ABSTRACT

MESSINA, NICOLE CATHERINE. Marine by Design: The Marine Military Microcosm and its Effect on Transition in Higher Education. (Under the direction of Dr. Chad Hoggan).

Military veterans make up a growing proportion of students attending community colleges. Current research shows that some veterans do not transition easily from the service into a higher education setting. One possible reason for this is that the military purposefully creates and sustains its service members' culture. This culture can be retained after separation from military service, making it difficult to understand, accept, and otherwise transition to the culture of higher education and other civilian contexts. These struggles include personal and institutional issues that student veterans must adjust to complete their post-secondary pursuits. Therefore, this dissertation will focus on Marine culture and the effects when transitioning to IHLs. It will focus on enlisted members of the U.S Marine Corps, as this branch is the smallest force but instills a deep sense of history and culture into its troops. These findings can then be extrapolated to the other branches of the U.S. Armed Forces.

Purposeful elitism evidences the strength and pervasiveness of the Marine culture. While the purpose of military culture is not meant to interfere with a service member's transition, literature shows that veterans have issues, such as personal and institutional problems, when separating from the military. The study of the U.S Marine Corps culture is relevant to this research on how military culture affects an individual. The pervasiveness of this idea of superiority and excellence is reinforced throughout a Marine’s career via their consistent indoctrination, suggesting the Marines have a firmly and purposefully embedded culture. However, the Marines' common saying is “Once a Marine, always a Marine.” This saying has been in use since 1907 and has several potential origins. Despite its murky beginnings, it remains a persistent saying in the Marines. With this saying in mind, it could be argued that the Marines

are encultured to live their lives by Marine Corps values (honor, courage, and commitment) for the remainder of their lives. The Marine Corps' influence on its service members is an important aspect that should not be overlooked. The sheer effort that the U.S Marine Corps puts into consistently training their Marines and reinforcing the expectation of excellence at all times illustrates that this branch of the military has a more pervasive culture than the remainder of the U.S military—which is not to say that the other branches are lacking in power or prestige. By studying the underpinning of the Marine Corps culture, insights from this study can then be extrapolated to examine the effects of this training on all veterans when transitioning to civilian life, both positive and negative.

Marine by Design: The Marine Military Microcosm and its Effect on Transition to Higher Education

by
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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my daughter, Rowan. I love you, infinity

BIOGRAPHY

Nicole Catherine Messina joined the U.S Navy shortly after high school and served as an Avionics Technician for almost nine years. She deployed in support of Operation Northern Watch, Southern Watch, and Enduring Freedom. Nicole started her college education with tuition benefits while serving. After separating from the military, Nicole went on to get her B.S in History ('10), and MLIS ('12) while using her G.I Bill benefits. While completing her bachelor's, Nicole was fortunate enough to be a Department of Veterans Work Study, which led her to advocating for student veterans. Fortunately, during her MLIS program, she became the Veterans Educational Benefit Coordinator at University of Wisconsin- La Crosse. This move to the great, snowy north cemented her passion for working with student veterans.

In 2015, Nicole took a position with East Carolina University to work with larger populations of student veteran as Director of Student Veteran Services, where she began the doctoral program at North Carolina State University in 2017. Nicole lives with her daughter in Greenville, North Carolina.

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To Rowan: Thank you for being so patient when you have loss time with your mom when I've had to work. I did this to show you that you can really do anything you put your mind to.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction

Problem Statement

The military is a unique organization. It is entirely made up of volunteers but requires complete adherence to its way of life and immersion into military culture. The immersion into military culture begins in basic training, colloquially known as boot camp, by many U.S Armed Forces branches. Military culture provides the basis of the mental foundation for how service members should carry out operations. The full scope of this culture has yet to be articulated. Still, the existence of a way of thinking, being, and acting is not only generally accepted but indeed informs much of military training (Meyer,2015). This culture is likely helpful for military effectiveness, and this culture is expected to be beneficial for military effectiveness, especially in combat situations. It may contribute to many military veterans' experience when transitioning back to civilian life. This study, therefore, seeks to understand better military culture and how its inculcation affects transition to an institution of higher learning (IHL).

Military veterans make up a growing proportion of students attending community colleges. Current research shows that some veterans do not transition easily from the service into a higher education setting (Arminio et al., 2015; Demers, 2011, DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011, DiRamio et al., 2011). One possible reason for this is that the military purposefully creates and sustains its service members' culture. This culture can be retained after separation from military service, making it difficult to understand, accept, and otherwise transition to the culture of higher education and other civilian contexts.

Military culture, including the process that a civilian goes through to first become a service member via basic training and how the military culture is sustained through the various schools that one attends during their military service, is a part of understanding veteran learner experiences. Military culture's aspects may become problematic for service members after they separate from the service. Since 2009 and the beginning of the Post 9/11 GI Bill, the National Veteran Education Success Tracker (2017) shows that 247,564 student veterans have completed a post-secondary degree. The Post 9/11 GI Bill provides generous benefits, which include paid in-state tuition, a book stipend of up to $1000 an academic year, and a monthly living allowance according to the cost of living rates in the area in which the student veteran is attending school, so many veterans are attending higher education to be competitive in the job market (Post 9/11 GI Bill, 2020),.

However, some student veterans may struggle with the transition to higher education because of military culture. These struggles will be outlined in Chapter 2 and include personal and institutional issues that student veterans must adjust to to complete their post-secondary pursuits. Therefore, this dissertation will focus on the culture and the effects when transitioning to IHLs. It will focus on enlisted members of the U.S Marine Corps, as this branch is the smallest force but instills a deep sense of history and culture into its troops. These findings can then be extrapolated to the other branches of the U.S. Armed Forces.

Purposeful elitism evidences the strength and pervasiveness of the Marine culture. As argued in O'Connell's book *Underdogs: The Making of the Modern Marine Corps,* "as long as there have been Marines, they have insisted that they are superior to the other services and have located that superiority in transcendent nouns such as 'esprit,' 'spirit,' 'mystique,' and 'feeling'". The Marine Corps' literature for its members emphasizes this attitude. The 5th edition of the *Handbook for Marine NCOs* (non-commissioned officers) continually expresses that Marines must maintain an attitude of excellence in all they do. For example, it states that when a Marine is in a school with other military branches, they are expected to be the top student or near the top.

Estes claims that “anything less is unworthy of the Corps” (Estes, 2008).

Elitism is prevalent in Marine heritage. For instance, in 1921, the then Commandant of the Marine Corps, General John A. LeJeune, decreed that Marines would assemble to hear his birthday message every year on the Marine Corps birthday. This message reinforced the concept of heroism and elitism of the past Marines. Commandant LeJeune stated, “In every battle and skirmish since the Birth of the Corps, Marines have acquitted themselves with the greatest distinction, winning new honors on each occasion until the term ‘Marine’ has come to signify all that is highest in military efficiency and soldierly virtue” (U.S Marine Corps, 2004)

While the purpose of military culture is not meant to interfere with a service member's transition, literature shows that veterans have issues, such as personal and institutional problems, when separating from the military. The study of the U.S Marine Corps culture is relevant to this research on how military culture impacts an individual. The pervasiveness of this idea of superiority and excellence is reinforced throughout their career via their consistent indoctrination, suggesting the Marines have a firmly and purposefully embedded culture. However, the Marines' common saying is “Once a Marine, always a Marine.” This saying has been in use since 1907 and has several potential origins. Despite its murky beginnings, it remains a persistent saying in the Marines (Venable, 2019). With this saying in mind, it could be argued that the Marines are encultured to live their lives by Marine Corps values (honor, courage, and commitment) for the remainder of their lives. The Marine Corps' influence on its service members is an important aspect that should not be overlooked. The sheer effort that the U.S Marine Corps puts into consistently training their Marines and reinforcing the expectation of excellence at all times illustrates that this branch of the military has a more pervasive culture than the remainder of the U.S military—which is not to say that the other branches are lacking in power or prestige. By studying the underpinning of the Marine Corps culture, insights from this study can then be extrapolated to examine the effects of this training on all veterans when transitioning to civilian life, both positive and negative.

Military Pedagogies

In *Making the Corps,* Ricks argues that basic training is indoctrination into the military and less of a school to teach military tactics. (Tactics are taught in the Marines Military Occupation School and Marine Combat Training). Before enlisting in the military, individualism is a dominant cultural norm; upon entering the Marines, service members are consistently reminded that their individual needs are no longer a concern. It is the group's needs and mission that are the focus. The Marines have two leadership objectives: the primary aim is mission accomplishment, and the secondary is troop welfare. Also, recruits are told that living the Marines' credo: "honor, courage, and commitment" is essential to the lifestyle of a Marine (Ricks, 1997).

Basic training is an avenue through which the military teaches the necessary mindset to recruits through arduous and repetitious training. The U.S Marine Corps basic training occurs at Parris Island, South Carolina, and San Diego, California. The training lasts approximately 12 weeks. It is divided into four phases. Phase 1 is the platoon's formation and includes the members' initial receiving, filling out the necessary paperwork, ensuring medical and dental requirements are met, uniform and gear distribution, and an initial physical fitness test. This phase ends with swim week, requiring Marines to learn survival techniques in the water and how to use issued equipment to stay afloat when needed. Phase 2 includes two weeks of rifle training, which focuses on the fundamentals of marksmanship and training in multiple firing positions, and a week of activities designed to build group cohesion. Phase 3 completes the recruit's training and contains the Crucible, which lasts 54 hours and tests all recruits' skills throughout boot camp. The final portion of phase 3 is graduation, emphasizing that the member is no longer a recruit but a basically trained Marine. The fourth phase lasts only a week and a half, and the Drill Instructors discuss discrimination, sexual harassment, and finances. The Drill Instructors no longer talk to these Marines as recruits, but instead as Non-Commissioned Officers to a fellow Marine.

Continuous training is a critical component of the military. The 5th edition of the Handbook for Marine NCOs states that three things are essential for the service member's career: training, instruction, and school. The Marine Corps has over 100 courses that service members can attend, taught by all military branches. It is stated that completing these courses will help ensure promotion to the next grade in service. Each Marine base has a dedicated space for education, commonly referred to as the schoolhouse, to ensure that training can occur without excessive travel for commonly held courses (Estes, 2008, p. 40).

Marines spend most of their time training and preparing for situations rather than in missions. This training is so purposeful that it innately changes the service member, even those who do not see combat. Service members no longer think of themselves as individuals but instead as part of a unit that becomes part of their identity (Black et al., 2007; Herbert, 1998; Volkin, 2007; Stone, 2017). They tend to be highly aware of their place within the military's larger structure, as training includes the coordination of activities between the smaller units and larger components of the military (Lawson, 1989, pp. 1-2).

Jung (2003) states that military pedagogy attempts to understand the process of military education in the “context of individual, social, political, ethical, cultural, and organizational background” (p. 263). Toiskallio (2002) breaks action down into two types of behaviors:

mimeomorphic and polymorphic. Mimeomorphic behaviors are learned through drill and simulation, whereas polymorphic behaviors can only be learned through experience. Mimeomorphic actions are trained repeatedly in the military to prepare service members when they are called to duty in deployment. This “action competence” is a holistic underpinning of a Marine. Action competence is learned behaviors that allow an individual to act appropriately in any given situation (Jung, 2001, p. 263). This attribute is a necessary response for a service member that includes practical knowledge and instinct in decision making during unexpected situations where there is incomplete information (Malkki, K, & Malkki, J, 2009, p. 31). Essentially, Marines must be able to cope with extreme and unexpected situations. Malkki, K. & Malkki, J. (2009) argue that for soldiers to be proficient, they must cope with edge emotions defined as feelings and anxiety combined with the potential danger and resulting peril when unable to process the current circumstances (p. 36). Awareness of these edge emotions allows soldiers to move past the barriers of fear and anxiety and make complex decisions (p. 37).

Two training lines are essential for teaching Marines to act appropriately in combat. The first ensures functional action, while the second demands mental flexibility. Functional action is how armies train to face chaotic situations, usually by practicing specific acts hundreds of times until they become muscle memory. Malkki, K. & Malkki, J. (2009) argue that these functions must be repeatedly practiced to enable a service member to act appropriately on the battlefield in a deadly environment where stress and anxiety may result in the service member behaving erratically. However, the repetitive and intensive training allows the service member to react calmly and appropriately (p. 44). Mental flexibility is a soldier's ability to act despite not training for a specific situation and being out of their comfort zone. This ability is significant as it trains soldiers to handle unfamiliar and uncomfortable situations. Simulators are often used to help soldiers work through problems that are not within their comfort zone, learn to deal with the encroaching emotions, and act ethically (pp. 44-45).

Throughout the extensive training to prepare Marines for combat, the military culture provides the supporting structure built on all the other skills. However, it is not necessarily beneficial for post-military life, but some of the military's expectations positively impact a veteran’s life. Many veterans credit the military for instilling in them discipline, leadership, decision-making skills, and attention to detail which are applicable throughout their lives (Hardison et al., 2020). However, there is also evidence that other dispositional factors inherent in the military culture are not helpful, such as struggling with self-authorship, when a student veteran may feel uncomfortable with having to come up with their ideas about a subject, rather than being explicitly told what to think or do (Armino et al., 2015). For instance, some Marines struggle with compartmentalizing their military culture after they leave the service, hindering the transition to civilian life, which can be detrimental in the realm of higher education, as they struggle to adjust to new social norms while contending with the realities of their military service, such as the need to be constantly alert and control external stimuli (Kranke et al., 2015).

Interrelated Concepts of Mindset, Identity, and Culture

Transition to military life begins in basic training and is (intentionally) a transformative experience for the civilian. Civilians are taught to become service members throughout the training period and learn to embrace military mindset, military identity, and military culture. These terms are explored in depth below.

Mindset

Gollwitzer & Bayer (1999) described the early work to define the term mindset. In the early twentieth century, psychologists of the Würzburg School of cognitive psychology first coined the term “mindset.” It is described as the process of a person:

> becoming intensely involved with solving a given task activates exactly those cognitive procedures that help task completion. The created mindset (i.e., the total of the activated cognitive procedures) should consist of the cognitive orientation that is most conducive to successful task performance.

The definition of mindset is closely tied to the connection between an activity and the corresponding cognitive processes needed to complete that specific task. French (2016) explains that researchers in psychology have used Würzburg’s work on mindset as formative to their future research. Gollwitzer built upon this and is considered the formative expert in implemental and deliberative mindsets. Implemental and deliberative mindsets surround the theory between setting goals and motivation. Heckhausen developed the Rubicon Model of Action Phases through study with his advisor, which studies how people “choose action goals, plan and enact their execution, and evaluate their effort” (Gollwitzer, 1990). Each of the actions corresponds with a mindset: “predecisional (deliberative mindset, preactional (implemental mindset), actional (actional mindset) and postactional (evaluative mindset)” (French, 2016). Deliberative mindset describes the process that a person goes through to determine the possibility and merit of a potential goal. This mindset is thought to help an individual make an unbiased decision after considering any needed information and any outside factors and deciding on the practicality of meeting a goal (Gollwitzer, 1990). Implemental mindsets are used in the preactional phase, processing the complete set of tasks needed to accomplish the intended goal (Gollwitzer, 1990). French (2016) mentions that an implemental mindset tends to lead to individuals exaggerating the practicality of meeting a goal due to prudent measures of the known factors.

While scholars focusing on cognitive psychology tend to use the basis of the Würzburg definition, this is not the case in social psychology and organizational leadership. Instead, social psychology and organizational leadership scholars define mindset as a "cognitive filter" (Gupta & Govindarajan, 2002). Mindset is approached in diverse ways by various scholars. Rhinesmith (1992) argues that a mindset is a "predisposition to see the world in a particular way […] a means of simplifying the environment and bringing to each new experience or event a pre-established frame of reference for understanding it" (p. 63). Mindset can be defined as a "procedural tool, heuristic, or naïve theory used to structure thinking," while other scholars define mindset as a "frame of reference." (Oyserman et al., 2009, p. 219; Benson and Dvedsow, 2003). Ultimately, researchers view mindset as a filter through which one sees and processes the world, specifically processing information.

Positive psychology is the least developed theory in the field of mindset psychology. Like the social psychology and organizational leadership fields, positive psychology takes little background from the Würzburg definition. Instead, prominent theorists in positive psychology base their ideas beyond the concept of cognition. Dweck (2006) argues that mindsets "are just beliefs" and "frame the running account that's taking place in people's heads. They guide the whole interpretation process". In 2012, Dweck further developed their concept that mindsets are "people's lay beliefs about human attributes" (p. 615).

Identity

Identity theory is based on microsociology in the social sciences, which studies individuals and small groups (Kemeny, 1976). Identity theory examines the nature of relationships between the individual and society, meaning that people are shaped by their relationship with those they come in contact with and have many different selves to meet the various social transactions' needs throughout their lives, which is the basis of the concept of role identities. Role identities are self-definitions for what a person feels their roles are in life and shape how others will treat them in certain situations. For example, a woman may be a doctor and mother but will be respected in separate ways by their patient or child (Hogg et al., 1995).

Role identities also provide an opportunity for evaluation from the self and society's standpoint. If a person's perceived role in society is perceived to be completed successfully for that role, society views that person as successful. The person will also consider consider themselves positively, leading to increased self-esteem. A perception of inadequate fulfillment of the role's expectations will reverse affect both society and the person.

Culture

Kluckhohn (1951) initially defined culture as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another.” Kroeber & Kluckhohn's (1952) monograph listed approximately 160 definitions of the word culture and added their own to the mix. This definition had a strong influence on the psychology world. Kroeber and Kluckhohn define culture as consisting of “patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behavior acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups…the essential core of culture consists of traditional (i.e., historically derived and selected) ideas and especially their attached values, culture systems may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, on the other as conditioning elements of further action” .

The concept of culture can be separated into three general categories: external, internal, and a mixture of external and internal (Jahoda, 2012). It is external to the extent that it acts as a “press” to which individuals are exposed and then expected to adhere to their social system (Schwartz, 2009). Culture is internal because it comprises “networks of knowledge” formed from learned routines that teach individuals to respond to other people and situations (Hong, 2009).

This definition also points out that culture can create a distinct communication method between members. Also, the culture hands down traditions through generations, but traditions change with time. In 2011, Keith provided a simple definition for the term culture “a) information (e.g., beliefs, habits, ideas) learned from others that are capable of influencing behavior; and b) a group of people who share context experience.”

Culture Theories

Anthropologists began exploring national character in the 20th century. In the early part of the century, personality and culture were becoming discussed more frequently. These anthropologists were asked to examine the enemy nations' character during World War I: Germany, Japan, and the Soviet Union. The working definition at that time for the national character was “relatively enduring personality characteristics and patterns that are modal among the adult members of the society” (Inkles & Levinson, 1954). Bohannan (1963) argued that children are without personality when born. It is the adults' job to mold that child into perceiving and responding to its surroundings in a culturally acceptable manner, pointing to the importance of enculturation. In the 1960s, the concept of national character fell out of scholarly interest to examine international culture and cooperation between nations.

Recently, scholars have argued for a coherent definition of the word “culture.” Smith (2016) attempted to bring symmetry to the definitions and went through articles written in the 1990s. In 1952, Kroeber & Kluckhohn published *Culture*: *A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions,* and within that book were 164 different definitions for the word “culture,” each provided by different scholars in the anthropology field.

Smith (2016) noted that many scholars in the social science fields such as sociology, psychology, and anthropology rarely take time in their writings to define the meaning of culture.

Because only one of the 210 writings that Smith analyzed had a definition for the meaning of culture, one could conclude that scholars do not feel that culture has already been defined appropriately or do not feel the need to delve into defining a word that the scholars that had come before them had ignored. Smith (2016) emphasizes the need for a firm definition for culture, arguing that scholars risk theoretical misunderstandings of their work without one. Swidler (2002) argues that culture should be the combination of practices in a group of individuals (p. 315).

The working definition for culture from Geert Hofstede (1991) is: “the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes one group or category from another (p. 5)”. This research will use Hofstede’s definition to embrace the concept that culture is a collective, not individual, aspect. Also, it is not limited to physical attributes of culture but focuses on the individual's behavior.

Identity theory focuses on how an individual relates to society personally, which could provide the potential for a narrative inquiry into unique situations facing service members in the future. Mindset is the study of how a person’s cognitive function is applied while a person performs specific tasks or learns new behaviors. The study of military mindset could provide an area of inquiry to learn more about how military education styles affect service members' brains. Culture has been selected as the best fit for this study because it relates to the collective knowledge, thought patterns, values, principles, and behaviors that inform a person’s actions and belief system reinforced over time. The military encompasses a service member’s life while they are enlisted, as they are required to abide by specific directives and behavior codes that are distinct from civilian life. This way of life is consistently reinforced throughout training and day-to-day activities in the military and, if not followed appropriately, can result in punishment through the military judicial system.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the indoctrination of Marine culture and how it is positioned to change how Marines see the world fundamentally. The U.S Marine Corps reinforces the belief that they are the best of the military branches and continually assert the excellence expected in service members while serving. This focus on excellence is just one element of Marine culture, but its visibility makes it easy to ascertain the presence and strength of Marine culture inculcated in basic training and reinforced throughout service members' time. This study seeks to understand the other, perhaps less visible or less easily described, elements of the Marines' culture and the elements of Marine culture learned within the service that can benefit or hinder service members' transition. Those student veterans who are hindered by their experience of Marine culture can manifest in personal or institutional issues, which will be explored in greater depth in Chapter 3 of this document.

While some Marines may compartmentalize their military training and successfully adjust their mindset to that of a college student or other civilian role, others may not be able to move on from the entrenched mindset learned in the military. While military culture is essential to the military and benefits combat situations, it does not necessarily lend itself to the context of higher education. This study attempts to understand the process that creates the Marine military culture and will enable higher education professionals to engage this population in meaningful ways to help proactively prevent and ease transitional difficulties. The lack of literature surrounding the profound depth of military culture makes this aspect of the phenomenon complicated to understand the veteran's efforts to build a new civilian identity, which makes programming for student veterans difficult and incomplete.

Theoretical framework

This dissertation uses Smith-MacDonald et al.'s (2020) theory of transitioning fractured identities to analyze the transition of Marine infantrymen to student veterans. Smith-MacDonald et al.'s theory was developed from a study of injured service members involuntarily removed from service before transitioning to civilian life. Smith-MacDonald's theory posits that a service member's identity after transition can be traced through their military service. This theory consists of four categories: soldierizing, fracturing, limboizing, and reconciling. Veterans do not proceed through these categories linearly but instead can skip or repeat the steps (Smith-MacDonald et al., 2020).

The first phase, soldierizing, refers to the United States Armed Forces purposefully stripping a civilian's identity and restructuring them into a military self. This process is done by removing external influences and relationships, while emphasizing military relationships and values. This phase is prevalent in veterans who viewed the military as a calling, rather than a time commitment. This category consists of mentalizing, codifying, us'fying, missionizing, and weaponizing (Smith-MacDonald et al., 2020).

Mentalizing refers to the belief that service members can conquer any task or challenge through willpower by consistently testing their mental and physical grit. Codifying is the incorporation of cultural norms prevalent in the military, which can be defined through structure and organization. Us'fying is the process of teaching a service member that their team always comes before self. Missionizing is the belief that service members must always succeed in whatever they do, failing is unacceptable despite the cost of the task (Smith-MacDonald et al., 2020).

The second category is fracturing. Fracturing takes place when a damaging event occurs. While the event varies between individuals, the experience creates cognitive dissonance as moralizing and missionizing conflict. These experiences are categorized as: mission over morals, evil, and military betrayal (Smith-MacDonald et al., 2020)

Mission moralizing occurs when a service member must put the mission before morals; for instance, a service member may be asked to do something forbidden by the Geneva Convention (Smith-MacDonald et al., 2020) It is suggested that evil is rarely discussed relative to combat. Still, service members may feel that they have encountered evil when their mentalizing ability fails to compensate for the extreme emotional and spiritual events that they may encounter. Military betrayal is caused when a service member is a witness or experiences the U.S. military functioning in a way that conflicts with the morals and values instituted by the military (Smith-MacDonald et al., 2020).

Limboizing occurs when service members cannot successfully complete the military to civilian transition due to the transgressions during their service. PTSD can exacerbate these experiences. The properties of this category are veteranizing, failurizing, destructuring, ronin'fying, individualizing, and resigning (Smith-MacDonald et al., 2020).

Veteranizing is the process of losing their military identity, mainly when they are separated from service. This identity is replaced with that of a veteran, which holds no meaning for the individual and may be unwelcome and forced upon them. Destructuring is the feeling that the veteran is not prepared to re-enter society and has become accustomed to behaviors and social norms that are not acceptable in civilian society. Ronin-fying is when the veteran now believes they have no sense of purpose or meaning in their lives. Individualizing is requiring the veterans to now focus on their success as individuals, as their team has been removed. Many feel intense grief after being cut off from relationships that sustained them during military service. Resigning is the conscious or unconscious belief that their operational stress injuries are permanent and they will suffer for the rest of their lives (Smith-MacDonald et al., 2020).

Positioning the Study within the Theoretical Framework

It is important to understand the culture of the U.S Armed Forces.. The U.S Marines proudly state that there are no ex-Marines, only former Marines. Without appreciating the idiosyncrasies of culture of the U.S Armed Forces, it is difficult to truly determine the needs of service members transitioning out of the military. This study has implications for institutions of higher education in their efforts to design programs for the specific needs of veterans who are still highly engaged in the military culture and have not yet begun to disengage from,or are moving through, Smith-MacDonald's categories of transitioning fractured identities.

Research Methods

This research aims to better understand how military culture affects the transformation and transition of service members. Multiple sources of data will be used to explore this transformation. The researcher analyzed training documents used to educate instructors for various schools that a Marine would experience throughout their enlistment, as well as manuals meant to educate senior noncommissioned officers on retaining military personnel. The researcher interviewed Marines who are student veterans, held billets as Drill Instructors, or Instructors in military schoolhouses to understand better how the instructors incorporate the material and how they approach reinforcing the military culture.

Significance of the Study

Marine culture is purposefully and carefully reinforced throughout the entirety of a service member's enlistment but to date, there has been no research on the long-term impacts of such intense indoctrination. It is necessary to understand how the military culture is created to understand better the implications of how their training may affect their transition out of the service, to allow IHLs to program more effectively for student veterans who enter their establishment and proactively address any transition issues that may emerge in the student veteran population.

Institutions of Higher Education should be prepared for the student veterans who enter their establishment. To best meet this population's needs, higher education should become more familiar with these students' unique needs (Radford, 2009). As Chapter 2 explains, many of the expected transition issues that a student veteran may face due to military culture can be categorized as personal issues or institutional issues.

As stated earlier in the chapter, military culture can induce such a profound change in a service member’s way of looking at the world and interacting with others that transitioning to higher education can be difficult for some of these student veterans. Military learning is traditionally different from the pedagogy in higher education. Bynum (2017) argues that all service members enrolled in a military class share a sense of purpose regardless of rank or experience, which is the completion of the mission and preparation for the hardships that will potentially be encountered. Military learning also reinforces the importance of the team throughout the class. The team is held up as a symbol that must be protected at all costs. The team's importance is emphasized by focusing on team dynamics, building team unity, and reinforcing cohesion (Bynum, 2017).

These dynamics differ from higher education culture, where individuality is a vital component to the college experience for traditional college students as they are exploring aspects of their personality and emerging into adulthood. Lefkowitz (2005) explains the importance of a college campus in emerging adults' lives, as they explore aspects of their personality and make autonomous decisions (p. 40-41). While a traditional student may be trying to figure out who they are, the student veteran has had years of inculcation of what their personality is and now must try to balance their military training and experience with returning to the civilian world (Arminio et al., 2015; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). Student veterans struggle in group assignments with traditional students, as they view many of the students as not taking the “mission” or “team” seriously and not following through on deadlines. Student veterans may view their traditional peers as ‘whiny’ and ‘irresponsible’ (Lim et al., 2018).

This dissertation will be divided into three articles. The first article presents how Marine military culture can impact the transition of veterans in IHLs. The second article explores how the inculcation of military culture can imbue such a strong sense of loyalty that service members can suffer a moral injury when involuntarily separated from the service, and the third article is a white paper for the NC Community College System, Univ. of NC General Administration, and the NC legislature about the building of the military culture and how it may positively and negatively affect the transition of military students into a higher education setting.

Definition of Terms

Culture: A pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group. These shared assumptions facilitate solving external adaptation problems and internal integration, which have worked well enough to be considered valid, and therefore, are taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel concerning those problems (Schein, 2012).

Identity: An attribute referring to either (a) a social category, defined by membership rules and (alleged) characteristic attributes or expected behaviors, or (b) socially distinguishing features that a person takes special pride in or views as unchangeable but socially consequential (or (a) and (b) at once) (Erikson, 1968).

Mindset: A set of assumptions described as the process of a person becoming intensely involved with solving a given task activates exactly those cognitive procedures that help task completion. The created mindset (i.e., the total of the activated cognitive procedures) should consist of the cognitive orientation that is most conducive to successful task performance (Gollwitzer and Bayer, 1999, p. 405).

Service member: any person serving in a branch of the U.S military. This includes active-duty members, Reserve and National Guard members.

Veteran: any service member that has separated from the U.S military.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this qualitative study is to examine the culture of Marines throughout their enlistment to explore how this inculcation can have lasting effects as service members transition into higher education. This military culture has positive and negative impacts on a service member's life. It is essential to understand the military culture's power because it could have lasting effects on individuals after they separate from the military. This information can inform programs for veterans when they enter higher education. A literature review was conducted to advance this study within the current sphere of knowledge.

This literature review reflects the experiences of service members entering the military and teaching military culture in basic training. They go through combat training to prepare service members for deployment on the front lines, further reinforcing the military culture. The literature review focuses on the current training regimen in the United States Marines Corps, beginning with basic training and then following the path of military education until separation. Due to the Marines' small size and the lack of literature about this branch, it was necessary to include literature from other branches, particularly infantry in the U.S Army. These service members—steeped in a culture of readiness to kill when necessary and hypervigilance—separate from the military with deeply ingrained militaristic systems of thinking, which this study refers to as "military culture," which may or may not be appropriate when entering higher education.

A comprehensive literature review was completed using Sage Database, Taylor & Francis Online, Wiley Online Library, ProQuest, Brill, Education Research Complete, and EBSCO Host and focused primarily on peer-reviewed scholarly articles to better understand the transition of the service member from civilian to veteran. Google Scholar was also conducted to provide additional literature to support this study. Overall, when using these search engines, the keywords included “U.S Marines Corps’ AND basic training,” “U.S Marines Corps’ AND education,” “U.S Marines Corps’ AND culture, “military AND culture.”

This literature review explores training that orients civilians into the military, prepares them for combat before deployment, and the complexities that occur when someone is transitioning into the military and then throughout their time in the Marines

Orientation into the Military

Basic training, or “boot camp,” is commonly known as the initial transition from civilian to military and arguably the most influential process. Recruits must pass a series of skill tests to continue training in their platoon; individuals who fail to meet skill standards are placed into another platoon who has just begun training for that skill (Demers, 2011; McGurkk, Cotting, Britt &Adler, 2006). Lori Holyfield (2011) states, “conscious solidarity building occurs in basic training that provides symbolic weight to the words honor, duty, and sacrifice in the name of defending the nation” (p. 21). Holyfield (2011) explains that this time in boot camp is designed to be transitional: you are not a civilian, but you are not yet a bona fide service member. This transition consists of grueling days, often lasting 16 hours, consisting of periods of physical exertion, classroom training, drill training, and practical application of previously learned skills, leading to creating a new identity (p. 26). A drill sergeant, drill instructor, military training instructor, or recruit division commander (depending on the branch—Army, Marines, Air Force, and Navy, respectively) is tasked with turning a civilian into a service member. Throughout this dissertation, the term drill instructor will be used for cohesion, regardless of branch.

Holyfield (2011) describes a drill instructor as a model of the optimal service member through demonstrations of “exaggerated male aggression and hostility”(p. 26). “This display of overt violence is a show of what is expected on the battlefield and combat readiness…the moral ambiguity of war is eliminated…during basic training as individuals shed their 'civilian skins for military uniforms'"(p. 26). A drill instructor's media portrayal is a loud, harsh disciplinarian who uses embarrassment and physical punishment to obtain obedience from their recruits. This is not reality, as it is unacceptable to the military's regulations and inconsistent with the findings of Foran & Adler (2013), who studied recruits' perceptions of drill instructors. The authors found that recruits viewed their drill instructors as tough but highly respected and motivated individuals (p. 585). While the drill instructor often exemplifies a symbol of fear and sometimes induces hatred, this person has the arduous task of transforming a civilian into a member of their respective branch of service (p. 586). Recruits come to look to their drill instructor with awe and respect—the symbol changing from that of fear to that of the ultimate image of military service (Foran & Adler, 2013, pp. 586-7). Researchers argue that the drill instructor is one of the most influential figures in a service member's formative experiences in the military as they "adapt behaviorally and psychologically to the military" (Foran & Adler, pp. 577-578; Faris, 1975). Holyfield (2011) argues that drill instructors model the ethos of emotional control for recruits as the recruits react to the overt hostility and aggression in basic training (p. 26).

The drill instructor encourages recruits to shed their civilian way of life and embrace the military through carefully choreographed lessons and seemingly endless repetitions. In the face of conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, the Army has made a concerted effort to ensure that new soldiers are trained for the situations they will encounter. Their basic training has been made more arduous, with training on urban warfare, checkpoint procedures, convoy operations, weapons familiarization, and live-fire operations based on Iraq and Afghanistan scenarios (Cavallaro, 2005). During basic training, drill instructors carefully guide recruits through "real-life" situations repeatedly until the correct responses become muscle memory. Weapon familiarization and warfare training are often done despite the variety of jobs these recruits will hold; there is a decided focus on combat operations as the Marine ethos of “every Marine, a rifleman”. To ensure that recruits get the most up-to-date training, most drill instructors have recently returned from combat deployments, where they were on the front lines (Johnson, Hewitt, Krammer & Lemler, 2007).

After Basic Training

After basic training, most service members then attend a school for their military occupation. For those service members who will be on the front lines of combat, the military goes to great lengths to teach members how to respond to different stimuli and deal with the stress and horror of combat. In an interview for the documentary, *The Ground Truth: After the Killing Ends*, Lt. Col Dave Grossman argues that this is necessary training because parts of the human brain are averse to killing other humans (Foulkrod, 2006). These methods are often denial, dehumanizing others, and detachment, essentially shutting the service member off from any emotion. The military encourages service members to forget and move on, as the mission—not the military member’s mental health—is of the utmost importance; this is known as the “soldier’s switch.” One soldier, Reinhold, describes his experience with the soldier’s switch, “the whole time I was in Iraq, I didn’t care about anything….Complete the mission—God forbid they ever leave me out of a mission ‘cause I swear that I would have lost my purpose on earth…cause you’re all rough and tough and you’re ready to fight and you would never show an emotion” (Holyfield, 2011). While helpful in combat, military culture can be detrimental when the service member separates from the military and must reintegrate into civilian life, as the focus on the mission disappears and the service member must find a new niche to fill in the civilian world. There is evidence that veterans struggle to adjust as they return to the civilian world, and it is plausible that one reason for these struggles is that the military culture does not suit civilian life very well.

Another complication due to military culture is isolation on the college campus. While veterans may not appear significantly older than their traditional peers, their previous life experiences are different. While veterans often cite that they can identify other student veterans on campus, relating to each other on a level common between service members, it can be challenging to find such peers on campus if there is no social club for veterans or a veterans' lounge. Veterans often crave connections with other veterans due to the loss of military esprit de corps (DiRamio et al., 2008). Another typical change for veterans that can hinder transition is that the concept of *team* is vital to service members, and in many cases, service members work, eat, exercise, and live together. Once the service member has separated, their team members are removed from their life. While they may stay connected with them through various means, the veteran is now an outsider to the active-duty members they once worked with because they no longer work towards the current mission. If the service member lived on or near their base, they might need to move from their support structure to be closer to job and education opportunities. This move will isolate the veteran further from their team, and they may be surrounded by individuals in their new location who are difficult to relate to because of significantly different life experiences (Arminio et al., 2015; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). Guzman Bouvard (2012) argues that the psychological impacts of war last far longer than the physical injuries sustained and can drive veterans into drinking heavily, isolation, suicidal ideation, and agonizing over their actions while on deployment (p. 51).

Ahren et al. (2015) argue that military members often view the military as a family due to conditions prevalent in the military, such as combat, the threat of Improvised Explosive Devices

(IEDs), and close living quarters, uniquely bonding the service members due to difficult circumstances. Service members phrase the experience as "Only we know what we've gone through". Wong et al. (2003) identify that despite the difficulty of combat situations, service members are often happy to fight alongside their team, as they feel they must keep their team safe. Losing a member of one's team is unthinkable and a sign of failure to service members; this motivation keeps military members combat-ready and willing to serve another tour or re-enlist. Wong et al. (2003) asked soldiers about the most critical contributor to their desire to persist in difficult circumstances, such as combat, and doing the best job possible. Some soldiers responded that they simply wanted to get home, while the most common response was "fighting for my buddies." Soldiers mentioned that the only thing that they truly worried about was themselves and their crew. Others said they did not want to let anyone down, indicating the importance of social cohesion in the military. For example, the Army trains the Stryker Brigade Combat Team with a manning system that places soldiers together for 36 months, including arrival, training, and deployment (Wong et al., 2003). Social cohesion serves two roles: each soldier carries the burden of success upon their shoulders, as they view their part of the unit as essential, and ultimately protects the unit from harm. One soldier stated: "That person means more to you than anybody. You will die if he dies. That is why I think that we protect each other in any situation. I know that if he dies and it was my fault, it would be worse than death to me" (Wong et al, 2003). Another role of social cohesion is to provide security in knowing someone else is watching out for you. One infantryman stated: "you have got to trust them more than your mother, your father, or girlfriend, or your wife, or anybody. It becomes like your guardian angel". Wong et al. (2003) explain further that once soldiers are convinced of their safety by the security in their unit, they will feel able to carry out their mission without worry.

The war in Afghanistan and Iraq was confusing, as the enemy was unknown. The American military follows the rules of engagement, but enemy insurgents do not, making combat situations especially dangerous and unpredictable. Lighthall (2012) conducted a study of veterans from various generations attending a Vets Journey Home (VJH) retreat. One participant, Caleb, tells a story of encountering children and learning they were unable to be trusted, changing his understanding of the rules of war. He stated, “It’s like I don’t know who the enemy is”. It is essential to control fear; discipline and obedience are necessary, alongside the aggression needed during combat operations. To enhance readiness, drills are repeated to ensure that movements become muscle memory. New language fills the environment: people are called targets (Holyfield, 2011). It would be difficult to believe that these actions do not leave a person irrevocably changed somehow.

Student veterans may face multiple issues when transitioning out of the military to higher education. These issues may be personal, such as familial, a feeling of isolation on campus, physical or mental disabilities that complicate transition, institutional barriers in receiving benefits, a lack of student veteran support services at the chosen institution, confusion regarding policies and procedures. These categories, personal and institutional, will be explored in depth below.

Personal Struggles in Higher Education

Student veterans who have families may struggle with adjusting to returning home and the time that academia requires of its students to be successful. Bagby et al. (2015) state that juggling family and academic responsibilities can be complicated for student veterans, especially when they have recently returned from deployment and feel that they must make up for lost family time. One student's ability to perform in the classroom was stymied due to a newborn who was not sleeping through the night, something that adult learners may also contend with.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) may exacerbate familial problems and create a toxic environment. Student veterans with PTSD are more likely to have higher intimate partner abuse levels. Klaw et al. (2016) defined this abuse as psychological and physical abuse directed towards significant others. In their study, two-thirds of student veterans admitted to verbally abusing their partner. The study also found that more than half of the student veterans surveyed had moderate to "huge level of anger stemming from combat stress, PTSD, and deployments".

Service members may feel isolated on campus due to their unique life experiences and want to interact with other student veterans (Strickley, 2009). Developing relationships with civilian students are often brought up as difficult (DiRamio et al., 2008). In an interview with 25 student veterans, "connecting with peers: emerged as a widespread concern in the study (DiRamio et al., 2008). Other studies showed that student veterans feel disconnected from their civilian peers due to an assumption of a lesser maturity level (DiRamio et al., 2008; Livingston et al., 2011). Disconnection is problematic because studies have shown that positive peer relationships correlate with a lower level of PTSD symptoms and a higher instance of persistence in higher education (Hausmann et al., 2007). In a longitudinal study, Whiteman et al. found that student veterans feel they begin with lower peer interaction. However, the peer support rate increased simultaneously for both student veterans and civilian students. Due to the initial lower rate of perceived peer interaction, the student veterans' perceived peer support level may never reach the same level of perceived peer support as that of civilian students.

As stated earlier, PTSD can be a common diagnosis that student veterans face when entering higher education. Student veterans can also suffer from a range of mental illnesses, such as anxiety, depression, and comorbidities related to military sexual trauma. Approximately 17.3% of student veterans may suffer from Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI), ranging from mild to severe symptoms. Veterans with TBIs face comorbid mental illnesses, such as PTSD, depression, increased risk of suicidal ideation, suicide attempts, and suicide completions. Also, those with TBIs can face pain, substance abuse, and cognitive impairment (Lindquist et al., 2017). A disabled student veteran may face great difficulty accessing needed services and support on campus.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that as of August 2019, 25% of the total veteran population had been assigned a service-connected disability rating by the Department of Veterans Affairs (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2019). Although a generalized statistic can be used, it would be difficult to provide a concise percentage of disabled student veterans in higher education. For this study, the researcher will assume at least 25% of student veterans in higher education have a VA service-connected disability rating.

Military culture does not allow a service member to show pain or weakness in the mind or body. Service members who develop these ailments may feel that other service members will look down upon them as weak. French and Nikolic-Novakovic (2012) argue that "inherent in this culture is the shame and embarrassment of admitting psychological distress. These admissions are contrary to the military code of silence. For many troubled veterans, it better to 'suck it up' and take care of the problem themselves, such as self-medicating with alcohol and other mind-altering substances (p. 69). Because of this facet of military culture's pervasiveness, student veterans are reluctant to disclose disabilities to the University (Shackelford, 2009). Also, student veterans fear disclosing disabilities because they believe that registering for services may impact employment later if a background check is required (Burnett & Segoria, 2009).

Institutional Issues for Student Veterans in Higher Education

Student veterans must apply for VA Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits before using them at an institution. Some student veterans do not understand the Post 9/11 GI Bill's complexities, making it difficult to access benefits and understand school processes in their first semester (Norman et al., 2015). Colorado U.S. Senator Michael Bennet surveyed student veterans at Colorado Universities. Over 260 student veterans completed the survey. Two-thirds of the respondents had issues with education benefit payments, 84% consisted of payment delays. Forty-eight percent reported waiting for at least two to four weeks to receive compensation, and almost 13% had to wait more than a month. Bennet added that many of his constituents relied heavily on the education payments to cover most of their living costs while attending college. Delays in payments by the Department of Veterans Affairs can cause unnecessary financial hardship for student veterans (Bennet survey, 2012). One student cited paying for tuition and books upfront and then waiting to be reimbursed. Another had submitted his application for benefits a year prior, but the forms still had not been processed (DiRamio et al., 2008, p. 91).

When a student veteran begins their education at a post-secondary institution, the navigation of processes can be complex and confusing, especially for a service member who is used to detailed instructions of what to complete, how to complete it, and where to go to confirm completion (Rumann & Hamric, 2010, p. 441). In DiRamio et al.'s study (2008), one student complained about the lack of information and assistance from the veteran's office on campus, unhappy that he was told to make an appointment when the staff "were sitting around drinking coffee" (p. 89-90). Another student was frustrated with the unclear and challenging to find information about needed forms. He stated that he either forgot to fill out needed forms or that they were not filled out on time, feeling that the college staff "didn't like [him]" (p. 90).

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This research employed qualitative research through the lens of Smith-MacDonald's theory of transitioning fractured identities. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the cultural conditioning that Marines receive throughout their service and how it is positioned to change how Marines fundamentally see the world.

My objective was to analyze the responses that answer the research questions based on the individual experiences of student veterans, Drill Instructors, and Instructors. I focus on the Marine Corps because this branch arguably has the strongest sense of instilled culture in the U.S. Armed Forces. The Marine Corps emphasizes discipline and excellence in their Marines continuously throughout their service and their life. This information can then be extrapolated to the other branches of the Armed Forces.

Qualitative Research

Qualitative inquiry emerged in education research in the early 1900s. In the 1980s, qualitative research was updated to include incorporating theoretical lenses to provide additional insight into critical issues and populations. As the practice of qualitative research grew, and the processes became more defined by scholars using specific approaches in the 1990s and into the 21st century, it has increasingly become seen as a viable and meaningful alternative to quantitative research, rising from the disciplines of anthropology, sociology, the humanities, and evaluation studies (Creswell, 2014, p. 13).

Qualitative research strives to examine participants' experiences through "examining documents, observing behavior or interviewing participants" (Creswell, 2014, p. 185). If plausible, data is collected on-site to experience the researched issue. Researchers talk directly to participants, and the setting allows people to act more naturally than they would in a laboratory setting (Creswell, 2014, p. 185). Creswell (2014) states, “this up-close information gathered by actually talking directly to people and seeing them behave and act within their context is a major characteristic of qualitative research” (p. 185). Researchers review all supplied data and then make sense of it by developing complex and comprehensive themes through the conversations and gathered documents. Each theme will be explored to see if there is enough evidence to support the theme or if more data must be gathered (Creswell, 2014, p. 186).

Maxwell (2005) argues that a researcher best uses qualitative research when they want to understand the participants' meanings and context better and understand the processes that inform the experience. Merriam (2009) posits that “qualitative researchers are interested in understanding how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 5). It is also important to remember that reality is a social construct and comprises many dynamic and evolving truths (Schwandt, 2007). A qualitative study is focused on examining how a person understands the meaning of their experience (Merriam, 2009, p. 5). Qualitative research was appropriate for this study because it sought to understand how military culture is imbued into people new to the military and how military culture's experience affected their transition to higher education.

As the bulk of the information gathered in this study is from interviews, it was important for the researcher to focus on the participants' meanings and not allow researcher bias to unduly influence findings. The researcher examined their role in the study and their background to determine if their own experiences had shaped interpretations and advanced themes particular to their own biases. The researcher must be cognizant of their role and ensure they are not shaping the study (Creswell, 2014, p. 186). Lastly, “emergent design” qualitative inquiry allows for flexibility in designing the research plan as the themes emerge through open-ended interviews with participants (Creswell, 2007).

Research Questions

The specific research questions this study addressed are as follows:

- Question 1: How do elements of Marine culture affect veterans' transition to higher education?

Design

This study was conducted through semi-structured interviews with broad, open-ended questions to better understand the Marine military culture's conditioning through Drill instructors and Instructors' eyes at other schools that Marines attend. Student veterans were also interviewed to examine if and/or how their military culture experiences have influenced their higher education experiences, positively or negatively. Also, Marine Corps material will be examined to get a clear idea of how Marine Corps service members are expected to instill or reinforce the military culture throughout a service member's time in the Marines

Selection of Participants

Before gathering any data, the Institutional Review Board process was completed to ensure collection occurs to protect the participants' rights. This process was accomplished by ensuring informed consent, protecting all participants' privacy, and maintaining data confidentiality. For this study, two groups of interview participants were recruited: Marine Corps Instructors (5; all male) and student veterans of the Marine Corps currently attending community college (11; 8 male & 3 female).

Marine Instructor Interviews. Initially, the researcher had planned to contact current Drill Instructors and Instructors through their respective commands. Unfortunately, due to

COVID-19, this was not possible. Instead, the researcher utilized their personal and professional network to recruit participants who had acted as a Drill Instructor or Instructor during their military service. Potential participants were recruited through social media avenues such as Facebook, the Marines Reddit group, and LinkedIn. Through this method, the researcher recruited two Marines who had been Drill Instructors and three Marines who had been Instructors at military schoolhouses. Parties who indicated interest were sent an email with my study's information (Appendix 1). When a participant stated that they were willing to participate, a date and time would be selected for the WebEx meeting. Then they were directed to sign the electronic informed consent form. The purpose of these interviews was to examine the training that Marines receive throughout their service and how it is positioned to fundamentally change how Marines see the world (Appendix 2 & 5)

Marine Veterans in Community College. The researcher had planned to recruit Marine student veterans from the community colleges closest to Camp LeJeune and Marine Corps Air Station Cherry Point. Still, due to COVID-19, the researcher opened recruitment to any Marine currently attending a community college. Eleven Marines were interviewed for this study. I contacted the Veteran Services Coordinator at each school via email and asked if they could distribute my participation request email to their students (Appendix 3). Participants must be previously enlisted in the Marines and separated from the service for no more than five years. (Appendix 4). Student veterans interested in participating in my study emailed me and set up a date and time to meet via WebEx. Once their interest and availability were confirmed, the participants were directed to sign the electronic informed consent form.

Document Analysis

Document analysis is a methodical approach for examining or assessing documents in either a physical or online format. The documents must be explored and deciphered for the researcher to gain a more holistic view of the topic being examined to meet the rigor necessary to be combined with qualitative inquiry (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Rapley, 2007).

For this study, I examined training materials via document analysis to better understand the methods of instilling the military culture into the Marines and what impact this highly specialized training has on incoming service members. The researcher used the Marine Corps Publications Electronic Library to access these documents, which hold all Marine Corps publications, orders, and directives. The researcher looked for any document that pertained to basic training, education, military instruction, military bearing, and sustainment. From this material, excerpts and directives were pulled directly from the documents to inform the researcher on the formal instruction provided to the U.S Marines Corps on how to instill Marine Corp culture into recruits and maintain that same rigor of military bearing until they separate from the military.

Document analysis involves three steps: skimming, reading, and interpretation. The researcher must be well-informed about the subject matter through a thorough literature review to identify helpful passages and ignore those that do not inform the researcher's understanding of the behavior (Bowen, 2009, p. 32). The researcher engaged in thematic analysis with the documents to look for emerging themes relevant to creating and maintaining military culture in the U.S Marines. I first skimmed the documents get a basic understanding of the information. Next, I read selected sections thoroughly to identify specific passages to code and then categorized them using relevant and emerging themes. Lastly, I compared the documentation to the participant interviews for any material that correlated a theme or process that seemed to divert from Marine Corps publications.

These documents supplemented the interviews with the instructors and student veterans, so the previous coding was applied to the documents. It is important to note that these documents were examined critically, as instruction manuals and training records may not reflect the reality of behavior in basic training and other educational opportunities provided by the U.S Marines (Bowen, 2009, p. 32).

Data Analysis

After interviews were complete, the researcher used the WebEx platform's transcription tool. These transcriptions were checked for accuracy by the researcher. Each participant was given the option to review their transcript to ensure the collected data were accurate and precise. After this was completed, coding began.

The coding process classified data into smaller sections, and a term was used to represent those emergent themes. These words represent categories which were then studied for the emerging themes consistent in the interviews and documents (Creswell, 2013, pp. 198-199). These themes were analyzed until saturation has taken place. Creswell (2013) defines saturation as when “the researcher stops collecting data because fresh data no longer sparks new insights or revels new properties” (p. 248).

Reporting of Findings

This dissertation will report the findings from this research through three publications. The first publication is an article exploring the how military culture enacts personal barriers when rebuilding a civilian identity in higher education. The second publication is an article exploring how the military culture may affect a service member so broadly as to inflict a moral injury upon involuntary separation from the U.S. Marine Corps. The third publication is a white paper for the North Carolina Community College System, University of North Carolina General Administration, and the North Carolina legislature about building the military culture and how it may positively and negatively affect the transition of military students into a higher education setting.

Validity

Validity is essential to the qualitative process to ensure the information is accurate. Qualitative validity is when the procedures the researcher uses are appropriate to the purposes and contexts of the study (Creswell, 2013, p. 201). Validity was promoted through triangulation. Triangulation means that various forms of data are evaluated to ensure the researcher has reached a logical conclusion regarding the emerging themes. The researcher asked fellow doctoral students knowledgeable in issues surrounding student veterans to code a few pages of interview transcripts to determine if the other doctoral students replicated the emergent themes found by the researcher. When the same themes emerge through distinct types of data collected and outsider coding, the researcher can show the validity of the study (Creswell, 2013, p. 201).

Data from interviews and document analysis were combined to help triangulate the data, which is "the combinations of methodologies in the study of the phenomenon (Denzin, 1970, p. 291). Using multiple methods to collect data allowed the researcher to depict the effects of cultural indoctrination more accurately in the U.S Marine Corps, ultimately ensuring the researcher's findings are as unbiased as possible. (Patton, 1990).

In addition, the researcher used member checking to help ensure the validity of the data collected. Member checking involves having the participants review and engage with the data collected and ensure that their desired intent in their responses was left intact (Birt et al., 2016), Lastly, I have examined and reflected on my experiences in the military and working with student veterans and provided a summary of my background. I will also note any personal biases throughout the analysis process to remain as critical as possible.

Ethical and Privacy Considerations

Throughout the design of this study, I worked to ensure that the study would take place ethically by following guidelines and measures set forth by Merriam and Tisdell (2016). I told each participant why I felt their story was important and how data would be collected. After collecting data from the participants, the information was kept on an external hard drive in a password protected file and kept in a locked cabinet when not in use. After the research has been published for one year, the data will be deleted. In addition, each participant was provided a randomized name through name-generator.org.uk to remain anonymous. I told each participant that while they will not be paid for their time, their information could provide valuable insights to potential stakeholders. This study did not begin until approved by the institutional review board at North Carolina State University.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Assumptions are considered factors in the study that are out of the researcher's control, but if the factor was not present, then the study would be insignificant (Leedy & Ormond, 2010, p. 62). For this study, the researcher assumed that the participants would be honest during interviews. To help ensure honesty, the researcher can ensure anonymity and that the participant may withdraw from the study at any time. This statement was present in the informed consent document, as well as stated during the initial stages of the interview. The researcher also assumed that this study conveyed a reasonably accurate depiction of the participant's experiences with

Marine military culture and how it transforms individuals serving. The results of this study will be applicable to stakeholders and add to the scholarly research concerning military veterans. The researcher assumed the sample size of participants was satisfactory to examine the design and effects that military culture has on the transformation of an individual.

Limitations

It is not possible to control some variables in research, meaning that all research will have limitations (Ellis & Levy, 2009). Fifteen participants utilizing in-depth interviews is standard for qualitative inquiry, it does not provide enough data for generalizable results (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Instead, the rich data provided through qualitative research provides transferability. Transferability refers to how knowledge can be evaluated for pertinent data to be applied elsewhere (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). The small population of U.S Marine Corps affiliated members did reduce the pool of possible participants, but I did try to mitigate this difficulty by allowing Marine student veterans from across the nation rather than focusing on one locality. In addition, while I am a veteran, I am not a Marine, which may have influenced what each participant was willing to share with me.

Delimitations

Delimitations are the characteristics that the researcher does have control over. The researcher's first delimitation was choosing the topic of effects of service members from the participation in military culture. The research delimited the population to Marines due to their relative small size, proximity to the researcher, and their perceived excellence as Marines.

Positionality Statement

I joined the U.S Navy while I was in high school and left for basic training two weeks after graduation in 1998. I served as an Avionics Technician on EA-6B Prowlers for 9 years in several different commands on Naval Air Station Whidbey Island in Washington state. I was deployed in Saudi Arabia during 9/11 then re-enlisted to deploy again to Turkey and Japan in support of various campaigns for both the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. During my second enlistment, I took a single college class upon my peer's recommendation and did well in it, which led to the realization that I could succeed in college despite my initial hesitation. After separating from the military in 2007, I enrolled full time in a local community college, and then transferred to a 4-year University and graduated with a bachelor's degree in History. I went on to get my master's in Library Science. The living stipend provided by the Department of Veteran's Affairs while attending school is relatively paltry if one has bills such as a car, mortgage, or family to support. I did not struggle with academics, but I did struggle with the loss of income while supporting a household, feelings of isolation on campus, and frustration with the Department of Veterans Affairs' processes and policies. I worked throughout my undergraduate career as Veterans Affairs work study and found a passion for assisting my fellow veterans to understand and use their education benefits There were little to no programs in higher education for transitioning veterans while I was working on my undergraduate degree, until the Post 9/11 Act was signed into law in 2009.

I did not serve in the U.S Marines and was not in an occupation field that faced any threat of combat action. However, due to my work in higher education I became very interested in the Marines who separated from the military and struggled to disentangle themselves from the Marine culture and embrace their civilian life and the career prospects that they might have. I became close friends with several Marine students and was amazed at the difference in culture between the U.S Navy and U.S Marines. My experience with the U.S Navy showed me a military that, while very mission-oriented, was fairly relaxed in tone, as long as all the necessary work was complete. The Marine students I worked with consistently expressed the push to strive for excellence and to "be the best." This was not something I observed in students that I worked with from the other branches of the military.

The Marines' mantra of excellence is something that stood out to me, leading me to wonder if that specific branch's culture made it more difficult for those veterans to transition into higher education.

I have worked with student veterans in a higher education setting since 2007. This experience has shown me that in many cases veterans and active-duty members are more willing to open themselves to other veterans, even if the branch of service or time period differs. This provided me with the ability to develop an easier rapport with those I interviewed, allowing for the interviews to go beyond the surface of an issue and examine more intrinsic themes relevant to military culture.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Gimme that Eagle, Globe, and Anchor: A qualitative exploration of U.S Marine military culture and its effect on finding commonality with civilians after the transition from military service

Nicole C. Messina

Abstract

This article focuses on the education of enlisted members of the U.S. Marine Corps, as this branch is the smallest force but instills a deep sense of history and culture into its troop. A qualitative study was conducted to discuss the effects of Marine military culture on a service member's transition to higher education. The impact of military culture on Marine veterans can then be extrapolated to the other branches of the U.S. Armed Forces. One central theme that emerged when discussing the transition to higher education was the pervasive enculturation of exclusivity when comparing service members to civilians.

Keywords: military culture, student veterans, higher education; identity

Gimme that Eagle, Globe, and Anchor: A qualitative exploration of U.S Marine military culture and its effect on finding commonality with civilians after the transition from military service

This qualitative study examines the indoctrination of civilians into the military, as military culture becomes an essential aspect of a service member's identity while enlisted. These attitudes and customs persist after separation from the military. Military culture and the reconstruction of a service member's civilian identity should be considered when Institutions of Higher Education (IHLs) design and implement programs to assist student veterans when they enroll in college. Understanding military culture can allow an Institution to appeal to potential student veterans and enable student veterans to achieve academic success. Military culture is not easily defined, but service members will often point to basic training as the foundation of their identity transformation from a civilian into a service member.

The U.S. Marine Corps reinforces the belief that they are the best of the military branches and continually assert the excellence expected in service members while serving. This focus on excellence is just one element of Marine culture. Still, its visibility makes it easy to ascertain the presence and strength of Marine culture taught in basic training and reinforced throughout service members' time. This study seeks to understand the influence of the Marine identity as an element of the Marines' culture and how the Marine identity can benefit or hinder service members' transition to a civilian identity, specifically within higher education. Higher education institutions should be prepared for the student veterans who enter their establishment. More military veterans will choose to begin their education at community colleges, so it can be argued that community colleges need to be prepared to meet the needs of transitioning service members (Radford, 2009).

Review of Literature

Within the growing research on veterans, the student veteran experience has been an increasing source of inquiry. Craig (2015) argued for a characterization of the field of veteran studies, stating the interdisciplinary scholars already contributing were “devoted to developing a clearer understanding of veterans and the veteran experience in the past, present, and the future (p. 113). With this understanding in mind, this research is presented on the indoctrination of U.S Marines into military culture and the impact that steady inculturation may have on student veterans’ curation of a new identity within higher education. Higher education professionals who wish to have a better understanding of how to better support student veterans on college campuses should refer to the recent literature reviews by Barry et al. (2014), Blackwell-Starnes (2018), and Jenner (2017) that detail the critical work in the growing interdisciplinary field. For this study, the current scholarship will focus on transforming an individual into a service member and how that transformation may present an obstacle for a student veteran when they begin reacclimating to the civilian world upon separation.

Orientation into the Military

The U.S. Marine Corps arguably have the most profoundly ingrained culture of all the U.S. Armed Forces and position themselves as the best U.S. military branch. This enculturated elitism begins when a recruit steps onto the yellow footprints in boot camp and continues their entire enlistment. O'Connell illustrates the emphasis on superiority in his book *Underdogs: The Making of the Modern Marine Corps*: "as long as there have been Marines, they have insisted that they are superior to the other services" (p. 27). The Marine Corps' professional development opportunities for its service members persist in stressing this attitude. The 5th edition of the *Handbook for Marine NCOs* (non-commissioned officers), for instance, regularly maintains that

Marines should exude an attitude of excellence in all they do. For example, when a Marine attends a school with other military service members, the Marine is expected to be the top student or near the top of the class. Estes claims that "anything less is unworthy of the Corps" (Estes, 2008, p. 40).

Despite the deep enculturation of Marines, the mindset and actions related to embedment in the military are designed specifically for the military lifestyle. The behaviors are not necessarily meant to last after transition, but the attitudes associated with military culture can persist; literature shows that some veterans have transition issues, both personal and institutional when transitioning out of the military. U.S. Marine Corps culture is relevant to this research on military culture's effect on individuals when they transition out of the military. For instance, the Marines' common saying is "Once a Marine, always a Marine." This saying indicates that Marines will live their lives by Marine Corps values (honor, courage, and commitment) even after transitioning out of the military. The foundation of Marine Corps culture can be examined to understand military culture's influence on all veterans when transitioning to civilian life and how it may affect veterans' ability to have positive interactions and relationships with civilians upon separation.

Basic training, or "boot camp," is the initial transition from civilian to military and leaves a lasting impact on many service members.. Ricks (1997) quotes Marine Corps Gen. Charles Krulak, “We are getting [the recruits] from a society that is in many ways disintegrating. Unless there is a change in this nation, this problem is going to manifest itself in larger proportion.” Recruits are taught military customs and courtesies and various skills to prepare them for military life (Demers, 2011; McGurkk, Cotting, Britt, &Adler, 2006). Boot camp is a transitional zone; a recruit is no longer a civilian but not considered a bona fide service member. Boot camp consists of long days, frequently lasting up to 16 hours. A recruit participates in physically taxing activities, classroom training, drill training, and applying newly learned skills in training evolutions. Weeks of intense training under the sharp eyes of a drill instructor result in the recruit forming the new identity, that of a service member (Ricks 1997, p. 26).

Researchers argue that the drill instructor is one of the most influential figures in a service member's initial experiences in the military as they “adapt behaviorally and psychologically to the military” (Foran & Adler, pp. 577-578; Faris, 1975). Through carefully constructed lessons and countless iterations of learned actions, the drill instructor acts as a model of military bearing and assists the recruits in leaving their civilian lifestyle behind and becoming service members. In the face of long-standing conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, most drill instructors have been selected from those Marines recently deployed to combat zones to provide recruits the most up-to-date training (Johnson, Hewitt, Krammer & Lemler, 2007).

After Basic Training

Part of boot camp is instilling in recruits that Marines are elite and must be the best in what they do every day. After completing boot camp, recruits are presented with the Marine Corps emblem, the Eagle, Globe, and Anchor. They are now fully part of the Marine Corps family, and once a Marine, they are always a Marine. After basic training, most service members attend a school for their military occupation. Due to the nature of combat, the military teaches service members how to prepare mentally for the stresses of war. Completing the mission becomes of the utmost importance, not what the service member is experiencing mentally or emotionally. The military reinforces that service members should not linger on the combat experience but instead focus on the mission; this is known as the "soldier’s switch” (Holyfield, 2011, p. 31). While helpful in combat, this mentality can be disadvantageous when the service member transitions out of the military and rejoins the civilian sector. The veteran no longer has a mission and must find a new role to fill in society, which may cause struggles during the transition (Arminio, Grabosky & Lang, 2015; DiRamio et al., 2008; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011).

Military culture focuses heavily on the importance of the team and the camaraderie found within the military. The loss of the consistent presence of a team may complicate transition because of isolation on the college campus. Veterans often seek connections with other veterans due to losing their military unit and kinship with other service members due to their life experiences. Veterans often state that they can spot other each otheron campus. Still, connecting with military affiliated students can be challenging if there is no prominent social club for veterans or a dedicated space for veterans to congregate (Arminio, Grabosky & Lang, 2015; DiRamio et al., 2008; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). Bouvard (2012) posits that the psychological impacts of combat may linger longer than any physical injuries sustained and can lead to veterans abusing alcohol, isolation, suicidal ideation, and agonizing over their actions while on deployment (p. 51).

Militarism

Social scientists define militarism as the process a nation goes through when preparing for war. This process allows civilians to distance themselves from the harsh realities of combat but instead focus on the perceived superiority of their military. Thus, it becomes necessary in the minds of the nation's citizens to not just have a military but a powerful one that brings pride to its nation. The primary tenets of militarism are: soldiers have positive personal traits that are favorable in society, military superiority is an element of national pride, citizens who do not support war efforts are unpatriotic and do not support members of the U.S. Armed Forces, and that armed conflict serves the will of God (Ali, 2007; Bacevich, 2005, p. 109; Bennet, 1998, p. 5; Stump, 2005; Tamir, 1997, p. 230).

A central personification of militarism is the service member, who is glorified for their service and made a hero (Bacevich, 2005, p. 106-107). When a society has developed a deep-seated need to support a military, equating both the military and war with patriotism, the nation's norm has become militarization (Enloe, 2004, p. 219-220). Countries with volunteer forces must continually perpetuate the necessity of the military and the patriotism associated with serving in the military to prevent the divide between the military and civilians (Cowen, 2006; Feaver and Kohn, 2001). When the Iraq War began, the press embedded reporters with deployed units. Reporters looked favorably on the service members they were embedded with, as they had first-hand experience with combat while safe in their role of observer. The news stories from these reporters were almost all favorable to the war effort, creating a positive impression of service members to the public. The 24 hours news cycle fueled a sense of closeness to the action for civilians. News stories began incorporating the "we" pronoun when discussing military actions, investing the reader in the war (Wyatt, C, 2010, pp. 826-27).

Despite the heroic image of a service member, the proportion of society who have chosen to join the military has shrunk since conscription ended. During World War II, roughly 10 percent of the United States was in the military, but now that number is 0.5 percent. In addition, veterans used to be overrepresented among those holding an elected office, but now many of the most widely known political figures have never served (Desch, 2006; Bianco & Markham, 2001, pp 275-88). Although the percentage of the population who have served in the military has decreased, many top leaders from Reagan, to Bush, to Madeline Albright and Trump have found it helpful to laud the military as heroes, as votes were easily gained for lip service of American heroism (Desch, 2006).

Opinion research shows that civilians have an overwhelmingly positive opinion of veterans but have little knowledge of the day-to-day life of a service member. Pew Research found that nine out of 10 individuals polled felt pride in military veterans, and 3 out of 4 reported thanking a veteran or service member for their service (Pew Research, 2011). Kleykamp, Hipes & MacLean (2017) found that 88% of individuals would enjoy having a veteran as a next-door neighbor, 92% felt that more tax dollars should go towards veterans' health care. Many participants indicated a desire to help veterans, which the authors associated with the national pride associated with service members.

Hollywood acts as a vehicle to perpetuate militarism in society, adjusting scripts and storylines to coordinate with the needs of the Pentagon. In exchange for positively casting war and the military, the Pentagon will provide inexpensive access to military equipment and locations. To ensure that the movie is produced in line with military requirements, a technical advisor for the military is always on set to approve script changes as they arise during production. The Pentagon will then pre-screen the film to support it for release to the public. If the Pentagon does not approve a movie, the film cannot be shown on military bases either overseas or in the United States, hurting profits for the entertainment industry (Robb, 2004).

The Pentagon insists that films “assist in the retention and recruitment of personnel” and must show military action in a reasonably accurate manner. If the movie is based on a historical event, the events must cast the U.S. military positively, and any adverse actions taken by the military must be removed (Robb, 2004). Research shows that military movies can sway public opinion. Films that show military members fighting against external factors, such as *Platoon*, made the public more likely to blame external factors in veterans' experiences when separating from the military. Films that showed service members taking control of problems, such as *Rambo,* led the public to blame veterans for their issues upon separation and believe they should be responsible for their problems (Griffin & Sen, 1995).

Some veterans wish to disengage with their military identity. At the same time, up to one-third still identify strongly with that portion of their identity, which is referred to as an identity conflict (Beckett, 2003; Kelty, Woodruff, & Segal, 2017). This conflict can cause issues in the workplace for veterans in civilian spaces (Kelty, Woodruff, & Segal, 2017). Military culture depends heavily on anti-individualism and a strong tendency to seek conformity and obedience (Beckett, 2003). Because of the consistent reinforcement of military culture during a service member's enlistment, concepts like “elitism, intensity, camaraderie, and uniqueness” set the service member apart from civilian society (Soeters, Winslow, & Weibill, 2006). Due to the growing civilian-military divide and the stark difference in lifestyles, military members begin to develop an “us” mentality (Hogg & Reid, 2006). When a service member separates, Post 9/11 veterans may experience feeling disconnected from the civilian population, think that civilians do not understand them, and have an identity crisis (Demer, 2011).

Military identity

McAndrew et al. (2019) found that veterans who reported difficulty adjusting to college life identified issues with cultural incongruity and/or feelings of not belonging or being misunderstood, causing student veterans to feel disconnected from their campus communities. The range of challenges in adjusting to college life is covered in the Association for Study of Higher Education’s (ASHE) 2011 report, *Crisis of Identity? Veteran, civilian, student*. This report utilizes Abes, Jones, and McEwan’s (2007) Multiple Dimensions of Identity model and provides a four-typology framework which is based on how closely the student identifies with their military experience, ranging from ambivalent students who are relatively unconnected to their military service to the skeptic students who identify strongly with their military service and do not wish to restructure their identity. While emerging student veterans are connected with their military identity, they realize that it may not be a beneficial identity in other situations. Other student veterans may successfully re-create a new civilian identity by inc their intersecting identities (p. 60).

Aschuler & Yarab (2018) focus on student veterans' sense of belonging on college campuses. The students in their study reported feeling isolated from the traditional student peers and preferred the company of other student veterans (p. 59). Hunter-Johnson et al.'s (2020) qualitative study also expresses the notion of isolation, with student veterans feeling othered on campus, creating an "us versus them" atmosphere (p. 9). Hinton (2020) examined the multiple identities that veterans negotiate when transitioning to a college campus and how their navigation of identities colored their sense of belonging on campus. Hinton's study had several veterans who described a sense of otherness when comparing themselves to traditional students. One student claimed that "veterans were more attentive and focused in class and, at the same time, not hesitant about censuring civilian students about 'disrespectful' behaviors like phone use or distracted talking" (p. 92). Another student said, "the teachers understood they didn't need to take care of [me]…that the people in the military were more wiser [sic]." (p. 95). This study focused on veterans othering themselves as distinctively different from traditional students, using their military identity as a double-edged sword, which may provide self-confidence while also isolating them from traditional students and the campus community.

Research Question and Data Collection

RQ: How do elements of Marine culture affect veterans' transition to higher education?

This study seeks to fill a gap in the literature by examining the effect of military culture culture and how it may positively or negative affect a student veteran's experience on a college campus. To answer this research question, qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews. These interviews aimed to understand better how their military culture has positively or negatively affected their transition to higher education. Recent literature examines the multiple identities that student veterans can use to recreate a new civilian identity.

Selection of Participants

This study is part of a larger research project on military culture and student veterans in higher education. A total of fifteen Marines took part in semi-structured interviews over Web-Ex. Eleven of these participants were student veterans, and five were instructors and their interviews were examined for themes relating to identity, and in the case of the student veterans, how elements of military culture impacted transition to higher educations for this study. Marine Corps Instructors, Drill Instructors, and recently separated Marine student veterans enrolled in a community college throughout the United States were invited to participate in an IRB-approved interview in the spring of 2021. For this research, recently separated is defined as a service member who left the military five or fewer years ago. The author identified community colleges near Marine bases and contacted the staff member responsible for the student veteran population. These staff members were asked to send out the research invitation to their student veteran population through their list-serv. In addition, the author posted the research invitation on social media sites such as Facebook, Linked In, and Reddit.

Eleven student veterans and four instructors participated in the interviews, which lasted approximately one hour and took place online through Web-Ex. Years of service ranged from four to 20 years. Years of community college experience varied from one semester to two years. All participants were enrolled in a degree program and planned on transferring to a four-year university. Four student veterans were male, and two were female. The Marine student veterans were all provided with a randomly generated name to protect their identity. The student veteran participants for this study are named: Brittany, Cassie, Daniel, Greg, Heath, Kevin, Michael, Paul, Russell, Simon, and Sylvia. The instructors who participated are named Alex, Eric, Justin, and Isaac.

Seven of the student veterans joined the Marines directly after high school. Cassie joined at 23 after divorcing her spouse, and Daniel and Greg joined after completing some community college after deciding they could not devote themselves to their education as they thought they should. Brittany served five years in Corrections and is now attending school with the eventual goal of becoming a doctor. Cassie served for four years as a legal administrative assistant and is going to school to pursue a career in Social Work. Daniel served for five years as a ground support mechanic and is working towards a degree in Mechanical Engineering. Greg arved for 32 years in the Infantry and is now attending school for History. Heath served for 15 years in the Infantry and is now planning to get his degree in History. Michael served for 9 years as a Combat Engineer and is now attending school for Engineering. Paul served for five years as a crew chief on a military transport aircraft and is currently attending school for a career in the health care industry. Russell served twenty years in the communications field, first as a radio operator and then as technical control chief is attending school for Geology. Simon served for four years as a bulk fuel specialist for military aircraft and focused on completing his general education requirements before deciding on a major. Sylvia served for four years, was a mail clerk, and attended school for computer programming and development.

Eric was a Field Artillery Instructor and spent twenty years in the Marines before retiring three years ago. Justin was an instructor in the School of Infantry and separated 5 years ago. Isaac served one tour as a Drill Instructor and recently separated from the Marines after serving twenty years. Alex served as a Drill Instructor twice and is currently enlisted as a Infantryman**.**

A semi-structured interview guide was used to ensure all participants responded to similar questions about their military and community college experiences. The semi-structured interview allowed the author flexibility to enable the student veterans to voice their experiences fully during the interview. Specific topics included what led the participant to join the Marines, their military occupation, which schools they attended while in the military, what experiences in the Marines had a lasting impact on them as Marines, and how their military service informed their transition to community college.

Data Analysis

The interviews were transcribed verbatim through WebEx's transcription service. The researcher listened to each interview several times to ensure the transcription was correct. Participants were asked to confirm the accuracy of the transcription through member checking. After each interview was transcribed, the researcher read each interview several times to fully understand the conversation. NVIVO was used to code the transcripts, and the researcher analyzed and coded each transcript for themes, allowing emergent themes to become readily apparent. Data triangulation took place when a qualitative researcher at the researcher's Institution read three interviews and the same themes emerged after these interviews were coded and compared against each other.

Limitations

Due to COVID-19, it was challenging to communicate easily with veteran services professionals within higher education to request a call for participants to be sent out, which led to fewer community colleges from which to recruit participants. Only six students participated in the interviews, and while the data cannot be used to generalize to the larger populations of student veterans, insights can be gained by looking deeply at a few cases..

Findings & Research Question

While several themes emerged in these interviews, it became apparent that it was essential to focus on the student veteran's perception of exclusivity compared to civilians, as this theme was prevalent in the interviews with the student veterans who were interviewed.

Perception of exclusivity in comparison with society

As discussed previously, the Marine Corps positions itself as the best of the branches of the U.S. Armed Forces. The theme of exclusivity due to an enlistment in the Marines arose throughout all interviews, and was exhibited through a perception of excellence in comparison to other branches of the U.S Armed Forces, traditional students, and civilian co-workers. Exclusivity may be a positive mental state within the military, but when it continues after separation from the service and persists upon arrival to campus, student veterans may unnecessarily struggle with building relationships with traditional peers, as they may see themselves as separate from civilians.

The perception of exclusivity with military service started for the participants before they enlisted in the military. The idea that the Marine Corps is the most demanding and challenging branch to join was pervasive before the participants went to bootcamp. The participants chose to enlist in the U.S Marines because of its perceived elitism. Paul stated:

> My pride led me to the Marine Corps because I had that innate, I guess, arrogance in myself, and if I'm going to do it, I'm going to do the hardest because I'm going to be the best there is. Enlisting in the Marine Corps because it was perceived as the most demanding branch was a pervasive thread throughout the interviews.

Michael felt that many join the Marines because they are looking to be a part of something bigger than themselves, saying:

> I think that for civilians, the Marines have an reputation of being elite. Young people, who may not have had the best upbringing are looking for a family, and why not pick the best to be your family. Others may come from a long line of Marines and want to keep on carrying the family torch. The Marines are very big on their history. A family that has been part of that history tends to instill the desire to be part of the Marines as newer generations grow up. People don't just join the Marines to be in the military, but join it to be the best. There is a reason one of our cadences for recruits is 'Gimme that Eagle, Globe and Anchor…' Recruits spend twelve weeks looking forward to getting their first EGA [Eagle, Globe and Anchor Insignia] and I think for most Marines, it really means something when they get their first one.

Kevin also discusses how important getting his EGA was, "You finish the crucible and they give you an EGA at that moment. You are a Marine, not a recruit anymore. You're not civilian, you're not anything else. You're a Marine from that moment on, and that's like a super prideful moment. I still have my first EGA, I'm sure everybody here does."

Greg had multiple family in the military, most of which who were in the Marines. He went from Reserves to Active Duty after a few semesters of college because he realized that his heart was in the military, more than it was in college:

> It was the fact that so many people, my family had been Marines. My dad was a Korean War veteran. his cousins were Marines come to Vietnam. And my grandfather's generation. All the men had been in the services and all but one in the service during World War Two and all, but one of them have been Marines… You know, we were joking the other day about Chesty Puller, or Dan Daly, you know, I mean, we have these people ensure the stories we tell recruits and young Marines is mythologized. But I mean, it's real. I mean we know who our heroes are. We know which Sergeants Majors who've gotten the Medal of Honor are we know our role for the nation.

Heath had multiple family members who were in the military and joined the Marines right out of high school, he stated:

> It's that the idea that you are an elite, a member of an elite organization, very highly professional. The officer corps itself, especially when I was a young Marine, I always whenever I talked or saw an officer, I immediately I thought of, you know, the the 18th century Virginia gentlemen, you know, even if the officer didn't come from there, that's the that's the persona they're trying to portray to the Marines. I think that the best way I think it would be to borrow from Eleanor Roosevelt. You know, they're like, the dirtiest, most foul mouth, most respectable men she's ever met.

Russell discussed his decision to enlist after high school:

> The Marines always had the reputation themselves, kind of set them apart from the other services. So that's kind of what made the Marine Corps a little more appealing to me than the other services... Before my senior year of high school, an Army recruiter called me; I was like, well, I get it. This means it's time to talk to recruiters. I didn't want to join the Army. Said I kind of wanted to see what the Marines is all about. Supposedly that they

> were harder and everything, so I went up there at the recruiting office at all four services in one building. And I didn't know; I was 16. I don't know what to do. So, I just kind of walked in. The Marine Corps recruiter was not there. The only guy in the building was an Air Force recruiter. And he almost got me, but um yeah, so I did talk to kind of the Army. I did talk to the Air Force. They did have some pretty, pretty good programs available, but I think we just known that you had the title Marine was what kept pulling me over that way.

After divorcing her husband, Cassie joined the Marines as a way to get a fresh start in life, stating:

> And I had so many people telling me that I couldn't do it. And so that was just a push like, well, I'm gonna show you and so I made the decision… I was just kind of drawn to the Marines. It just, I don't know. It just pulled me in. I guess, because they've always been seen and known as the best trained and the best of the best.

Brittany chose to join the Marines because her family thought she would be unable to get through any of the branches basic training, so decided to join the branch with the longest boot camp to prove them wrong:

> I was told by my parents that I wasn't smart enough to go to college. And more likely it was because they didn't have the money to help me out, maybe I don't know why. And then I thought about joining the military, and they said, I wouldn't make it in the military. And so for me, that was it hurt that they didn't think that I would be able to go to college. But when they said, I wouldn't be able to succeed in any branches of military that hurt even more. And so, for me, I thought, well, let me join the biggest, baddest branch, and the Marines was what kept popping up. And that's what I chose.

Daniel joined the military because of a family tradition of serving in the Armed Forces. The U.S Marine Corps appealed to him, as the branch was seen as the most challenging branch to join because it had the longest training, and had the best reputation with U.S citizens stating, “Everyone has the idea of when there’s a Marine, they’re like ‘oh, they’re cut from a different cloth.’’

Justin, a School of Infantry instructor, emphasized the importance of living up to the excellence promoted by the Marine Corps, stating that being an Instructor continued the training learned in boot camp:

> Everything reverts back to that you are expected to portray yourself in a certain certain manner, you're expected to live your life in a certain way. you're teaching, you're teaching a person a new an entirely new way to how to live their life. And so in the beginning, it takes constant correction. You know, understand, they just came out of boot camp. And that was the hardest thing that as instructors that we always had was, was you, we always had to correct ourselves a lot of times to understand that we're not drill instructors, that wasn't our job. The students that we had had already become Marines, it's not our job to make Marines, it was our job to maintain them, and to build upon the instruction that they'd already received.

Camraderie

The importance of camaraderie in the Marine Corps was discussed throughout the interview. Alex, a Drill Instructor, felt it is instilled from boot camp—the importance of Marines looking out for other Marines. In boot camp this could look like a Drill Instructor pulls aside a recruit when they are having difficulty. A conversation about a difficult topic can be enough to change a junior Marine’s mindset about something, by showing compassion when no one else had:

> It's when it's kind of one on one, and you have to pull a kid behind and you have to have that really weird conversation. To him. It's weird Like, what are you doing? What's going on back at home?" Recruit starts crying, you know what I mean? Yeah, because nobody ever cared about him enough to ask him that question. Nobody ever cared enough to pull them off to the side. You know what I mean? Those types of things is what the public would never see that they don't they look, all you see is Marine.

Alex took his job of training young Marines very seriously, and would spend a significant amount of time working to improve the overall culture of the Marine Corps to ensure that all Marines had a good experience in the branch:

> We had a Facebook social media scandal. We had all types of Marines talking very poorly about our sisters. And I was like, No, I'm not having it. So that three month period, I took everything I could and tried so hard to do everything with them. We get to graduation day, one of the recruits comes up to me and he said, Sir, I just want to thank you for changing my mind on how I look at females in the Marine Corps. So right then in there, that entire cycle, I was like, You know what? Job well done. I did my job because I changed that kid's life. I changed his mind, whether that stuck or not, but he thought enough to come see me and say that. That was that was that's what I thought when he first asked me that, you know what I want to I want to I want to teach them the right way how to go move through life professionally, positively, you know, and make smart decisions.

Kevin felt that the sense of camaraderie in the Marines was different than anything he had experienced, suggesting that the constant close proximity to his fellow Marines was responsible for the close bonding:

> Just like how close everybody is to each other. You get like the camaraderie and like everyone being close, like other places, like you see him everyday at school or see him every day at work, or one of my buddies from our company, he went off to join the army. And he's even saying it's not even there because they get like their own bedrooms and stuff. And I mean, that sounds like a silly thing to say like, Yeah, you get your own bedroom. But like when I first showed up, I had four roommates, and the room was slightly smaller than your office. So you're just like super close to all your friends at all times.

Brittany credits the harshness of the day to day life of a Marine for cementing relationships and building a sense of camaraderie

> Like, when I got my unit, you know, we were working 12 hour shifts, not to mention the debriefing in the morning, and in the afternoon, when you come off shift, then you're coming in at least three hours early. So that way you can PT, take showers, you know, do what you need to do. That doesn't include if you have CERT training on top of that, you know, there were times where I would be done. And I would literally just have enough time to make it home and pass out on the couch because I was so exhausted. But during that time with your unit I think it's those hardships that bring you together. And it's the things that we'll laugh about now is the toughest times the hardest times is what like, we all seem to recall and, you know, tell our stories about and we can laugh about it now.

> But when we are in the middle of that, you know, we just wanted to give up and it was because of the guys to the left and right of us that kept us going.

Brittany goex on to explain that that Marines provided her with a sense of family after a rough childhood, and stays in touch with those she served with:

> Yes, it was the first time where I felt like I had a family, believe it or not. And it was the first time that I had people who had my back just as much as I had theirs. The guys don't think I'm a Marine. And because I am a girl, and because I was a POG [person other than grunt], right. But, um, as far as with them and my unit, anytime that I needed someone. They were all there for me, and always had my back. And yeah, sometimes there were some poor leadership, you know, but I, for the most part, I still have all of those friendships and like, contacts to this day.

Finding New Sources of Camraderie

Some would seek out other student veterans on campus to recreate the missing brotherhood or sisterhood feeling to meet this need. The veterans interviewed thought they could not connect with traditional students. Simon explained the need to have a level of commitment to another person before considering them friends, which are standards that would be difficult for a civilian to meet. He stated, “I mean, you know, people be like, Oh, yeah, I got this friend, and he won't help me move or whatever. I'm like, Well, what kind of friend is, right? That's big, might as well not be friends with them. Like, if your friends not willing to kill or die for you, then like how good of a friend can they really be.

Kevin spoke at length about the importance of camaraderie and was disappointed to find that it was not found in the U.S Army when he joined the National Guard after separating from the Marines:

> Start like simple on like ranges and stuff, the the Marine Corps will the one you're not leaving people behind, but it's not even an option you consider in the army, they trained to leave bodies behind. which blew my mind when I first saw that, and I got in a yelling match with one of the staff NCOs and officer got involved.

There is often some gentle joking between members of the branches, as Simon explained the difference between the U.S. Army and the U.S. Marine Corps with an analogy:

> I've described it as, the Army would be like a McDonald's. And the Marine Corps would be like, a, like a pretty good restaurant, and like, maybe a three- or four-star restaurant. So, it's like, you go to McDonald's or serving a million Big Macs a day, but they taste like shit. And they're not good for you. But if you go to like a good, pretty good restaurant, I mean, they're not cranking out burgers left and right, but it's better burger. on a small scale.

Cassie also mentioned the teasing that will frequently go on about the branches when veterans meet each other:

> As far as veterans, we're all the same, but we banter back and forth, like, Oh, this person's better, because they were in this branch. And here's the Navy coming with, you know, their big ships to give us a ride, you know, we have that banter back and forth. But when it comes to someone outside of that has no idea. It's more of, you know, the Marine Corps is the hardest, it's got the longest training that, you know, we're the fiercest warriors. We're the first in and last out. And in culture over time, I mean, we're seen as these rock hard, solid beings that will, you know, slit your throat in the middle of the night. thing, you know?

Simon then discussed the student veteran lounge on campus.

As far as I know, there's only one other Marine besides me at the school. So, there's a dude in there who I have talked to a few times; he was in a Navy. There's a dude who was in the Air Force, I think so. I mean, they're good guys, but I mean, they're not Marines."

Simon went on to explain his opinion of other branches while he was still serving:

Just everything about the Army kind of disgusts me. Besides, I mean, the army infantry dudes are cool. I mean, it's, they have a similar mindset. I would think the Army Rangers are cool. Green Berets, they're cool. But the regular big Army, it honestly makes me kind of sick to my stomach. It's just everything about them. They're just disgusting. I mean, it's not uncommon to see wildly overweight soldiers. All sorts of messed-up haircuts. I mean, those are little stupid things. … They don't take pride in [their uniform]. They don't make it look good. They don't wear it good. … and just a complete lack of any type of intensity. A lack of most military bearing. I mean, I said I was at Fort Lee. And I mean, they walk around the march, but it's like garbage marching. I mean, it looks like a train of preschoolers going out for recess.

Kevin enjoys a sense of similarity with other veterans, but graviates towards other Marines and finds them easier to relate to than traditional students:

Like I have a lot of friends back home that have never done anything military in their life. But I can definitely relate more with veterans specifically Marines than if they get more specific in that infantry Marines. That's what I've liked the most in common are like the guys that I was actually with That's when like they have the most in common. And at that point, you just feel completely, like, all of us are the same. But I don't know if I prefer their company to being been here where I hang out at most mostly hang out with Marines, like if I go on, actually to two of my friends that I hang out with back home or

> Marines to hang out at the VFW. So I guess maybe I do prefer being around veterans and Marines. So we can just relate more, you don't really have to hear about like other people's big issues.

Brittany prefers to socialize with veterans as she feels their life experiences most closely match her own, even though she did not see combat like many of the Marines that visit her student veteran lounge:

> So with veterans who have gone through the same things, or similar things, because, you know, I haven't, by any means gone through what some of these guys have gone through, not even close. But we all have a similar background that we can meld. And we also have that life experience. And I think that that understanding that respect, where a lot of these students don't have that.

The Marine Corps birthday is a celebratory time for Marines, and Marines will go to great lengths to ensure their fellow Marines get to celebrate “their birthday.” Brittany relates how last November 10th, her Marine friends brought her cake to class:

> Last semester, when the Marine Corps birthday happened, and like everybody was getting together, and I was stuck in labs all day, and I, all of a sudden, you know, have my instructor there's knock at the door to my lab. And the instructor goes, opens and comes back and gets me and says, there's a bunch of guys out there with cake saying it's your birthday. You know, it's stuff like that, that there's that sense of pride and family and they will have your back and be there for you. And I walk out there and there's a bunch of guys with birthday cake saying ‘happy birthday Marine. You just I've never seen that with other branches. I mean, it may happen. I've just never seen it.

Traditional students

Many veterans may find a new sense of camaraderie with veterans of other branches; it is much more difficult for some student veterans to socialize with traditional students, which is problematic since these civilians will be their peers or supervisors in the workforce. Simon revealed frustration with the work ethic of students upon separation and the sense of how little society expects of individuals to be considered hard workers:

> It's just like, I'm kind of blown away by this, the how low the bar is for the average person. Like, if you show up to work on time with everything you need, it's like, oh, my God, you're really good. This is amazing…Like, it's not a big ask, you know what I mean? Or whatever, like, show up to class and like, actually have the assignment done? Or like, have your textbook with you, have a laptop with you, have a pen? It's not, it's not a big ask, but apparently, it goes a long way.

Sylvia indicated confusion about why students would enroll in college due to the cost of college and the commitment needed to complete a degree program:

> I think that with a lot of people, especially, you know, a lot of kids, you know, going to school and everything like, obviously, yes, they want to be there, you know, get the college experience and everything, but it's, some of them are just doing it to get things rolling, like pass by, and I feel like if you don't have the heart, or the willingness to like, do what you think, what you want to do in there, and then it's just gonna go downhill from there, because we're just wasting your time you're wasting your money. And, like, you don't even know why you're there. So it's, and I'm not talking about the ones who decided to change majors and things like that, no, I'm talking to aspects of, you know, you're going there, but you're not your heart is not even in it. It's what if your heart is I

> think I believe, then it's not going to do anything for you is not going to produce anything, it's just is there?

Kevin voiced his thoughts that the majority of college students were just on campus because that was the next step, rather than truly wanting to be there:

> I think it's just a lack of discipline, a lack of caring like they've never really worked for stuff like they got through high school because they had to their parents are paying for their college and they just don't care about any of this. Whereas like if you been through a job where you actually have to work towards stuff and then you come to college because you want to not because it's just a lot of college because they say it's just the next step. The next thing I have to do. So it's kind of like an obligation I have to do. Whereas I'm coming back because I want to be here I want a degree. We have like different outlooks on it.

Daniel was also surprised by the perceived lack of work ethic amongst students once he enrolled in college courses stating:

> People's work ethic. Not there. Or, I shouldn't say that. It's not the same to what we're used to…people were more focused on things that they were doing that weekend, or what they were doing later that night, and then they would be surprised when they didn't do well on a test.

Daniel emphasizes this by describing a Spanish class, where everyone had done poorly on the writing portion of the test. The professor gave everyone 24 hours to practice and then re-take that section. He said:

> There was a guy in the class that stood up and was like, yo, you didn't give us enough time to do any of this. I said, 'you had a full 24 hours to figure this out? I was like, no,

> you're still complaining that it's not enough.' That was to me, you don't say that, but this kid had no issues saying that to a grown man who's 45 and teaching you Spanish, the class that you chose to take…So that mindset was wild to kind of wrap my mind around.

Kevin started classes shortly before his institution was shut down by COVID, and while he did not enjoy taking online classes, he felt that separating from the Marines and going directly into a college classroom would have been difficult with expectations for excellence from those around him:

> COVID happened and I got sent home two weeks into the semester, I ended up doing a lot of online classes and kind of glad that happened, because it helped me kind of go from being a Marine Sergeant to just a normal person. Because my two weeks here for my one in person class, I'll see kids like walk out their hands in their pockets or like walking and talking on the phone or walking eating or just like this stupid haircuts. And people would show up to classes in like pajamas, and just be sitting there like, watch it out. It's just go away knife hands! So thankfully, I was able to kind of become a normal person for a little while.

Paul also expressed a similar sense of frustration with civilians when he first separated from the Marine Corps, stating:

> I'd be at work with these grown men, 56- or 57-year-old men, you know, been working their whole lives in this place. And they're like, you know, I'm pretty tired. But like, in my mind, be like, dude, you're pathetic. You know, it's a 14-hour shift. And we haven't eaten all day, and I'm dehydrated, you know, you're garbage because you're complaining. Thinking just being very aggressive, incredibly aggressive, when there's no need to be, to the point where like, I didn't even, you don't even think you're being aggressive. It's just

> how you communicate. But people are like, “Oh, my God, why are you acting like this? What are you talking about?” You know, things like that.

Daniel was successful building relationships with his traditionally aged college peers outside of the classroom, especially when they were in the same degree program and had several classes together, but noted the relationship was different than he would have with another veteran:

> We were able to connect, but not at the same level … that I would connect with another veteran. And a lot of it may be me, just like, they’re fresh out of high school, like they don’t have life experiences. And some of just overhearing some of the conversations that people have is like, I don’t think you understand that that’s not that big of a deal…So that aspect, you kind of lose opportunities to even open up or want to talk to some people.

Paul also had a change of heart after having a chance to be around a variety of civilians in community college and society in general. He argued that his prior way of thinking was unacceptable and too rigid:

> I'm also surprised in some and I'm starting to realize more the quality of civilians out there…. Subconsciously, I thought the only way to be a good productive member of society was to be in the military. And that's simply not true. There are a number of phenomenal people that are civilians. Things that, like you said, tripped me up or confused me. Just that was like, my re-assimilation was just how to be a human, how to be a civilian again. That was like a foreign language.

Discussion

Interview data demonstrated the perception of exclusivity that participants had when comparing themselves to society. The participants viewed themselves as apart from civilians, apart from other military branches, self-imposing themselves in isolation. This is consistent with

McAndrew et al. (2019)'s correlation between veterans feelings of not belonging on campus with their difficulty adjusting to college. Isolation is a well-researched issue for student veterans (Aschuler & Yarab, 2018; Hunter-Johnson et al.'s, 2020). Still, this study links the U.S Marine's demands for excellence, the insistence that Marines are the best of the best, to the Marine student veterans' sense of isolation on a college campus. Past research shows veterans seeing themselves as more disciplined or more prepared, but it is generally connected to the experiences lived within the military, not as the result of indoctrination in military culture.

This data show some veterans having issues connecting with civilians because of veterans' perception that they are more disciplined and harder workers than civilians. This mindset is perpetuated throughout military service (Ricks, 1997). The veterans interviewed discussed the allure of the Marine Corps because of its reputation as the most challenging branch to enlist in, particularly boot camp, which is longer than basic training in the other branches of the U.S. Armed Forces. Most of the Marines interviewed explicitly mentioned that they joined the Marine Corps because it was thought to be the most challenging. If they wanted to join the military, they were going to choose the most arduous path.

Because of the exclusivity present in the Marine Corps, some service members spend a significant amount of time ensuring they meet Marine Corps standards, both in uniforms and behavior. While enlisted, some Marines hold others outside of the Marine Corps to these standards and find the other branches lacking in the discipline. This was apparent in Simon's discussion of his perception of the U.S. Army while serving and other branches in his college's Veteran's Lounge. He expressed difficulty relating to branches that he perceived as less demanding than the Marine Corps. Some service members hold themselves to a higher standard for the entirety of their enlistment, and this behavior may continue after separation from the military. Most of the Marines interviewed communicated frustration with their perception that the traditional students are chronically late for class or arrive without the needed materials, which they perceive as a failure to prepare. Sylvia wondered why college students would enroll in college if they were not committed to the work that one must put into a degree program, especially when the cost of college is considered. Both Simon and Paul conveyed a sense of annoyance with co-workers for their perception that fellow employees complained about being tired or extended work hours. The veterans interviewed would discuss how their service in the Marines showed them the real meaning of exhaustion, implying that they thought civilians could never understand the true magnitude of what service members endured. Hinton's 2020 study echoed the sentiments of the students above, stating that veterans were more disciplined in the classroom and that many traditional students treated faculty in a way that seemed disrespectful to the veterans.

While students in both studies expressed a feeling that they were better prepared and more disciplined than traditional students, Hinton's study did not address the possibility that this impression of traditional students could have had a negative impact on the student veteran's ability to immerse themselves in the campus community. Aschuler & Yarab (2018) discusses the sense of isolation veterans feel on campus, and how military affilitated students sought out the company of student veterans. Their study does not recognize that while life experiences may differ dramatically between traditional students and student veterans, forming relationships with traditional students is important when re-entering civilian society. Both Paul and Simon recognized that their mentality regarding civilians was detrimental to forming relationships with traditional students and purposefully worked to change their mindset about civilians. Daniel also realized that failing to build relationships with civilian peers hurt his ability to make the most out of his college experience, even though he still had some reservations about their perceived maturity level.

Opportunities for further research

The findings from the student veterans interview offer a new perspective on a factor, the perception of exclusivity of military members, that may contribute to the sense of isolation that some veterans feel on college campuses. Institutions of Higher Learning and student veterans could better understand the many factors that affect the civilian identity reconstruction that happens after separation from the military. Acknowledgment of the effects of enculturation in the military, both positive and negative, can assist student veterans and those providing supportive programming.

Because this research consisted of only U.S Marine Corps veterans, further study could be conducted with veterans of other branches to see if the sense of exclusivity is as strongly represented in different military branches. In addition, only two female veterans were interviewed for this study. While they did express exclusivity in their interviews, it was not to the degree of the other male Marine veterans. This could also be due to their military occupation specialty as a mail clerk and a legal administrative assistant. Later research could examine only female veterans or veterans who worked in primarily administrative roles. Researchers could also compare student veterans who had only done one enlistment versus those who had retired from military service.

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Plato's cave: A single case study on the connection of moral injury and involuntary retirement from the U.S Marine Corps

Nicole C. Messina

Abstract

As per the Marine Corps' report "Force Design 2030", the branch is planning on making significant changes to the makeup of the Marine Corps. This will lead to a drawdown of force numbers, potentially leading to a group of service members being involuntarily separated. Involuntary separation from an institution like the U.S Marine Corps may lead to moral injuries due to the importance service members place on serving in the U.S Armed Forces. A single case study was used to explore the potential moral injury one Marine suffered after being involuntarily retired due to a posttraumatic stress disorder diagnosis after deploying 9 times. This case study is framed with Smith-MacDonald et al., 2020 theory of structured fracturing identities, with explores the steps service members may pass through as they reconcile the events that led to their moral injury. Future research is necessary to explore experiences and backgrounds of others involuntarily separated.

Keywords: military culture, transition, moral injury, medical retirement

The conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan have renewed scholarly interest in service members' and veterans' physical and mental welfare. Perhaps because of the advances in medical technology that have led to service members surviving what would have been a deadly injury in the past, “invisible injuries” have gained more attention than physical injuries. Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), depressions, anxiety, and substance abuse are common “invisible injuries” commonly associated with the conflicts (Tanielian, et al., 2008; Hoge & Warner, 2014; Trivedi et al., 2015). But only recently did another emerging construct appear to understand better psychological trauma that service members may experience: moral injury. Moral injury can manifest as guilt, shame, anger, and existential problems. This can occur after experiencing an event that an individual perpetuates or is witness to another person engaging in an action. These experiences can be injurious if their instituted values are unreconcilable with the events in question(Currier et al., 2014). This article seeks to better understand how involuntary retirement may affect transitioning service members, which will be done by examining the case of a 45-year-old Marine infantryman who was medically retired at 33, after 15 years of service. This transition will be examined through the lens of Smith-MacDonald’s et al.’s (2020) theory of transitioning fracturing identities.

Literature Review

Retirement

Researchers have not yet investigated involuntary retirement from the military and its impact on transition. Planned military retirement has little research, with most articles involving the commissioned officer population and their career prospects and the remainder discussing retirement planning (Hoffeditz, 2006; Hunt, 2007; Giger, 2006).

Moral injury

Military service can leave lasting physical, emotional, spiritual, and psychological wounds, which can be overlooked and result in the service member dealing with inner conflict (Shay, 2014). If this conflict is left unacknowledged, it can emerge as a mental or physical issue. Medical professionals may overlook the potential of moral injury when working with a veteran due to a lack of awareness (Shay, 2014).

Moral injury is relatively new in the psychology field, so there are ongoing discussions on the definition, making it more likely for veterans to be diagnosed with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder, as the two share symptomology. Researchers suggest that moral injury may stem from a service member's actions in combat that oppose their own values or beliefs (Litz et al., 2009; Shay, 2014). Jonathan Shay defines moral injury as: "a betrayal of what's right by someone who holds legitimate authority in a high stakes situation" (Shay, 2014, p. 183). Jinkerson (2016) adds four core symptoms to moral injury: guilt, shame, spiritual/existential conflict, and a loss of trust in oneself, others, or higher beings (p. 126). Shay argues that PTSD with no complications such as substance abuse, as defined by the DSM, does not create chaos in a service member's life, but moral injury does (Shay, 3024, p. 184). This definition was created after he worked with veterans and active-duty service members for many years. This definition will be used when referring to moral injury in this article.

Moral injury can change someone by "deteriorating their character; their ideals, ambitions, and attachments begin to change and shrink" (Shay, 2014, p. 186). Once trust is destroyed, a person may feel harmed, exploited, or humiliated. In this scenario, a person has few options, either isolate or create a false narrative to right the perceived wrong (Shay, 2014, p. 186). In addition, moral injury can degrade social bonds, increase feelings of hopelessness, and mirror symptoms of PTSD (Litz et al., 2009; Nash & Litz, 2013). Service members with PTSD related to a moral injury may also suffer from higher levels of reexperiencing, depression, anger, guilt, and self-blame with those with PTSD from a potentially life-threatening event (Litz et al., 2018; Currier et al., 2014; Koenig et al., 2018).

The Wounded Warrior Battalion supports and treats injured Marines if their command supports the service member receiving treatment. The Regiment is headquarted in Quantico, Virginia and has two Wounded Warrior Battalions, both of which have multiple detachments around the globe, many of which are major military or Department of Veterans Affairs treatment centers. The Wounded Warrior Battalion's mission is to return Marines to their military occupational speciality and enable them to continue serving (Wounded Warrior Battalion, 2021).

Research Questions and Data Collection

Research Question: How does the culture of the U.S. Marines affect service members' transition into civilian life after retirement?

Methodology

This study seeks to fill a gap in the literature by examining the effect of military culture on veterans who were involuntarily retired from the U.S Marine Corps and how it may positively or negatively affect a student veteran's transition to higher education. Qualitative data were collected from a Marine as part of a more extensive study surrounding Marine military culture to answer this question. Marine veterans who had acted as instructors during their enlistment or were current student veterans were invited to take place in an IRB-approved interview in the spring of 2021. The author posted the invitation on social media sites such as Facebook, Linked In, and Reddit.

A subset of participants were three retired Marines, and it became apparent that there were considerable differences in outlook and transition needs of the two Marines who were involuntarily retired than the one Marine that chose to retire after serving twenty years. One Marine's interview of being involuntarily retired was so profound, it became apparent that a single exploratory case study could provide an opportunity to research the phenomenon of moral injury stemming from the transition of Marines involuntarily retired. Mitchell, the subject of this research, was then interviewed multiple over three months, totaling three hours of interview time.

Selection of Participants

Recently separated Marine student veterans enrolled in a community college throughout the United States, as well as Marines who acted as military instructors or Drill Instructors, were invited to participate in IRB-approved interviews in the spring of 2021 for a more extensive study. The author identified community colleges near Marine bases and contacted the staff member responsible for the student veteran population. In addition, the author contacted potential instructors and Drill Instructors through social media, including Facebook, LinkedIn, and Reddit. Mitchell was interviewed as a military instructor, but a considerable portion of the first interview had shifted, and Mitchell discussed his involuntary retirement from the U.S Marines. Mitchell was then interviewed two more times, for approximately an hour both times. He is currently a graduate student and is seriously considering applying to a Ph.D. program.

Data Analysis

The interview was transcribed verbatim through Otter.ai's transcription service. The researcher listened to each interview several times to ensure the transcription was correct. The participant was asked to confirm the accuracy of the transcription through member checking.

After the interview was transcribed, the researcher read each interview several times to fully understand the conversation. NVIVO was used to code the transcripts, and the researcher analyzed and coded each transcript for themes, allowing emergent themes to become readily apparent. Data triangulation took place when a qualitative researcher at the researcher's Institution also coded the interview, and the same themes emerged after these interviews were coded and compared against each other. Data was submitted to the participant for member checking to reduce researcher bias.

Limitations

While the data cannot be extrapolated for use outside the context of this study, helpful insights can be gained by looking deeply at one case. Qualitative research provides rich detail to understand a phenomenom better. However, as this article is based on the data collected from one person, the contents could be skewed due to the research subject's misunderstanding or misconstruing events as they occurred. Also, as the researcher is an integral part of the process, they must continually reassess their own subjectivity to ensure that the data is not tainted by bias. Reassessment occurred during regular reflection throughout the data collection and analyzation process, as well as through member checking and respondent validation to ensure that the contents and interpretation were as the subject intended (Alase, 2017; Bansal et al., 2018; Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Clark & Vealé, 2018; DuBois et al., 2018; Roberts et al., 2019; Simons, 2012, Williams & Moser, 2019).

Another limitation of the study may be that the subject who chose to participate in this study had been through significant mental health counseling, which provided him a degree of efficacy and clarity that may not be relatable to other retired Marines. The researcher carefully and objectively evaluated the data supplied by asking relevant follow-up questions when necessary to qualify statements (Alase, 2017; Bansal et al., 2018; Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Clark & Vealé, 2018; DuBois et al., 2018; Roberts et al., 2019; Simons, 2012, Williams & Moser, 2019).

Theoretical framework

This article used Smith-MacDonald et al.'s (2020) theory of transitioning fractured identities to analyze the transition of one Marine infantryman to a student veteran. Smith-MacDonald et al.'s theory was developed from a study of injured service members who were involuntarily removed from service before transitioning to civilian life. Smith-MacDonald's theory posits that a service member's identity after transition can be traced through their military service. This theory consists of four categories. Veterans do not proceed through these categories linearly but instead can skip or repeat the steps (Smith-MacDonald et al., 2020).

The first phase, soldierizing, refers to the United States Armed Forces purposefully stripping a civilian's identity and restructuring them into a military self. This process is done by removing external influences and relationships, while emphasizing military relationships and values. This phase is prevalent in veterans who viewed the military as a calling, rather than a time commitment. This category consists of mentalizing, codifying, us'fying, missionizing, and weaponizing. (Smith-MacDonald et al., 2020).

Mentalizing refers to the belief that service members can conquer any task or challenge through willpower by consistently testing their mental and physical grit. Codifying is the incorporation of cultural norms prevalent in the military, which can be defined through structure and organization. Us'fying is the process of teaching a service member that their team always comes before self. Missionizing is the belief that service members must always succeed in whatever they do, failing is unacceptable despite what the cost of the task is. Weaponizing is the process of training service members to respond to actions with violence and aggression (Smith-MaacDonald et al., 2020).

The second category is fracturing. Fracturing takes place when a damaging event occurs. While the event varies between individuals, the experience creates cognitive dissonance as moralizing and missionizing conflict. These experiences are categorized as: mission over morals, evil, and military betrayal (Smith-MacDonald et al., 2020)

Mission moralizing occurs when a service member must put the mission before morals; for instance, a service member may be asked to do something forbidden by the Geneva Convention (Smith-MacDonald et al., 2020) It is suggested that evil is rarely discussed relative to combat. Still, service members may feel that they have encountered evil when their mentalizing ability fails to compensate for the extreme emotional and spiritual events that they may encounter. Military betrayal is caused when a service member is a witness or experiences the U.S. military functioning in a way that conflicts with the morals and values instituted by the military (Smith-MacDonald et al., 2020).

Limboizing occurs when service members cannot successfully complete the military to civilian transition due to the transgressions during their service. PTSD can exacerbate these experiences. The properties of this category are veteranizing, failurizing, destructuring, ronin'fying, individualizing, and resigning (Smith-MacDonald et al., 2020).

Veteranizing is the process of losing their military identity, mainly when they are separated from service. This identity is replaced with that of a veteran, which holds no meaning for the individual and may be unwelcome and forced upon them. Destructuring is the feeling that the veteran is not prepared to re-enter society and has become accustomed to behaviors and social norms that are not acceptable in civilian society. Ronin-fying is when the veteran now believes they have no sense of purpose or meaning in their lives. Individualizing is requiring the veterans to now focus on their success as an individual as their team has been removed. Many feel intense grief after being cut off from relationships that sustained them during military service. Resigning is the conscious or unconscious belief that their operational stress injuries are permanent, and they will suffer for the rest of their lives (Smith-MacDonald et al., 2020).

Reconciling is another potential aspect of transition, although less used than resigning and frequently occurs with traditional psychotherapeutic care. The five properties are finding a herd, reclaiming identity, grieving, forgiving and repurposing. Finding a herd refers to the analogy that service members are like sheepdogs, who have a herd that they must protect. Once they herd is gone, the sheepdog now lacks a purpose and feels isolated. Those who are able to find a herd have found a community of likeminded individuals, often other veterans. Reclaiming identity is the process of service members realigning themselves with positive aspects of their identity. They may feel that they will never be a "civilian" again due to their military experience, especially their core values. Grieving refers to the important step of accepting and mourning losses of people, things, and aspects of oneself. Forgiving is often a stumbling block for service members wishing to heal from their fracturing experiences. Forgiving is a complex process that requires service members to acknowledge the pain they felt, cause, and then let it go. Lastly, repurposing revolves around moving forward in their lives and rediscovering true meaning (Smith-MacDonald et al., 2020).

The Single Case Study

Mitchell is male, 45 years of age at the time of this study. He retired from the U.S Marine Corps at age 33 as an Infantry Assault Marine after 15 years of service. He has now been retired for 11 years. His family has a history of military service; he distinctly remembers playing with his grandfather's toy rifle and military hat throughout his childhood. His grandfather would tell him stories about his service in Korea and read him bedtime stories from *Soldier of Fortune* about Marines in combat. He does not remember a time when he did not want to become a Marine. When he joined the Marines directly out of high school, he intended to stay in for as long as possible. After returning home from his ninth deployment, Mitchell recognized a need for mental health care after a particularly hostile argument with his spouse. He sought out care from the doctors stationed in trailers in the parking lot of the base gym for four months. One day he arrived at work and tried to log into his computer. His access was denied. Mitchell alerted his Master Sergeant and was then told to sit at his desk and wait. After a few hours, his leadership told him that he had been diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder and that his access had been removed. Shortly after that, he was told to go home and not return until he was called back. He was told he would be medically retired and one day received his retirement package in the mail.

In his narrative about leaving the Marines, Mitchell describes a leadership failure that may aptly be described as a moral injury. He believed he was trying to do the right thing by beginning mental health care. Mitchell spoke with a doctor but was not told that he had been officially diagnosed with PTSD. Instead, Mitchell showed up to work one day and found that he could not access the materials needed for his job. His supervisor told him to go sit down, and only later did he find out that the Naval Hospital had sent his diagnosis directly to his command.

Mitchell's narrative is as follows. He had deployed nine times to combat zones. He has numerous citations for his work ethic and valor in combat and volunteered to deploy when needed. The U.S. Marine Corps, which he had wanted to be a part of his entire life, had failed him. His command could have sent him to the Wounded Warrior Battalion in hopes of addressing his mental health concerns but instead he was involuntarily retired. These actions meet Shay's definition of moral injury: a betrayal of what's right (supporting mental health care) by someone who holds legitimate authority (his command) in a high-stakes situation (his career) (Shay, 2014, p. 183).

Themes

Soldierizing

Mitchell joined the United States Marine Corps right out of high school. Once he enlisted, Mitchell had every intention of staying in for as long as he could. He loved being an infantryman and thrived on completing his missions:

> My wife knew it. So that was my plan. While my wife and I got married, I told her I was gonna stay here until I was looking at 25-30 years, 30 years, usually the longest that person can do it. That's what I was hoping. It was about being a Marine, about being in the lifestyle.

Mitchell was aware of the demand that serving in the Marine Corps required, that it was more than just a job, and being a Marine became his identity:

> It's an entire culture. It's not just something that you do. It's not just a job, it's an actual lifestyle. I guess the only thing I can say is as adulthood for me, my entire adult life is the Marine Corps culture. Because as soon as I became an adult, I became a Marine, and I've never stopped being a Marine.

Mitchell dreaded the thought of leaving the Marines. When asked what he thought it would be like, he simply replied, "hell." When pressed on this idea, he said: "I'm not allowed to be what I want to be. I'm no longer able to do what I was meant to do or be who was meant to be. Now I had to be part of the civilians. Yesterday, I was a sheep dog. And today I'm the sheep. How does that work?”

Fracturing: military betrayal

Fracturing summarizes the feelings that Mitchell had during and after his medical retirement. In 2007, the Secretary of Defense instituted guidance that the “deployment-to-dwell” time for Marines would be 1:2 to ensure that combat units received adequate rest to maintain the heightened tempo of operations during the Iraq and Afghanistan wars. This dwell time ratio means that if a Marine was deployed for six months, they would receive at least 12 months where they would not be deployed (MARADMIN 448/07).

Mitchell loved deploying, but in the summer of 2007, he was given orders to start his dwell time:

> Towards the end of my third deployment is when the Marine Corps or probably the whole DOD came up with this idea…Tons of guys were just doing deployment after deployment after deployment. And if they're surviving combat, physically, mentally, they're just falling apart. And the DOD started to recognize this. And so they had to start instituting dwell time for these guys to kind of decompress and reset. So that's what they did. That's why I got the orders. I'm very upset about it still and it's been a while.

The change in pace was unwelcome, and Mitchell believes that the instituted downtime provided too much time for Marines to reflect on their past deployments.

> We just come off combat. If you were somewhere in the world, and now we're all forced to slow down and we're sitting in our offices and our cubicles. And I have time to think. The corporal sitting the desk in front of me would, quite often, lose his mind. And you just would hear like this animalistic little scream, come out of him. And I'd look around

> the corner and he's literally underneath his desk in the fetal position. And he has the most frightened look on his face ever. He'd come from the same unit I did. And but he was in a different company, his platoon had gotten suckered into an ambush while we were on deployment. And he had got stuck in the middle of the road. And everybody around him died. And every now and then he would just go back to that place. And it would he would, his brain literally shut down.

The silence affected Mitchell too. Directly after returning from deployment, he realized that something was wrong, but he wanted to get better. He was selected to become a Gunnery Sergeant, but he knew he could not perform at the needed level without addressing his problems.

> So I go back to work. I had a couple of people I knew like over to MEU or division, they kept offering to pull some strings to get me out of group. I really wanted to go work for them. But at the same time, I was afraid that I was going to get to them and still be in this in this place I was at and fail them. So I was like: “I'm not really a good candidate to come work for you right now.” I was afraid to fail them. But looking back at it, I think this is kind of like they probably knew what I was going through. And this was their offer to: “Hey, you come over here where people know you and let us help you instead of hanging out with all those people over there that keep trying to destroy your career.” And I kept turning it down.

Mitchell was deeply bothered by the atmosphere in Marine Logistics Group (MLG), where he was assigned, calling it a place “where Marines go to die.” Mitchell felt that while the MLG was made up primarily of “displaced grunts,” many of which were dealing with their own issues with combat, there was a feeling that the Marines there did not support each other, but instead looked for ways to ruin the careers of others.

> Up until that point, I've never seen officers or staff NCO's try to actively destroy another staff NCO's career in the way that they did, for no reason. I mean, I had not done anything wrong, I didn't have any kind of bad marks anywhere in my record. I had way more combat time than anybody else in the office. I've got medals for valor. And they just, all of a sudden, the Navy says I got this. So I must be a piece of shit. So it's time to ruin my career.

His unit did not refer Mitchell to the Wounded Warrior Battalion, which could have provided him with a variety of resources to either facilitate a transition out of the military or allow him the opportunity to stay in (Wounded Warriors, 2021).

The Navy had set up trailers in the gym's parking lot where service members could seek out treatment for mental health issues, so Mitchell went a few times a week for four months, believing he was being a “good” Marine and working to make himself mission capable. The psychiatrists diagnosed him with Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) but did not tell him. He thought he was taking the necessary steps to improve his mental health and that it would not be held against him.

> I wasn't told that the doctor, you know, he made his determination, handed it over to the Naval Hospital. Naval Hospital gave it to my chain of command. I show up to work one morning, and the way I found out that I had this diagnosis was my security clearance had been revoked. My ability to log onto my computer was revoked. My ability to do any of my work was completely hampered by the fact that I couldn't access any of the material, I needed to do my job. And when I went to my Master Sergeant, be like, “Hey, what's going on here,” and he was just like, “Just go back to your desk, and sit down and just be quiet.” And his whole demeanor towards me completely changed. I was no longer, you

> know, that guy that was doing all these other jobs plus taking some of the slack off of him whenever his plate got a little bit full. Now as I was this liability that was in the back of the room that nobody wanted to have anything to do with.

In the process of separating from the Marine Corps, Mitchell attended a Transition Readiness Seminar, which did little to quell the impending fear of the unwanted separation. The Marine who led the class essentially told the class, “Hey, I don't know why everybody's leaving. You're gonna fail at being civilians anyway.” Mitchell agreed with her silently. When asked if this made him angry, he said, “I wasn't angry at her. I'm angry at the reality that I can't come back. I agreed with her.”

Limboizing

Once he separated from the U.S Marines, Mitchell stayed in bed for three to four weeks, only leaving to use the bathroom and depending on his wife and children to bring him food. At the insistence of his wife, he took a job as a security guard. He lost it shortly thereafter due to suffering from potentially dangerous intentions, ultimately landing him in a Department of Veterans Affairs psychiatric ward. The next few years after his retirement, Mitchell was in and out of the V.A. hospital. Reflecting on his stays at the hospital, Mitchell remembered having periods when he did not have any angry outbursts. Still, he then would experience episodes where he would become irrationally angry over inconsequential things. Although Mitchell was not assigned to the Wounded Warrior battalion, a friend stationed there knew he was struggling, so a Marine Colonel visited his house regularly. One day the Colonel found that he had ripped all the doors out of his house.

Mitchell said: “So I spent the next few years going through that cycle of trying to make myself better, somehow losing my shit and destroying my home and traumatizing my wife and children in the process." He regularly sought out care at the V.A., going through counseling and an intensive inpatient program for PTSD. He had little faith that the inpatient program was going to work, but now looking back, he said, "It really set me on the road." He admits he still has anger issues, but they only happen a few times a year rather than a few times a week. Mitchell related that he feels out of control in these instances.

> Every now and then, just, I lose my shit. And I'm still trying to figure out how I'm not in jail yet or haven't been shot, or how I haven't killed somebody on accident. Because when I'm going through these things, I'm not in control. I'm like a passenger, sitting there off to the side watching it all happen, but I'm not. I'm not driving this bus. And then when you come out of it, you look at the path of destruction, like a tornado just came through your house or an earthquake or something. And you're like, I know, no one else in my house was capable of doing this. I had to have done it.

Destructuring:

As a retired Marine, he does not view himself as part of the larger American society. Instead, he feels that he is an observer.

> It's more observing. It's almost like a there's this sub society off to the side that's coexisting with the mainstream society. They don't, you know, there are some veterans that can make that that transition and kind of blend them together. I don't think I've done that. I don't think I can.

Despite the anger Mitchell feels towards the Marines, due to his unwanted medical retirement, he would still rejoin the perceived safety of the Marine Corps if given the option.

> I would not have any qualms doing it. Because at the same time, yeah, this is the sort of society that you're protecting. But at the same time, you're insulated in the same your own little subculture that really has nothing to do with what's going on there. You're living your own little life. I'll protect your little ignorant view of the world as long as I get to maintain my own and not be disturbed. So I would definitely jump at it. Because then that means I don't even have to interact with these people at all. I can go back on to military installation. And live my own life. Look at my own fantasies, not have to worry about anyone else's. Because no one's living reality around here. Everyone's living their own little fantasy. Do you ever even look at the allegory from Plato about the cave. About when that one person that finally gets up, and they walk to the exit, and they go outside? A lot of times, they're, they're, you know, now they've learned that the whole life that they live the whole time is a mirage. It's, it's, it's an illusion. And here's the real world, right? The first reaction for most people is to go back into a cave and continue to live that illusion. Because the outside world is so much bigger and much more vibrant and complex than what they're used to. And if you could escape, go back to an easier life, you know, most people jump at that. I mean, yeah, you could look at it physically. The Marine Corps is harder than being a civilian because you had to stay physically fit; you have to be prepared for war at all times. But in all other aspects, aspects too much easier life. In reality, I don't have to worry about feeding myself. I don't have to worry about clothing myself. I don't have to worry about paying bills unless I'm married. And I even push that off on my wife, so I didn't do it. You know, all I had to do is focus on my job.

Mitchell’s wife urged him to start taking classes at community college so that he would have something to do. He acknowledges that it has provided him with an alternate mission, giving him some sense of purpose since leaving the Marine Corps. However, he identifies only as a Marine. He believes that his unique life experiences have provided a different frame of reference, which can cause stress when interacting with professors, stating, “Every paper I write, I read it from that viewpoint of being a Marine.” Mitchell feels that due to his experiences in combat and seeing the harsh realities of war, it makes it difficult for him to place his classwork in an accepted theoretical framework:

> I think that lots of things they look at, the world, even the educated people on this campus, they see the world through a fantasy lens, and they want to believe that everything's all good and hunky dory. I'm like no, I, when I when I look at certain things, and I see all the warts and the bad things. I still embrace it, but I'm still going to be critical about it. I'm still going to point it out. Because I don't think that it does us any good to ignore the bad things and just look at the good. So even if I'm pointing out all the bad things, and it frustrates a lot of my teachers when we're trying to do stuff because like, they're like, “Well, what? Which point of view you're taking, you're taking that you're taking that.” And a lot of times I'm like, “No, I'm like, way over here, dude, I'm not even in your little thing. I'm, I'm kind of, you know, why does it, Why is everything got to be linear, I'm more spherical, like, I'm way over here.” And make some angry, but it is going to affect my perception of the world forever.

Ronin-fying

Mitchell recognizes that the Marine Corps has left a powerful impression on his psyche.. As a Marine, he felt part of something bigger and better than he was a civilian.

> The Marine Corps has a very special place in the American psyche, and that's where I was at. I was in that that little special place. That pseudo-religious awe that everybody

> has, for the Marine Corps. Especially when you're in the Marine Corps, you work really hard to, to realize this image. No matter how fantastical it is, you're creating the reality, because the funny thing is, is that that fantasy was created way before the reality ever actually existed. So the Marine Corps spent so much time and effort making that fantasy reality, it's no longer fantasy. It's reality. Unfortunately, sometimes that fantasy gets out of hand, because that's what it is. Fantasy is not reality. But the Marine Corps made it. It's not meant to be reality. But it is. But that's where I was, I was, I was in that.

After significant mental and physical health issues, Mitchell has little faith in his ability to continue long-term in society, although he continues to receive mental and physical health care through the Department of Veterans Affairs. When asked if he can see a future for himself beyond the Marines, he said:

> Maybe, I don't know. You know, it's, I don't see anything. It's kind of like hazy, kind of like looking through some 19th-century glass that's got a lot of imperfections in it. You know, it's kind of there, maybe. But it's also fragile.

Mitchell has been retired for ten years and is a successful student who is considering a Ph.D. program. He takes advantage of offered counseling, and feels his anger issues are markedly improved. He feels, however, that it is inevitable that he will eventually have an outburst at the wrong time in the wrong place.

> And a lot of it has to do with the fact that I know that all it takes is me to have one bad day in the wrong place. I mean, that could happen here on campus. I can have one bad day on campus, and everything goes out the window; all bets are off. And I work, I don't think a lot of people understand how hard I work, at trying to contain myself a lot of times. Because it can get really, really, really bad. And the only people that could

> probably stop me if I got to that point would be the cops. And once that happened, and it would be over, you know. And so when I think of the future, it's with that shadow kind of looming over, you could have a future. But chances are that it’s going to happen sooner or later. I'm going to have an episode, wrong place, wrong time. And that's going to result in all bets are off. You know what you thought you were doing yesterday, you're not ever going to be doing again. Or you thought you're doing tomorrow? It's never happened. You know, you're not gonna get a slap on the wrist and told not to do that again. There's not even a chance I would survive that event.

When asked about this fatalistic view, Mitchell knows he cuts an imposing figure at over six feet tall and shares that he feels he will lose his temper and yell at the wrong person, causing them to call the police out of fear. Smith-MacDonald et al., (2020) mentions that resigning, part of the destructuring, can result in veterans feeling a “deep-seated hopelessness…and a desire to annihilate oneself” (p. 240).

Mitchell recalls finishing his first day at a four-year University. He took the bus to his car, intending to never come back. He did not like the noise, or the crowds, and felt he had nowhere to go. On one of the stops, two other Marines boarded. They took a look around and spotted Mitchell and asked, “Are you a Marine?” Mitchell nodded but did not say anything. The two sat down and said, “We are too. Do you want to go get something to eat? Some other vets will be there.” Mitchell agreed and, while eating, found himself enjoying the company, although he did not say much. The veterans folded him into their group, regularly texting him and inviting him to hang out. Mitchell slowly emerged from his shell, becoming first a work-study, then a tour guide for the campus, and then winning a scholarship for veteran leaders. He credits those two Marines for stopping him from giving up, even if all they did was invite him to lunch. A mission is much easier to complete as a team, and Mitchell had found one.

Discussion

It is possible that Mitchell could have gotten out of the Marines without suffering a moral injury and avoided bouncing between Smith-MacDonald et al.'s various categories in the theory of transitioning fracturing identities. Upon receiving Mitchell's PTSD diagnosis, his unit could have recommended him to begin care at the Wounded Warrior Battalion. This specialized care units designed to assist service members and veterans with care and support for long-lasting injuries and needs to attend multiple medical appointments per week. After receiving care, the Wounded Warrior Battalion will recommend sending the service member back to full-duty or supporting their transition out of the military. Suppose Mitchell had received care from the Wounded Warrior Battalion and was recommended to separate. In that case, it is possible that because of the counseling and support services he would have been receiving, he would not have felt as if the Marines had discarded him (Wounded Warrior Battalion, 2021). Mitchell could have moved through Smith-MacDonald et al.'s categories and reconciled his new identity as a veteran, husband, father, and student instead of simply a Marine.

According to Smith-MacDonald et al.'s theory a servicemember must must acknowledge and address the injuries sustained while in the fracturing and limboizing categories to reconcile a new identity. The properties of the reconciling category are: finding a herd, reclaiming identity, grieving, forgiving, and repurposing (Smith-MacDonald et al., 2020). Finding a herd refers to looking for a community rather than self-isolating. Reclaiming identity is the process of recognizing the positive traits imbued by their military service and transitioning them to the civilian realm. Grieving requires a veteran to accept and mourn the loss they suffered, be it removal from military service or the loss of an important person. Repurposing occurs when a person begins to rediscover meaning in their life and allows them to move forward from the transition (Smith-MacDonald et al., 2020.

Implications for practice

When service members separate from service, some choose to further their education at an Institution of Higher Education; therefore, all Institutions need to ensure some support for student veterans. The Department of Veterans Affairs states that 10% to 30% of those who served in the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts have PTSD, and over 90% of veterans from these conflicts have experienced trauma. The number of veterans and service members in higher education has risen, especially community colleges, as they are cost-effective and flexible for adult students. (Rumann 2010; Barnett, 2011, Rivera & Hernandez, 2011). Nearly 80% of community colleges now have some services for service members and veterans (McBain et al., 2012). These services vary widely, and some of the more time-intensive programs are found primarily in institutions near military bases (Cook& Kim, 2009; Sewall, 2010). In the light of the prevalence of PTSD and experiences of trauma, it would benefit Institutions that serve recently returned populations of service members and veterans to introduce high-impact practices to support the military-affiliated population.

Orientation. Military culture differs dramatically from those living in the civilian world. When service members transition out of the military, they need additional support to reduce feelings of isolation (Brown & Gross, 2011; DiRamio & Jarvice, 2011; Rumann, Rivera, & Hernandez, 2011; Strickley, 2009; Whiteman et al., 2013). In response to these needs, some institutions have created veteran-specific orientations. Orientations have improved community college student persistence, increased campus involvement, increased faculty and student interactions, and mitigated a student veteran feeling isolated on campus (Chaves, 2006). In addition, Hollins (2009) found that students who attended orientation in Virginia community colleges had higher GPA and retention rates when compared to their peers that did not.

Military Veterans Center. A running theme in student veteran research is a feeling of isolation on campus (Brown & Gross, 2011; DiRamio & Jarvice, 2011; Rumann, Rivera, & Hernandez, 2011; Strickley, 2009; Whiteman et al., 2013). In response, some Institutions have begun providing a Military and Veteran Center on campus to provide an opportunity for social interaction. Student veterans report using these facilities to make friends, honor their military service, relax, and receive support from students who understand their difficulties. Relationships formed in the Military and Veteran Center on campus can be so strong they persist after graduation. Off-campus social outings often have alumni and students who have just started school (Yeager & Rennie, 2020).

Student Veteran Driven Campus Responsiveness. The Afghanistan withdrawal led to many reactions from anger, support, apathy, confusion, and frustration that the veterans' community was being overlooked. One veteran said, “This matters so much to use and you people don’t care; you have forgotten us the way you always forget us” (McCarthy, 2021). One university approached its student veterans and asked how they could support the population. The veterans acknowledged the need for support but wanted it to consist of other veterans on campus. The university then set aside space for the student veterans to talk without outside intrusion. The campus then arranged for outside veteran groups to come in and facilitate conversations. The campus counseling director visited the Military and Veteran Center to have a cup of coffee and talk with students. The campus understood this could not be a one size fits all occurrence and supported the veteran services staff in deciding how to meet the individual needs of the population. The Institution also turned to faculty and staff, asking them to provide low-level support for student veterans and be aware of their feelings regarding the Afghanistan withdrawal. Campuses should remain mindful of events concerning the veteran or military population, listen to their needs, and respond meaningfully (McCarthy, 2021).

Conclusion

Mitchell's narrative exemplifies the need for support of service members who have been involuntarily removed from service. His path mirrors Smith-MacDonald et al.'s theory of transitioning fractured identities, lending support for the newly developed framework. Institutions of Higher Education should remain aware of the needs of their student veteran population, as PTSD and mental health issues are being diagnosed more frequently. Institutions can develop personalized programming for the needs of their veteran population, potentially including a Veteran Specific Orientation, Veteran and Military Space, and student veteran driven campus responsiveness. Throughout his interviews, Mitchell described feeling alone, and isolation has become a common theme in student veteran research. If not for those two Marine veterans who reached out to him, he may have left a bright future behind.

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U.S Marine Military Culture and its Impact on Transitioning Students: High Impact Options for IHLs

Introduction

Jack, a recently separated Marine, sits in a History survey course. It is his first day of school and he is already considering dropping out. He is sitting with his feet planted firmly on the floor and is trying to take notes, but he cannot focus on what the professor is saying. The kids, and this is how he thinks of the students in his class—many of whom are only a few years younger—are irritating him already. *If this is how they are on the first day*, he assumes, *it'll only get worse*. Many of them are on their phones, tapping away, while others sit and stare into space. He can't imagine disrespecting an instructor this way. *How am I going to work with these students?* The professor mentions a group work assignment, and Jack feels tense. *These students aren't going to do any work. How is the assignment going to get done? I'm going to have to do it all himself.* This is a common experience of many student veterans when they enter the classroom: disillusion, fear, and exclusivity.

This report focuses on the education of enlisted members of the U.S Marine Corps. This branch is the smallest force but instills a deep sense of history and culture into its troops throughout their service, providing an opportunity for an in-depth look at the effect of Marine military culture and its impact on transition. Readers can extrapolate this information and adjust it to the needs of their own student veterans.

When Marines meet higher education

Jack may be prepared for higher education academically, but culturally he is in a very different place than his fellow traditional college students. He may feel that he is out of place in college, but his thought process is due to Marine military culture, which 'others' civilians and, in some cases, service members from different branches. Military culture, including the process that a civilian goes through first to become a service member via basic training, and how this culture is sustained through the various schools that Marines attend during their military service, is a part of understanding veteran learner experiences. Military culture's aspects may become problematic for military members after they separate from the service.

Institutions of Higher Education should be prepared for the student veterans who enter their establishment. More military veterans will choose to begin their education at community colleges, so it can be argued that community colleges need to be prepared to meet the needs of transitioning service members. To best meet this population's cultural transition needs, higher education should consider implementing helpful programs to ease transitioning issues (Radford, 2009).

While a traditional student may be trying to figure out who they are, the student veteran has had years immersed in military culture, influencing their personality, and now must try to balance their previous mindset and experiences with returning to the civilian world (Arminio, Grabosky & Lang, 2015; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). Student veterans struggle in group assignments with traditional students, as many view other students as not taking the "mission" or "team" seriously and not following through to meet deadlines. Student veterans may view their traditional peers as 'whiny' and 'irresponsible' (Lim, et al., 2018).

Daniel, a Marine veteran, expounded on this sentiment:

> People's work ethic. Not there. Or, I shouldn't say that. It's not the same to what we're used to…people were more focused on things that they were doing that weekend, or what they were doing later that night, and then they would be surprised when they didn't do well on a test. (Messina, 2021)

Camaraderie

Jack has been in college for a month now. He is enjoying the challenge of his classes and makes sure he is early for class, turns his assignments in on time, and sits in the front of the room. His professor tells everyone to pair up to work on peer reviewing a midterm paper. He does not want to be partners with anyone. *I'm not going to get any useful feedback. They hardly even talk in class.* After a long moment, the professor asks him to review the paper of the only other person unpaired in class. *Great*, he thinks, *what a waste of a class period.*

Jack misses his fellow Marines and spends a lot of timing sending memes back and forth on group text to his old friends. He has not made any friends in school yet, but he does not think it is an issue. He has his old friends, who are still serving. These students are so young and just do not seem to understand simple facts about life. Ahrens, et al. (2015) argue that service members often view their military teammates as a family due to conditions prevalent in the military, such as combat, the threat of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs) and close living quarters, uniquely bonding the service members due to difficult circumstances. Service members phrase the experience as: "Only we know what we've gone through" (p. 4). Despite the difficulty of combat situations, service members are often happy to fight alongside their team, as they feel they must keep their team safe (Wong, et al., 2003). Losing a member of one's team is unthinkable and a sign of failure to service members; this motivation keeps military members combat-ready and willing to serve another tour or re-enlist. Wong et al. (2003) asked soldiers about the most critical contributor to their desire to persist in difficult circumstances, such as combat, and doing the best job possible. Some soldiers responded that they simply wanted to get home, while the most common response was "fighting for my buddies." Soldiers mentioned that the only thing that they truly worried about was themselves and their crew. Others said they did not want to let anyone down, indicating the importance of social cohesion in the military (pp. 9-10). For example, the Army trains the Stryker Brigade Combat Team by placing soldiers together for 36 months, including arrival, training, and deployment (Wong et al., 2003, p. 5). Social cohesion serves two roles: each soldier carries the burden of success upon their shoulders, as they view their part of the unit as essential and ultimately protects the unit from harm. One soldier stated: “That person means more to you than anybody. You will die if he dies. That is why I think that we protect each other in any situation. I know that if he dies and it was my fault, it would be worse than death to me” (Wong et al, p. 10). Another role of social cohesion is to provide security in knowing someone else is watching out for you. One infantryman stated: “you have got to trust them more than your mother, your father, or girlfriend, or your wife, or anybody. It becomes like your guardian angel” (p. 11). Wong et al., 2003, explain that once soldiers are convinced of their safety by the security in their unit, they feel able to carry out their mission without worry.

Elitism and U.S. Marines

Jack begrudgingly sits with his assigned partner. *Did this guy even put any effort into the assignment?* He studiously marks up his partner’s paper, assuming his review will be graded. He watches the student out of the corner of his eye. Anger grows inside of him. *He isn’t even reading it.* After a few minutes, the student picks up his pen and begins making notes on Jack’s paper. Jack frowns slightly. *He’s probably just pencil whipping it*.

Jack unfairly assumes that the other students do not put the same effort into their assignment as he does; the Marines had taught him that he was the best of the best. The Marine Corps’ purposeful elitism evidences the strength and pervasiveness of their culture. The Marine Corps' literature for its members emphasizes this attitude. The 5th edition of the *Handbook for*

Marine NCOs (non-commissioned officers) continually expresses that Marines must maintain an attitude of excellence in all they do. For example, it states that when a Marine is in a school with other military branches, they are expected to be the top student or near the top. Estes claims that "anything less is unworthy of the Corps" (Estes, 2008, p.?). Even a process as seemingly inconsequential as sleeve rolling is done with great care. One Marine described:

> The regulation is that it's like, whatever it's like two or three inches above, like the bend of the elbow. But in reality, you do one more fold. You want to get it high. And then it's not uncommon to see Marines spend two hours rolling their sleeves. Rolling, iron, fold, iron, roll, starch, iron fold, roll, like over and over and over to the point where they're like, look, I'll put it this way: There was a guy in my platoon who had a burn on his arm. He has scars now because he tried to iron his sleeves while they were on. Because if you don't have a tight, crisp sleeve, like skintight, cutting off your circulation tight, like your arms will kind of change colors a little bit. You're a piece of shit, like you're actually looked down upon. And I mean, you'll get called out for it. (Messina, 2021)

Elitism is prevalent in Marine heritage. For instance, in 1921 the Commandant of the Marine Corps, General John A. LeJeune, decreed that Marines would assemble to hear his birthday message every year on the Marine Corps birthday. This message reinforces the concept of heroism and elitism of the past Marines. Commandant LeJeune stated, "In every battle and skirmish since the Birth of the Corps, Marines have acquitted themselves with the greatest distinction, winning new honors on each occasion until the term 'Marine' has come to signify all that is highest in military efficiency and soldierly virtue" (U.S Marine Corps, 2004). Many service members seek out the Marines when selecting a branch of service to join, as they feel it’s the most difficult and the most prestigious. One Marine, Paul, stated: “My pride led me to the

Marine Corps because I had that innate, I guess, arrogance in myself, and if I'm going to do it, I'm going to do the hardest because I'm going to be the best there is" (Messina, 2021). The perception that the Marine Corps is the most demanding and most elite branch was a prominent thread throughout the study.

The pervasiveness of this idea of superiority and excellence is reinforced throughout their career via their training, suggesting the Marines have a firmly and purposefully embedded culture. However, the Marines' common saying is "Once a Marine, always a Marine." This adage has been in use since 1907 and remains a persistent saying in the Marines (Venable, H., 2019). With this in mind, it could be argued that the Marines are encultured to live their lives by Marine Corps values (honor, courage, and commitment) for the remainder of their lives. The Marine Corps' influence on its service members is an important aspect that should not be overlooked. The sheer effort that the U.S Marine Corps puts into consistently training their Marines and reinforcing the expectation of excellence at all times illustrates that this branch of the military has a more pervasive culture than the remainder of the U.S military—which is not to say that the other branches are lacking in power or prestige. By studying the underpinning of the Marine Corps culture, insights from this paper can then be extrapolated to examine the effects of this training on all veterans when transitioning to civilian life, both positive and negative.

Marine culture is purposefully and carefully reinforced throughout the entirety of their career to prepare a Marine for combat, but to date, there has been no research on the long-term impacts of such intense indoctrination. While the purpose of the culture is not meant to interfere with a service member's transition to civilian life after their service, literature shows that veterans have transition issues, such as personal and institutional problems, when separating from the military. It is necessary to understand how the mindset of a service member is created to understand better the implications of how their training may affect their transition out of the service, to allow IHLs to program more effectively for student veterans who enter their establishment and proactively address any transition issues that may emerge in the student veteran population.

Isolation

Jack's partner hands his back his paper. He looks at it. The student made extensive notes. "Hey, I liked your paper. It's good. Did you want to get together at the library tomorrow and work on them together? I'm free after 1. My name's Ryan." Jack says nothing, unsure if the offer is genuine.

Another complication due to military culture is isolation on the college campus. While veterans may not appear significantly older than their traditional peers, their previous life experiences are different. While veterans often cite that they can identify other student veterans on campus, relating to each other on a level common between service members, it can be challenging to find such peers on campus if there is no social club for veterans or a veterans' lounge. Veterans often crave connections with other veterans due to the loss of military esprit de corps (DiRamio et al., 2008). Another typical change for veterans that can hinder transition is that the notion of *team* is vital to service members, and in many cases, service members work together and eat, exercise, and live together. Once the service member has separated, their team members are removed from their life. While they may stay connected with them through various means, the veteran is now an outsider to the active-duty members with whom they were once so close. If the service member lived on or near their base, they might need to move from their support structure to be closer to job and education opportunities. This move will isolate the veteran further from their team, and they may be surrounded by individuals in their new location who are difficult to relate to because of significantly different life experiences (Arminio, et al, 2015; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). Guzman Bouvard (2012) argues that the psychological impacts of war last far longer than the physical injuries sustained and can drive veterans into drinking heavily, isolation, suicidal ideation, and agonizing over their actions while on deployment (p. 51)

Implications for Practice in IHLs

When service members separate from service, some choose to further their education at an Institution of Higher Education; therefore, all institutions need to ensure some support for student veterans. The number of veterans and service members in higher education has risen, especially at community colleges, as they are cost-effective and flexible for adult students (Rumann, 2010; Barnett, 2011, Rivera & Hernandez, 2011). Non-traditional students are an important population for IHLs to recruit, as there will be significantly fewer traditional freshman between 2025 and 2029 due to a declining birth rate in the United States (Copley &Edward, 2020). Nearly 80% of community colleges now have some services for service members and veterans (McBain et al., 2012). These services vary widely, and some of the more time-intensive programs are found primarily in institutions near military bases, but should be replicated elsewhere if institutions wants to support the success and retention of student veterans (Cook & Kim, 2009; Evans et al., 2015; Sewall, 2010). In the light of the prevalence of PTSD and experiences of trauma, it would benefit institutions that serve recently returned populations of service members and veterans to introduce high-impact practices to support the military-affiliated population.

Opportunity to build camaraderie

Military and Veterans Center. A running theme in student veteran research is a feeling that they lack meaningful connections on campus due to the difference in life experiences between student veterans and traditional students (Brown & Gross, 2011; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Rumann, et al., 2011; Strickley, 2009; Whiteman et al., 2013). In response, some institutions have begun providing a Military and Veteran Center on campus to provide an opportunity for social interaction. Ideally, these facilities should have input from the student veterans on campus before they are assigned, to ensure their needs are met. Location, square footage, and proximity to student veteran professionals should be considered or veterans may not use the space as intended (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017). Student veterans report using these facilities to make friends, honor their military service, relax, and receive support from students who understand their difficulties. Relationships formed in the Military and Veteran Center on campus can be so strong they persist after graduation. Off-campus social outings often have alumni and students who have just started school (Yeager & Rennie, 2020). The Military and Veterans Center provides a "safe" place for veterans to come together and be able to speak freely, knowing that the others there are comfortable with military culture and understand the change that is taking place when veterans begin to re-integrate into civilian life.

Opportunity to combat exclusivity

Veteran specific course. Student veterans have different concerns and struggles when entering IHLs, so an introductory course designed specifically for their needs makes good sense. O'Gara et al., (2009) found that the students enrolled in these courses enjoy a higher retention and graduation rate. These courses may offer some of the same information as other first-seminar courses may teach, but this is an opportunity to allow students to have guided discussions to better understand the impact military culture has had on their mindset. These conversations should include conversations regarding traditional students, college life, and the importance of engaging in programming. This may make student veterans aware of the exclusivity prevalent in military culture and lead to increased collaboration with traditional students, easing transition to civilian life (Burnett & Segoria, 2009; Messina, 2021; O'Gara et al., 2009)

Opportunity to combat isolation

Orientation. Military culture differs dramatically from those living in the civilian world. When service members transition out of the military, they need additional support to reduce feelings of isolation (Brown & Gross, 2011; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Rumann, Rivera, & Hernandez, 2011; Strickley, 2009; Whiteman et al., 2013). In response to these needs, some institutions have created veteran-specific orientations. Orientations have improved community college student persistence, increased campus involvement, increased faculty and student interactions, and mitigated student veterans' experiences of isolation on campus (Chaves, 2006). In addition, Hollins (2009) found that students who attended orientation in Virginia community colleges had higher GPA and retention rates when compared to their peers that did not. Perhaps most important, incoming students have an opportunity to meet other new student veterans. Staff should be mindful of this and create breaks in the programming to facilitate relationship building between students and staff and students.

Further opportunities for IHLs

Student Veteran Driven Campus Responsiveness. The Afghanistan withdrawal led to many reactions, including support for withdrawal to anger, apathy, confusion, and frustration that the veterans' community was being overlooked. One veteran said, "This matters so much to us, and you people don't care; you have forgotten us the way you always forget us" (McCarthy, 2021). One university approached its student veterans and asked how they could support the population. The veterans acknowledged the need for support but wanted it facilitated by other veterans on campus. The university then set aside space for the student veterans to talk without outside intrusion. The campus arranged for outside veteran groups to come in and facilitate conversations. The campus counseling director visited the Military and Veteran Center to have a cup of coffee and talk with students. The campus understood this could not be a one size fits all occurrence and supported the veteran services staff in deciding how to meet the individual needs of the population. The Institution also turned to faculty and staff, asking them to provide low-level support for student veterans and their feelings regarding the Afghanistan withdrawal. Campuses should remain mindful of events concerning the veteran or military population, listen to their needs, and respond meaningfully (McCarthy, 2021).

Conclusion

Student veterans are an attractive population to recruit for IHLs. Many have a federal benefit that pays tuition; they are known to be hard workers, and supporting this population can create positive press for the institution. However, this is a marginalized population that has been institutionalized to an extent. Historically, these students do well in classes after becoming acquainted with how the institution works, but they need special considerations to ensure they are appropriately supported. While a veterans lounge is a popular place to start, if it is not in a location deemed desirable by student veterans, they won’t use it. Programming should be designed alongside the population for their specific needs, rather than simply adopting one after hearing about it at a conference or reading literature about it. Meaningfully support your student veteran professionals and allow them to advocate for the population as they are the “boots on the ground” and should have the best understanding of what the population needs.

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CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

This study addressed the problem of how Marine military culture is conditioned and if this enculturation has last effects on student veterans as they transition to higher education. To conduct this research, I spoke with two distinct populations: student veterans at community colleges throughout the U.S. and Marines who served as instructors and Drill Instructors. Invitations to participate were sent to community colleges near Marine bases and social media networks. Fifteen Marines participated: two Drill Instructors, three Instructors, and ten student veterans. It became clear through the review of training materials and speaking to Marines that military culture in the Marines is something that is not simply instituted during basic training via Drill Instructors but codified every day by the entire branch, especially by the non-commissioned officers. The Joint Chief of Staff argued in 2013 that these ranks carry out some of the most critical tasks in the military: mentoring, teaching, and coaching. It is these actions that build a strong and tightly bonded force. Perhaps it is because the Marines are the smallest branch or because its members hold it in such high regard, but the bond between Marines was evident in the stories the participants relayed. In addition, the Marines in this study were excited to share their military stories and their transition path and sought out other Marines for me to interview and pointed me towards helpful military manuals.

The idea of, and the daily act of being, a Marine provided the necessary building blocks for service members to strive for the imagined ideal. However, the image of the ideal Marine is not without fault. The Marines interviewed described feelings of isolation, arrogance, and suffering from moral injury. Marines who leave military service are placed back in the civilian world with people who do not seem to understand or value the reality of their military service and then devalue these civilians as being less than their military peers. Student veterans reported traditional students as having a poor work ethic and a general lack of commitment to their education. This thought process can lead to Marines isolating themselves from traditional students in higher education, missing out on a valuable opportunity to try out a new civilian identity.

Marines reported feeling most comfortable socializing with fellow Marines and other veterans. Veterans tend to pick each other out on a college campus easily. Members of different branches often engage in friendly verbally sparring about each other's branches. It became clear throughout the interviews that those who joined the Marines were drawn to the branch due to its reputation as the "most challenging" branch and the "best" branch. The Marines who took part in this study set their branch above the others in discipline and exclusivity.

Interview data demonstrated the perception of exclusivity that participants had when comparing themselves to society. The participants viewed themselves as apart from civilians and other military branches, self-imposing themselves in isolation. This is consistent with McAndrew et al. (2019) correlation between veterans' feelings of not belonging on campus and their difficulty adjusting to college. Isolation is a well-researched issue for student veterans (Aschuler & Yarab, 2018; Hunter-Johnson et al.'s, 2020). Still, this study links the U.S Marine's demands for excellence, the insistence that Marines are the best of the best, to the Marine student veterans' sense of isolation on a college campus. Past research shows veterans see themselves as more disciplined or more prepared. Still, it is generally connected to the experiences lived within the military, not as the result of indoctrination in military culture.

Because of the exclusivity present in the Marine Corps, some service members spend a significant amount of time ensuring they meet Marine Corps standards, both in uniforms and behavior. While enlisted, some Marines hold others outside of the Marine Corps to these standards and find the other branches lacking in the discipline. Some service members hold themselves to a higher standard for the entirety of their enlistment, and this behavior may continue after separation from the military. Most of the Marines interviewed communicated frustration with their perception that the traditional students are chronically late for class or arrive without the needed materials, which they perceive as a failure to prepare.

Previous studies did not address the possibility that this impression of traditional students could have hurt the student veteran's ability to immerse themselves in the campus community. Aschuler & Yarab (2018) discuss the sense of isolation veterans feel on campus and how military-affiliated students sought out the company of student veterans. Their study does not recognize that while life experiences may differ dramatically between traditional students and student veterans, forming relationships with traditional students is essential when re-entering civilian society.

Mitchell's narrative exemplifies the need for support of service members who have been involuntarily removed from service. His path mirrors Smith-MacDonald et al.'s theory of transitioning fractured identities, supporting the newly developed framework. Institutions of Higher Education should remain aware of the needs of their student veteran population, as PTSD and mental health issues are being diagnosed more frequently. Institutions can develop personalized programming for the needs of their veteran population, potentially including a Veteran Specific Orientation, Veteran and Military Space, and student veteran-driven campus responsiveness. Mitchell described feeling alone throughout his interviews, and isolation has become a common theme in student veteran research. If not for those two Marine veterans who reached out to him, he may have left a bright future behind.

Implications for practice

When service members separate from service, some choose to further their education at an Institution of Higher Education; therefore, all Institutions need to ensure some support for student veterans. The Department of Veterans Affairs states that 10% to 30% of those who served in the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts have PTSD.and over 90% of veterans from these conflicts have experienced trauma. The number of veterans and service members in higher education has risen, especially community colleges, as they are cost-effective and flexible for adult students. (Rumann 2010; Barnett, 2011, Rivera & Hernandez, 2011). Nearly 80% of community colleges now have some services for service members and veterans (McBain et al., 2012). These services vary widely, and some of the more time-intensive programs are found primarily in institutions near military bases (Cook& Kim, 2009; Sewall, 2010). In the light of the prevalence of PTSD and experiences of trauma, it would benefit Institutions that serve recently returned populations of service members and veterans to introduce high-impact practices to support the military-affiliated population.

Orientation. Military culture differs dramatically from those living in the civilian world. When service members transition out of the military, they need additional support to reduce feelings of isolation (Brown & Gross, 2011; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Rumann, Rivera, & Hernandez, 2011; Strickley, 2009; Whiteman et al., 2013). In response to these needs, some institutions have created veteran-specific orientations. Orientations have improved community college student persistence, increased campus involvement, increased faculty and student interactions, and mitigated a student veteran feeling isolated on campus (Chaves, 2006). In addition, Hollins (2009) found that students who attended orientation in Virginia community colleges had higher GPA and retention rates when compared to their peers that did not.

Military Veterans Center. A running theme in student veteran research is a feeling of isolation on campus (Brown & Gross, 2011; DiRamio & Jarvice, 2011; Rumann, Rivera, & Hernandez, 2011; Strickley, 2009; Whiteman et al., 2013). In response, some Institutions have begun providing a Military and Veteran Center on campus to provide an opportunity for social interaction. Student veterans report using these facilities to make friends, honor their military service, relax, and receive support from students who understand their difficulties. Relationships formed in the Military and Veteran Center on campus can be so strong they persist after graduation. Off-campus social outings often have alumni and students who have just started school (Yeager & Rennie, 2020).

Student Veteran Driven Campus Responsiveness. The Afghanistan withdrawal led to many reactions from anger, support, apathy, confusion, and frustration that the veterans' community was being overlooked. One veteran said, “This matters so much to use and you people don’t care; you have forgotten us the way you always forget us” (McCarthy, 2021). One university approached its student veterans and asked how they could support the population. The veterans acknowledged the need for support but wanted it to consist of other veterans on campus. The university then set aside space for the student veterans to talk without outside intrusion. The campus then arranged for outside veteran groups to come in and facilitate conversations. The campus counseling director visited the Military and Veteran Center to have a cup of coffee and talk with students. The campus understood this could not be a one size fits all occurrence and supported the veteran services staff in deciding how to meet the individual needs of the population. The Institution also turned to faculty and staff, asking them to provide low-level support for student veterans and be aware of their feelings regarding the Afghanistan withdrawal.

Campuses should remain mindful of events concerning the veteran or military population, listen to their needs, and respond meaningfully (McCarthy, 2021).

Opportunities for further research

The findings from the student veterans interview offer a new perspective on a factor, the perception of exclusivity of military members, that may contribute to the sense of isolation that some veterans feel on college campuses. Higher learning institutions and student veterans could better understand the many factors that affect the civilian identity reconstruction that happens after separation from the military. Acknowledgment of the effects of enculturation in the military, both positive and negative, can assist student veterans and those providing supportive programming.

Because this research consisted of only U.S Marine Corps veterans, further study could be conducted with veterans of other branches to see if the sense of exclusivity is as strongly represented in different military branches. In addition, only three female veterans were interviewed for this study. While they did express exclusivity in their interviews, it was not to the degree of the other male Marine veterans. This could also be due to their military occupation specialty as a mail clerk and a legal administrative assistant. Later research could examine only female veterans or veterans who worked in primarily administrative roles. Researchers could also compare student veterans who had only done one enlistment versus those who had retired from military service.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Sample Invitation to participate to Drill Instructors in the research project titled: “Marine by Design: Military Pedagogy in Action”

Dear Sergeant Major,

You were recommended to me as a potential participant in a research study I am conducting on the transition of service members to civilian life. It is based on the assumption that Marine training affects Marines for life, not just for their time in the service. Specifically, we are seeking to understand the training that Marines receive throughout their service and how it shapes the way they see the world--so we can better understand how Marines experience their transition to college and/or civilian careers. As a Drill Instructor you are in an ideal position to provide valuable insights into this process.

The interview should take about 1 hour and will be conducted virtually (using WebX, unless you prefer another platform). It is anonymous and very informal. I am trying to capture your understanding of the Marine instructional method and how it transforms the recruit into a Marine. Your responses to the questions will be kept strictly confidential. Each interview will be assigned a number code to help ensure that personal identifiers are not revealed during the reporting of findings.

There is no compensation for participating in this study. However your participation will be a valuable addition to the research that will inform recommendations to the Department of Veterans Affairs, Department of Justice, and other relevant government departments.

If you are willing to participate, please suggest a day and time between December 1st-January 15th that suits you and I'll do my best to accommodate your schedule. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask.

Best wishes,
Nicole Messina
Doctoral Candidate
North Carolina State University
ncjablon@ncsu.edu

Appendix B

Research Protocol for Instructors for the research project titled: "Marine by Design: Military Pedagogy in Action"

Due to current restrictions under COVID-19, interviews will take place online through Webex

Introduction:

"Now that we are both present in Webex, I will now begin recording our interview with the Webex recorder tool and select that the recording be saved to my computer. After our interview, the conversation will be transcribed through WebEx. You may ask to review the interview transcription for authenticity prior to submission of the research or are able to request a copy of the transcript.

Introduce myself and provide the interviewee with a brief description of my background and the purpose of my research. Thank interviewee for their participation in the interview. The researcher will ask if the participants feels comfortable in their location and has adequate time to take part in the interview.

Clarify the purpose of this research study. "The purpose of this study is to examine the training that Marines receive throughout their service and how it is positioned to fundamentally change how Marines see the world."

"The interview will take approximately 1 hour."

“Your willingness to participate in this research is voluntary, but their participation is greatly appreciated and will further the understanding of military culture as it pertains to veterans transitioning to higher education. To ensure your privacy, a name to represent your interview will be selected through a random name generator.”

“Your participation will be kept confidential and that data retrieved during this session will be kept in a password protected file kept on an external hard drive that will be locked in a cabinet when not in use. After the research has been published for one year, the information will be deleted.”

“Before this interview you were asked to complete a short form to ensure you understood the purpose of the research and to gain your informed consent via electronic signature. Did you complete that form? (Submission will be checked prior to the beginning of the interview). Do you consent to this interview now that all information has been provided to you verbally?”

Are you ready to begin?

Q1. What made you want to join the Marines? How long have you been in for?

Q2.What do you feel led you to becoming a Drill Instructor? Did you have any experiences in the military that led you to want to take on transforming recruits into Marines?

Q3.What does Marine culture mean to you? Or, how would you describe Marine culture?

Q5. Can you tell me about the instruction you received to become a Drill Instructor? What are a few examples of tactics they taught you to do to be an effective Drill Instructor that you felt embedded Marine culture into the recruits?

Q6. What do you hope recruits learn during basic training that will best serve them during their time in the military?

Q7. Can you tell me about the roles that Drill Instructors have (enforcers, instructors, senior drill instructor?). What is the purpose of each of these positions in terms of molding civilians into Marines?

Q8. Can you tell me a little bit about phase 1 and the essential lessons that begin turning a recruit into a Marine?

Q9. Can you tell me a little bit more about phase 2 and the essential lessons that assist with turning a recruit into a Marine?

Q10. Can you tell me a little bit more about phase 3 and the essential lessons that solidify the recruit becoming a Marine?

"Thank you for your time. I truly appreciate your participation in my research."

Appendix C

Sample Invitation to participate to student veterans in the research project titled: "Marine by Design: Military Pedagogy in Action"

Dear student veterans,

I am conducting interviews as part of a research study to increase our understanding of the training that Marines receive throughout their service and how it affects the way Marines see the world. As a student veteran, you are in an ideal position to provide valuable first-hand information from your own perspective.

The interview should take about 1 hour and will be conducted virtually (using WebX, unless you prefer another platform). It is anonymous and very informal. I am trying to capture your understanding of the Marine instructional method and how it transforms the recruit into a Marine. Your responses to the questions will be kept strictly confidential. Each interview will be assigned a number code to help ensure that personal identifiers are not revealed during the reporting of findings.

There is no compensation for participating in this study. However your participation will be a valuable addition to the research that will inform recommendations to the Department of Veterans Affairs, Department of Justice, and other relevant government departments.

If you are willing to participate, please suggest a day and time between January 15th through March 1st that suits you and I'll do my best to accommodate your schedule. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask.

Best wishes,

Nicole Messina
North Carolina State University
Doctoral Candidate
ncjablon@ncsu.edu

Appendix D

Research Protocol for student veterans for the research project titled: “Marine by Design: Military Pedagogy in Action”

Interview protocol will be the same as Appendix B

Q1: How made you want to join the Marines?

Q2: What was your military occupational speciality (MOS)?

Q3: Can you describe your MOS?

Q4: What military schools did you attend while enlisted?

Q5: Why did you separate from the service?

Q6: Do you think that basic training had a transformative effect on you? If yes, can you explain how?

Q7: Can you tell me about one or more experience you had during you various military trainings you had in the Marines the somehow solidified the concept that you were a Marine?

Q8:Is there a particular school that you feel transformed you most as a Marine? If so, why and/or how did it do that?

Q9: What made you want to separate from the Marines?

Q10: Describe your transition out of the military?

Q11. How do you think your Marine training prepared you for higher education?

Q12. Describe your successes in higher education? How was your success was due in part to your training in the Marines?

Q13. Tell me about your experiences navigating higher education or veteran's education benefits? Are there any times that particularly stood out to you?

"Thank you for your time. I truly appreciate your participation in my research."

Appendix E

Interview protocol will be the same as Appendix B

Research Protocol for Instructors for the research project titled: “Marine by Design: Military Pedagogy in Action”

Q1. How long have you been in the Marines?

Q2. What made you want to be a instructor at this school?

Q3.What does Marine culture mean to you?

Q5. Can you tell me about the instruction you received to become an effective instructor?

Q6. Did you feel that any of the information you learned reinforced the importance of Marine military culture?

Q7. What do you feel your purpose is when instructing Marines in your class?

Q8. Are there any particular lessons that you feel really establish the Marine Corps values?

“Thank you for your time. I truly appreciate your participation in my research.”