. Researchers have used this approach reliably in previous studies of violence prevention and multi-cultural curricula in classrooms (Daiute, Stern, Leluti-

Weinberger, 2001; Daiute, 2008), political and economic transitions as practiced in workplace settings (Ninkovic, 2012), education reform projects to increase social inclusion (Daiute, Kovacs-Cerovic, Tedorova, Jokic, & Ataman, 2013), and uses of computer simulations (Kreniske, 2012). Drawing on the theory and method of those prior studies, I present, in this chapter, the results of my analysis of the interplay of narrative values, both implicit and explicit, in materials which offer the perspectives of the military, veterans advocacy organizations, and academic institutions as well as the narratives of student veterans on the process of transition to higher education.

Chosen as a sample of culturally-determined materials or products are Armed Services website recruitment appeals and a military training manual; the websites of public institutions of higher education as they address their missions and the inclusion of student veterans in academic life; and the websites, mission statements, and publications of veterans advocacy groups. The institutional perspectives and goals in these products are evaluated through the analysis of their values expressions. This analysis is followed by an examination of the narratives that student veteran participants use to make sense of and negotiate their transitions and observation of how the student veterans uptake, resist, or transform the institutional and organizational values in their narratives.

The analytic process allows exploration of the process of negotiation of meaning among all the actor stakeholders as found in the selected cultural products. The following table outlines this study's conception of the activity meaning system of transition and lists the cultural products whose analysis is offered to increase understanding of the dynamic interactions amongst stakeholders. The analysis will demonstrate if there is a uniformity of values expressed across

stakeholders or a pattern of tensions across the stakeholder expressions, thereby identifying both shared and differing meanings within the system.

Table 6: Activity Meaning System Design for Student Veteran Transition  
 (\*Narrative analysis process and results are based on Daiute (2014, p. 64).)

Dimension of Activity and Meaning	Global-societal Sphere of Activity	Relevant Institutional Actor-stakeholder	Other Institutional Actor-stakeholder	More Interactions among Actor-stakeholders	Individual Actor-stakeholders
Research Focus and Relevance of Stakeholders	Student Veteran Transition from Military to Academic Life	Military	Higher Education	Veterans Advocacy	Student Veterans Negotiating Transition
Relevant Stakeholders and Activities		Armed Services	Public Colleges and Universities*	Veterans Organizations, Advocacy Groups, Private Consultants	Student Veteran Participants
Stakeholder Expressions		Mission Statements and Websites; Military Training Manual	Mission Statements and Website Material Directly Addressing Veterans	Mission Statements and Websites, Publications	Participant Narratives about Military and Academic Life
Stakeholder Interactions				<Mediates Military and Academia>	
Analyses		Values Analysis	Values Analysis	Values Analysis	Values Analysis; Narrative Plot Analysis

\*Seven of the public institutions selected were identified from a 2011 report from the Pat Tillman Foundation as among those optimally responsive to the need of student veterans for



support. The public academic institution where the data were collected is also included in the sample.

Only public institutions have been chosen to sample as they are the most frequent choice of student veterans upon entry into higher education (National Survey of Student Engagement, 2010).

As indicated above, the materials analyzed are drawn from the websites of seven public institutions of higher education, identified by the Tillman Foundation in 2011 as offering optimal support services to veterans, as well as from the public institution from which this study's student veteran participants were recruited. The twenty-seven web documents reviewed for higher education include mission statements and materials exclusively addressing student veterans. These materials, as public discourse documents, constitute relational activity. The documents both inform a broad audience and also directly reference the perceived needs and interests of currently enrolled student veterans as well as potential veteran applicants. This analysis seeks to understand which values have guided the selection of elements and details that have been included in these documents (Daiute, 2014).

### **Identification of Values Exclusive to Public Higher Education**

Three values exclusive to public higher education emerged from the analysis of the expressions located in these cultural products. The first and third most frequently expressed values were located primarily in materials specifically addressing the student veteran population. The first value expressed the importance of promoting higher educational institutions as "military friendly" through the provision of veteran-specific support services. The third and least frequently identified value and presented here as ancillary to the first, expressed the importance of making higher education affordable for student veterans by making them aware of their entitlements and remedying potential obstacles to receiving these benefits. The second most

frequently expressed value, located almost exclusively in mission statements, expressed the importance of fostering certain kinds of knowledge in higher education.

### **Value that Higher Education Should Promote Itself as “Veteran Friendly”**

The value of higher education promoting itself as “veteran friendly”, as the most frequently enacted value, is supported by forty-seven expressions over the twenty-seven higher education documents. Following are the most frequently identified expressions of this value with an indication of the number of times they were identified and examples of the value’s expressions:

Endorsements and Rankings of the Educational Institution as “Veteran Friendly” (6):

*Presence of a logo indicating ranking of the institution as “Best for Veterans” by Military Times magazine*

Veteran Transition Program (5):

*“Designed as a learning community, the VTP is a veteran and service-member program providing a stepping stone for students to begin their college career on the right path.”*

Military Skills Recognition and Transfer (4):

*“VETeach is designed to maximize the leadership qualities you have gained in the military so that you can put them to work in the education field.”*

Outreach Recruitment Program (4):

*“The Outreach Mission is in keeping with the University’s, to enhance growth by seeking out all veterans...”*

### **Value that Higher Education Should be Made Affordable**

The value of making higher education affordable for student veterans, ancillary to making institutions “veteran friendly,” was enacted by sixteen expressions over the twenty-seven

higher education documents. Following are the most frequently identified expressions of this value with an indication of the number of times they were identified and examples of the value's expressions.

Linkage to financial aid and other resources (7):

*“Resources, such as the Veterans Upward Bound Program, are also available to help you apply for GI benefits, college enrolment and financial aid, and college placement tests in reading and in math.”*

Acceleration of GI Bill payments through institutional participation in the W.A.V.E program, Web Authenticated Verification of Enrollment (3):

*Indicated by the presence of the W.A.V.E. logo, a graduation cap emblazoned with flag motif*

Listing of benefits and qualifications for GI Bill benefits (3):

*“The Post-/11 GI Bill provides financial support for education and housing to individuals with at least 90 days of aggregate service on or after September 11, 2001, or individuals discharged with a service-connected disability after 30 days.”*

Reduced cost of attendance at the institution for veterans because of the availability of supplementary scholarships (3):

*“Eligible veterans receive up to 98 percent of the cost of undergraduate tuition through NY State’s Veterans Tuition Award (VTA).”*

### **Value that Higher Education Should Foster Certain Kinds of Knowledge**

The value of fostering certain kinds of knowledge through higher education was enacted by twenty-three expressions over the twenty-seven higher education documents. Following are

the most frequently identified expressions of this value with an indication of the number of times they were identified and examples of the value's expressions.

Learning Community of Diversity (10):

*“To establish a model for a New American University measured not by who we exclude, but rather by who we include.”*

Development of Global Competitiveness (4):

*“Recognizing the increasing competitiveness of the world, the University will ensure that all students develop an understanding of global issues....”*

Rejection of Stereotypes and Generalizations about Students (4):

*“Interaction teaches that people are individuals who cannot be characterized by stereotypes and overgeneralizations.”*

Constructive Knowledge (3):

*“That mission is to discover, create, transmit, and apply knowledge to address the needs of individuals and society.”*

### **Values Exclusive to Advocacy**

In an effort to sample as widely as possible across the spectrum of veteran advocacy groups, the analysis examined the website documents of several organizations advocating for disabled veterans, the website of a group advocating physical fitness as the means to achieving transitional functionality, the website materials and a publication addressed to higher education by a consultancy offering itself as a “translator of military culture to the civilian sector,” and the website materials of several institution-specific and one national student veteran association. With the exception of one expression referencing available counseling services for PTSD and TBI and one referencing counseling for unspecified stress-related issues located in higher

education materials, a focus on veteran psychological damage was exclusive to advocacy materials.

### **Value that Advocacy for Veterans Should Address Psychological Damage**

The value of focus on addressing veteran psychological damage was enacted by nineteen expressions over the eighteen advocacy documents. Following are the most frequently identified expressions of this value with an indication of the number of times they were identified and examples of the value's expressions:

Trauma and the Veteran Suicide Rate (5):

*'The stark numbers of military suicides tell the story: 7000 veterans across all eras died by suicide in 2011...and those are just the ones the VA knows about.'*

Alienation (4):

*"But former military personnel report feeling not just disoriented, but deeply alienated from the rest of America;...."*

Need for crisis management (3):

*"If you are not in crisis but would like to do something to move forward emotionally...."*

Loss of Identity (2):

*"...not just a temporary destabilizing of identity, but a complete identity crises."*

### **Values Exclusive to the Military**

As previously indicated, the analysis examined eight military documents of which seven were drawn from website recruitment materials of the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps and one from material excerpted from an Air Force training manual for enlistees. The value below was located exclusively in military documents.

## **Value that Ideals Should be Lived through Actions**

The value of ideals being lived through actions was supported by twelve expressions over the eight documents. Following are the most frequently identified expressions of this value with an indication of the number of times they were identified and examples of the value's expressions:

### Living Values (5):

*"...from then on they live them every day in everything they do—whether they're on the job or off. In short, the Seven Core Army Values listed below are what being a Soldier is all about."*

### Purposeful Living (4):

*"As a Marine, you can fight for what you believe because it's worth believing in. How you lead your life is the decision before you. You can simply stand for what is right and stand with the many. Or you can fight for what's right—alongside the Few."*

### Honor as Living Values (1):

*"Honor is a matter of carrying out, acting, and living the values of respect, duty, loyalty, selfless service, integrity, and personal courage in everything you do."*

### Learning Values through Training (1):

*"Soldiers learn these values in detail during Basic Training."*

## **The Shared Value of Aspirational Ideals**

Although the value that aspirational ideals should be espoused was minimally supported in public higher education documents, with seven of the eight located expressions found in one university mission statement, the value was very vigorously supported across both the military, with sixty-four located expressions, and advocacy groups, with twenty-four located expressions.

The most frequently located expression of the value for each of the three stakeholders, along with a listing of the number of times it was expressed and an example of each are indicated below.

Military: Protector Identity (5):

*“I am a guardian of freedom and the American way of life.”*

Advocacy: Taking Action (3):

*“\*Take Action Now\*”*

Higher Education: Instructional Values (1):

*“The cultivation of character and the modeling of honesty, integrity, compassion, fairness, respect and ethical behavior both in the classroom and beyond;....”*

### **The Shared Value of Collaborative Goal Achievement**

The value that goals should be achieved collaboratively was expressed across all three institutional stakeholders, with a preponderance of the expressions of this value located in the higher educational materials. Public higher education documents supported the value through twenty-two expressions, while the value was located fifteen times in advocacy documents and seven times in military documents. The most frequently located expression of the value for each of the three stakeholders, along with a listing of the number of times it was expressed and an example of each are indicated below.

Higher Education: Achievement through Collaboration (3):

*“The department works collaboratively with all university advisors, faculty, and staff in taking a proactive role in the educational process.”*

Advocacy: Peer to Peer Support (4):

*“Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) began when several veterans and friends, moved by stories of the first wounded service members returning home from Afghanistan and Iraq, took action to help others in need.”*

Military: Teamwork (4):

*“The day to day duty of every Navy man and woman is to work together as a team to improve the quality of our work, our people and ourselves.”*

### **The Shared Value of Civic Responsibility and Selfless Service**

The value that civic responsibility and selfless service are essential aspirations was expressed across all three stakeholders with the preponderance of the expressions, seventeen, located in military documents, nine supporting expressions located in higher education documents, and five in advocacy documents. The most frequently located expression for each of the three stakeholders, along with a listing of the number of times it was expressed and an example of each are indicated below.

Higher Education: Civic Responsibility (8):

*“...pursuing research and discovery that benefits the public good; assuming major responsibility for the economic, social, and cultural vitality and health and well-being of the community.”*

Advocacy: Core Value of Serving Others through Giving (3):

*“FITCO Core Value #2 “Serving Others by Giving.”*

Military: Selfless Service (6):

*‘We will be mindful of the privilege to serve our fellow Americans.’*



### **The Shared Value of Nurturance of Leadership Skills**

The value that leadership skills should be nurtured was located in only two of the stakeholder documents, those of higher education and the military, with three expressions of the value located within each. The most frequently located expression for of the value for each of the three stakeholders, along with a listing of the number of times it was expressed and an example of each are indicated below.

Higher Education: Leadership (3):

*“..and to become informed citizen-participants prepared to assume leadership roles in a democracy.”*

Military: Leadership (3):

*“I need to have patience, compassion, and firmness to be able to lead under pressure. I have seen many officers in charge do an amazing job over here, and I am going to try and follow their lead so future Soldiers ca trust in my leadership.”*

### **The Shared Value that Meaning Should be Conveyed through Images**

The shared value that meanings should be conveyed through images was supported through thirty-two image expressions in advocacy documents and seventeen in both higher education documents and seventeen in military documents. Advocacy images, all drawn from their websites, focused on logos such as grasped hands and soldiers carrying each other, images portraying disabled veterans, veterans in domestic interactions with women and children, and photographs of organization founders captioning them as veterans. Higher education images, drawn from their websites, focused on images suggesting a relationship between displays of patriotism and symbols ordinarily associated with academia, such as books and mortar boards banded with flag borders, and images of service members in dress uniform performing rituals on

campus such as saluting or raising the flag. Military images, drawn from their recruitment websites, focused on images portraying military service members engaged in combat or firing weapons, the insignia of each branch of the Armed Services, and service members dressed in fatigues interacting with civilians in the US and with villagers in the Middle East. Assumed values such as those of civic participation and patriotism are often hidden within discourse as images such as these. (Billig, 1995).

The table below lists the most important values expressed by each stakeholder, listing first the values expressed exclusively by the stakeholder and then shared values by frequency of their expressions within the stakeholder.

#### **Table 7: Values Table**

(\*Narrative analysis process and results are based on Daiute (2014, p. 108).)

#### **Stakeholder #1: Higher Education**

**Value #1:** Higher Education Should Promote Itself as Veteran Friendly  
(Exclusive Value)

**Value #2:** Higher Education Should Promote Certain Kinds of Knowledge  
(Exclusive Value)

**Value #3:** Goals Should Be Achieved Collaboratively  
(Value Shared Across Institutional Stakeholders)

**Value #4:** Civic Responsibility and Selfless Service Should be Essential  
(Value Shared Across Institutional Stakeholders)

#### **Stakeholder #2: Advocacy Group**

**Value #1:** Advocacy for Veterans Should Focus on Addressing Psychological Damage  
(Exclusive Value)

**Value #2:** Goals Should Be Achieved Collaboratively  
(Value Shared Across Institutional Stakeholders)

**Value #3:** Aspirational Ideals Should be espoused  
(Value Shared Across Institutional Stakeholders)

**Value #4:** Civic Responsibility and Selfless Service Should be Essential  
(Value Shared Across Institutional Stakeholders)

**Stakeholder #3: Military**

**Value #1:** Ideals Should be Lived through Actions  
(Exclusive Value)

**Value #2:** Civic Responsibility and Selfless Service Should be Essential  
(Value Shared Across Institutional Stakeholders)

**Value #3:** Goals Should be Achieved Collaboratively  
(Value Shared Across Institutional Stakeholders)

**Value #4:** Leadership Should be Nurtured  
(Value Shared with Higher Education)

**Stakeholder #4: Student Veterans**

**Academic Narrative Value #1:** Fostering of Knowledge, +/- addressive expressions

**Academic Narrative Value #2:** Respect, +/- addressive expressions

**Academic Narrative Value #3:** Collaborative Activity, +/- addressive expressions

**Academic Narrative Value #4:** Persistence

**Stakeholder #4: Student Veterans**

**Military Narrative Value #1:** Respect, +/- addressive expressions

**Military Narrative Value #2:** Taking Collaborative Action

**Military Narrative Value #3:** Honesty, +/- addressive expressions

**Military Narrative Value #4:** Selfless Protection

The analysis found that student veterans, in their military narratives, most often referenced values of respect, taking collaborative action, fairness, and identification as a selfless protector, values strongly associated with the military. Student veterans varied their addressivity toward the values of fairness and respect, taking both positive and negative positions on their experience of the actual expression of these values in military life. In their academic narratives,

they most frequently referenced fostering of knowledge, respect, collaborative activity, and persistence as values. With the exception of the value of persistence, they again varied their addressivity toward these values, taking both positive and negative positions on their experiences of the actual expression of the values of the fostering of knowledge, respect, and collaborative activity in academic life.

Outlined below is a positioning table of some of the most frequently identified exclusive and shared values for higher education, veteran advocacy groups, and the military, along with indication of how student veterans positioned themselves in their academic and military narratives with regard to these values.

Table 8: Values Positioning Table  
 (\*Narrative analysis process and results are based on Daiute (2014, p. 111).)

	Military	Advocacy	Education	Veterans
Value #1 Civic Responsibility/ Self-less Service	Yes as selfless service	Yes, as service through giving	Yes, as civic responsibility	Academic narratives: No Military Narratives: Yes
Value #2 Goals Achieved Collaboratively	Yes, as teamwork	Yes, as peer-to- peer support	Yes, as faculty, peer staff collaboration	Academic Narratives: Yes/No Military Narratives: Yes
Value #3 Ideals to Aspire to Should be Espoused	Yes	Yes	Yes	Academic Narratives: Yes/No Military Narratives: Yes
Value #4 Construction of Knowledge	No	No	Yes	Academic Narratives: Yes/No Military Narratives: No
Value #5 Consideration of Trauma Should be Paramount	No	Yes	No	Academic Narratives: No Military Narratives: No
Value#6 Ideals Should be Seen in Practices	No	No	Yes	Academic Narratives: No Military Narratives: Yes

## **Chapter VI**

### **Conclusions**

The controversy over the extent to which student veteran transition into higher education is deeply problematized was reviewed in the introduction to this study, the review referencing some rather dire assessments of overwhelming odds against student veteran success under current conditions. This discussion will offer recommendations for future educational research and practices to assist student veterans to successfully transition into higher education. The understandings student veterans presented in their narratives and the ways in which they positioned themselves with regard to the values expressed by the stakeholder institutions from which and to which they are transitioning will guide these recommendations.

This study considers student veterans to be performing an especially complex developmental task in their cross-cultural transitions from the military to higher education for several reasons. They are transitioning from military culture, which has been traditionally quite successful in resisting challenges to its goals and practices from outside its own culture (Bacevich, 2013), into the current culture of higher education whose traditional values of liberal education are being intensely questioned both, to a considerable extent, from within and from without in general public discourse (Lustig, 2011). Student veterans are, therefore, engaged in transition from a culture exhibiting some of the isolationist characteristics of a total institution (Goffman, 1957), into a culture which is itself in flux, both accepting and resisting challenges to its traditional values.

After experience in the military, a culture which has been particularly successful in resisting changes to its practices and explicitly exhorts the enactment of its values, student veterans find, when they enter higher education, a culture which must entertain critique from

without and whose beliefs and practices are often expressed implicitly. In essence, they are doubly charged with finding how to accommodate themselves and fit in a culture which is itself undergoing a transitional process to determine how it will stand in the future and whose values are often obscure.

In their narratives, student veterans addressed differing focal issues and presented differing resolutions and resolution strategies to express their understandings of the cultures of the military and higher education. As the plot analysis results indicated, student veterans position themselves very differently in their cross-cultural narratives. To review, in the example narrative offered to illustrate plot analysis, there was a paradoxical self-presentation by Marina of herself as agentic when supported by the structured setting of military culture, generally considered less receptive to independent action, and as passive, vulnerable, and potentially defeated in her narrative about her challenges in the culture of higher education.

The issues focused on and directed to resolution in student veteran narratives varied dramatically when compared across cultures, with the focal issues of respect, reciprocal obligation, and deception expressed in the military narratives and issues of alienation and mismatched struggling dominating their academic narratives. The majority of student veteran narratives offered clarification of their understandings of self within the military context, with fewer developing such understandings through their narratives of their experiences in academic culture.

The values analysis found that student veterans, in their military narratives, most often referenced values of respect, taking collaborative action, fairness, and identification as a selfless protector, values strongly associated with the military. Student veterans varied their addressivity

toward the values of fairness and respect, taking both positive and negative positions on their experience of the actual expression of these values in military life. In their academic narratives, they most frequently referenced fostering of knowledge, respect, collaborative activity, and persistence as values. With the exception of the value of persistence, they again varied their addressivity toward these values, taking both positive and negative positions on their experiences of the actual expression of the values of the fostering of knowledge, respect, and collaborative activity in academic life.

Institutional values were found to be shared in understandings of civic responsibility and selfless service, the achievement of goals through collaborative activity, and the importance of being guided by aspirational ideals. They were divided over values such as how knowledge should be constructed, the consideration of trauma as paramount in transition, and emphasis on enactment of ideals.

Sharp distinctions found between military values and civilian values, and by extension academic values, e.g., the fostering of critical reflection as opposed to an imperative to take action directed by others without question, are better understood when attention is placed on the purposes they are intended to support. Exum, Coll & Weiss (2011) described military culture as reliant on hierarchy and group cohesiveness and the enactment of explicit core values in the service of the successful completion of a given, concrete objective. In such service, allegiance to the group and the chain of command are valued far more highly than any considerations of self-interest or one's own welfare because such an orientation supports and advances the ultimate objective, successful group achievement of a given mission.

Conversely, American civilian society values the ability to operate relatively autonomously in a culture which enshrines individual achievement and has been placing



increasing emphasis on flexibility in the assumption of roles both within the workplace and without (Exum et al., 2011) Service members often find such emphasis on personal freedom and the lack of clearly delineated responsibility and accountability disconcerting. This was reflected in student veteran narratives about their participation in academic life by their expressions of alienation from academic peers and the institutional hierarchy and a professed isolated struggle for educational achievement in which they feel they are mismatched.

Although academic values may diverge somewhat from those of the larger culture, they do map onto those of the civilian world in their emphasis on more or less self-reliant attainment of certain intellectual skills for higher order thinking, and in the achievement of an understanding of and successful negotiation of a hierarchy which is less transparently structured than that of the military.

It is heartening to recognize a new orientation within the military about how to support better psychological adjustment of its service members both while on active duty and in later transition to their civilian lives. A January 2011 special issue of the *American Psychologist* was exclusively devoted to the military's interest in assessing and supporting "comprehensive soldier fitness." The articles in the issue delineated the shifting of military attention away from complete reliance on considerations of pathology and its treatment to assist military service personnel toward one which builds on the strengths service members have developed through military service and the application of principles of positive psychology.

A new focus is also being placed on the ability of the experience of war to strengthen and focus individuals who have been undergone its challenges (Peterson, Park & Castro 2011). Tedeschi and McNally (2011) emphasized the importance of recognizing the opportunities for

improved adjustment which might emerge from even traumatic war experiences, citing longstanding research studies such as that by Sledge, Boydstun, and Rabe (1980) which found that POWs often related their experiences as prisoners were beneficial to their overall development and that of Dohrenwend, Neria, Turner, Turse, Marshall, Lewis-Fernandez, & Koenen (2004) which found that the great majority of male veterans who had served in Vietnam regarded their experiences positively and found no reason to construct these appraisals as reflecting “pathological defensive denial.” The recommendations which follow will build upon a similarly positive orientation to the value of military experience during time of war and on the strengths it is believed these experiences have inculcated in student veterans.

Perhaps, in the desire to impose PTSD as a construction on veterans to explain any challenges to success in their transitions, we see an example of “societal defensive denial”, of the need to offer appropriate and effective services building upon the strengths that veterans, including student veterans, gain through military service and to support them in the negotiation of the complex and often confusing cultures of transition.

### **Research and Practice Recommendations**

A research effort to explore how student veterans themselves would create and implement a program to support their transition would demonstrate respect for them as disciplined individuals who come to academia from purposeful lives in the military. Student veterans may often feel that the academic environment, although perplexing to them is also infantilizing, this assessment expressed in their academic narratives as alienation from their younger peers and what they perceive as academic tolerance of these younger students’ disrespectful and undisciplined attitudes and behaviors.

Their engagement in a research program to design and implement their own transitional program for their academic integration in more than “an advisory capacity”, as is now often the case, would serve a dual purpose. It would offer an opportunity for a fuller exploration of their perceptions of the transitional process and also take advantage of the maturity and focus on mission they have developed through their participation in military life, these being repurposed to create a transitional bridge for their integration into the culture and values of academia.

Recommendations for interim practice include the involvement of student veterans in a self-authorship curriculum (Baxter Magolda, 1999). The initial portion of such a curriculum offers traditional information on transition such as definition of the purposes of higher education and information on financial support. In the second phase, instructors encourage student veterans to write about their past military past and present higher educational experiences querying them with complex scenarios requiring interpretation, judgment, and critical understanding. This process is intended to open space for reflection and an opportunity to create meaning, much as student veterans have been encouraged to do in this study through their oral narratives. The goal of this writing is to enable reflection on how sources of authority may differ, how different kinds of knowledge are constructed, and to offer an opportunity to see how the processes of decision-making are contextualized. A sample scenario might illustrate how values are embedded in different cultures and ask for reflection on the process of agentic uptake and resistance to these differing value sets.

The idea of creating meaning through writing is not new nor is its application in the exploration of traumatic experience to foster improved psychological adjustment (Pennebaker, 2004). In a writing application such as the self-authorship curriculum, it is hoped student veterans would begin to bridge the gap between military ways of knowing and doing and

academic ways of knowing and doing. They might also, to some degree, come to understand these ways of knowing not as binary oppositions, but as having some common ground within them, and encourage an understanding of knowledge as a complex and contextualized commodity.

Previous research has shown that unless veterans engage in an extensive process of self-segregation with other veterans throughout their time in academia, their thinking becomes increasingly contextual in nature (Baxter Magolda, 1999; Pizzalato, 2003). Although the support of other veterans can be critical for student veterans as they transition, avenues of integration into the larger culture should be offered from the initiation of their academic careers. High impact educational practices such as involvement in learning communities combining both veterans and non-veterans and involvement in virtual communities, such as SWIG (Student Wiki Interdisciplinary Groups) in which students reciprocally contribute to and enhance each others' projects across the differing disciplines they are studying assist in their introduction to academic discourse and offer exposure to how higher education views the construction of knowledge. Service learning projects capitalizing on student veterans' uptake of the ideal of selfless service offer the opportunity to reconnect them in service to the larger community and the practice of the ideals of good citizenship.

More than fifty years ago, Clark (1960) described the practices of certain institutions of higher education as providing a "cooling-out" function for students, much like today's student veterans, whose aspirations for higher education have been encouraged, but who will be insufficiently supported within the institution. This "cooling-out" function was theorized to operate through various mechanisms including the countenancing of the gradual disengagement of students from the goal of academic success. Public institutions of higher education, in

particular, are now tasked with a responsibility to see that such a “cooling-out” does not occur for the contemporary student veteran population and that they are offered appropriately supported opportunities to take full advantage of the transformative potential of higher education.

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