Examing the development of self-authorship among student veterans

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EXAMINING THE DEVELOPMENT OF SELF-AUTHORSHIP
AMONG STUDENT VETERANS

A Dissertation
Presented to
The Faculty of the School of Education
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

by
Sharon L. M. Stone
April 2014
EXAMINING THE DEVELOPMENT OF SELF-AUTHORSHIP
AMONG STUDENT VETERANS

by

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Approved April 2014

by

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Bruce Brunson, Ph.D.
Dedication

To my husband, Eric, who daily exemplifies the core values of integrity first, service before self, and excellence in all you do – you are my inspiration;

and

To my daughters, Hadleigh and Malorie, who treated the challenges of military childhood as adventures and faced scary times with courage, good humor, and wit – you both are stronger than you know.
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Acknowledgments

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endowment, many students, including myself, would have struggled to make ends meet during our dissertation research. My thanks to both of them for their commitment to furthering teacher education and educational research and for taking a genuine interest in this study.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the many service members and their families who sacrifice personal choice for the greater good and community roots for global mobility, all in an effort to support and defend the Constitution of the United States and the people who live under its laws. These sacrifices, great and small, shape them and color their perspectives on the world. These are my people, my culture, and my tribe. None who has not been one of us can truly understand what we do and why we do it. We can, however, communicate more and in better ways than we have done in the past. If we do not retain connections to civilian society, we will become a separate class that can either exploit power or be exploited by it; we must remain engaged in the civil processes that formed the military in the first place if we are to avert this outcome. So it is my intention with this research to bridge gaps of understanding between military students and civilian educators – a brief conversation in the overall discourse, it’s true, but hopefully a meaningful one. Organizations are never as good as the people who comprise them and it was not my intention to justify or promote with this research any principles or processes of the armed forces. Instead, I hoped to open the proverbial black box – at least a crack – to discover how the forces that shape service members impact their learning and how we as educators can best support their educational needs. It now rests with the reader to judge if I have accomplished that mission.
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EXAMINING THE DEVELOPMENT OF SELF-AUTHORSHIP
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ABSTRACT

The literature has shown that student veterans arrive in college with unique characteristics and also face unique challenges (Black et al., 2007; Bonar & Domenici, 2011; Church, 2009; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). There is also some evidence that student veterans develop complex ways of making meaning at younger ages than students in the general population (Stone, 2013). Despite the increasing numbers of student veterans enrolling in college, and the current emphasis on student development as it relates to teaching and learning, college educators know very little about how military training and experience affects the individual learning and development of veterans transitioning to higher education. Using a conceptual framework constructed from elements of self-evolution (Kegan, 1994), epistemological reflection (Baxter Magolda, 1992, 1999), and constructivist adult learning theories (Knowles, 1975, 1980; Mezirow, 1991), this interpretivist study examined how eight student veterans progressed toward the developmental stage of self-authorship and what role, if any, their military training or experience played in that development. Secondly, the study examined how those eight student veterans, who were nearing or entering the stage of self-authorship, experienced learning in the community college environment. The findings of the study showed that both the compulsory nature of military culture and its operational focus supported development toward self-authorship for individuals possessing the personal characteristics of drive and initiative as well as supportive, interdependent relationships.
These findings led to a substantive theory describing the nexus of development military experience can provide to service members.

SHARON L. M. STONE

EDUCATIONAL POLICY, PLANNING, AND LEADERSHIP
Examining the Development of Self-Authorship among Student Veterans
Chapter 1: The Intriguing Question

The numbers of active duty service members and veterans enrolling in postsecondary education has been increasing as the result of U.S. involvement in Operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom and their subsequent drawdowns (Church, 2009). Historically, the population of student veterans has grown following wars and other armed conflicts since World War I (Madaus, Miller, & Vance, 2009) with an especially pronounced increase after World War II and the signing of the Serviceman’s Readjustment Act of 1944 (Kim & Rury, 2007; Olson, 1973). This piece of legislation, also known as the GI Bill, offered a multifaceted package of benefits to returning veterans, partly in an effort to prevent economic recession, high levels of unemployment, and civil unrest (Olson, 1973). However, it was the educational benefit that was most accessed by veterans (Olson, 1973), no doubt providing a model for future iterations of the GI Bill. So, in addition to the conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, the streamlined administrative process and generous funding of the Post 9/11 GI Bill, which is currently in effect, can also partly explain the present influx of veterans at institutions of higher education (Shackelford, 2009). The elevated levels of veteran enrollment are likely to continue for at least a few more years and should soon account for 5% of the total college enrollment in the United States (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011).

Student veterans today, although much like their predecessors with regard to combat experience, are also different from veterans of World War II through Vietnam.
The U.S. military is now an all-volunteer force and relies on the promise of health, educational, and retirement benefits to recruit new members. Whereas veterans of past conflicts may have attended college because of the serendipitous intersection of personal interest and government funding (Mettler, 2005), veterans today often enlisted with the goal of attending college either during or after their periods of service (DiRamio, Ackerman, & Mitchell, 2008).

Additionally, the college environment has changed since World War II, especially in the area of student affairs and theories of student development (Biddix & Schwartz, 2012; Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). A particularly important change has been the linking of learning to student development (Brown, 1972; Evans et al., 2010). The turmoil on campuses during the 1960s and 1970s, long after World War II veterans had graduated from college, prompted student affairs professionals and faculty alike to examine more closely the interactions between academic achievement, epistemic development, and student characteristics (Evans et al., 2010). This interest both supported and benefitted from the work of social psychologists who focused their theories on college students, a group that had come to be recognized as a unique segment of the population; however, most of those theories were based on participant samples that were, for the most part, male, Caucasian, and had enrolled in college directly after high school (Evans et al., 2010).

Eventually, theorists began to include women, students from racial and ethnic minorities, and those identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender students in developmental theories (Evans et al., 2010). Some research has also focused on students at high risk of attrition due to challenges they face from lack of academic preparation,
low socioeconomic status, or racial discrimination (Pizzolato, 2003, 2004). However, despite this most recent influx of student veterans and the current emphasis on student development as it relates to teaching and learning, college educators know very little about how military training and experience affects the individual learning and development of veterans transitioning to higher education. Most of the student veteran literature focuses on service delivery (e.g., Branker, 2009; DiRamio & Spires, 2009; McGrevey & Kehrer, 2009; Shackelford, 2009), physical and psychological disabilities (e.g., Barry, Whiteman, & MacDermid Wadsworth, 2012; Church, 2009; Kraus & Rattray, 2013; Madaus et al., 2009), or issues of transition and integration (e.g., Black, Westwood, & Sorsdal, 2007; Bonar & Domenici, 2011; DiRamio et al., 2008). There is a gap in the current understanding of how military service and the pre-entry characteristics of veterans affect their psychological development and learning experiences in college. In this study, I seek to address that gap.

Definitions

This study examined and described the ways self-authorship develops in veterans by the time they reach college or soon after enrollment. Because of the uniqueness of both the participant population and the psychological construct of self-authorship, I offer definitions of these terms from the outset of this paper. Then I will proceed to describe the purpose and significance of the study, my own biases and subjectivities, and the conceptual framework I will use as a lens for my investigation and analysis. Finally, I will present my research questions with a brief description of my intended method and approach. Ordering the material in this way should provide the clearest explanation of my purpose and participant population.
Student veterans. Although the Code of Federal Regulations defines a veteran as someone who has “served in the active military, naval, or air service and who was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable” (Pensions, Bonuses, and Veterans’ Relief, 2012, p. 148), the practical definition of veterans can be more complex because certain veteran benefits include additional eligibility requirements that sometimes are quite different from one another (Powers, 2013). Additionally, institutions may not, in some cases, be able to account for all their students with military experience because the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) does not contain a category for deactivated reservists or National Guard members (C. A. Cate, Director of Research for Student Veterans of America, personal communication, May 20, 2013). In this investigation, I use the term, “veteran,” to refer to any person who has served on active duty in any branch of the military (i.e., Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, or Coast Guard) or in an activated reserve or National Guard unit. The term “activated” refers to reserve or Guard units that have been ordered to full-time duty in military service (“Activation,” 2013; Department of Defense Dictionary, 2010). Student veterans then are those students who meet the above definition of a veteran and are currently attending an institution of higher education (Bonar & Domenici, 2011).

Adult learners. Much of this study involved comparing and contrasting student veterans with other groups of students. Those students may be traditionally-aged college students (18 to 23 years old) or other non-traditional students such as students over the age of 23 and those who are married, work full- or part-time while attending classes, or who have children or are responsible for adult family members such as aging parents. Part of the comparison focused on learning preferences of these various groups.
Regardless of classification as traditional, non-traditional, civilian, or veteran, some students respond better to pedagogical approaches which tend to be teacher-centered and prescriptive and therefore more appropriate for children (Knowles, 1984). Conversely, some respond better to andragogical approaches which tend to place more responsibility for learning on the student and are more appropriate for adults (Knowles, 1984). Therefore, understanding what characteristics separate children from adults is necessary to the discussion of learning preferences and teaching approaches.

Adult learners in this study are defined as those individuals who meet all four criteria offered by Malcolm Knowles (1984): biological maturity, legal majority, social responsibility (e.g., as parent, spouse, voting citizen, self-supporting worker, etc.), and psychological maturity marked by a sense of self-direction. The progression from childhood to adulthood occurs on a continuum and varies for each individual depending at least in part on life experiences and opportunities. Some traditionally-aged college students fit the definition of adult learners as do many or most non-traditional students and student veterans. Other traditionally-aged college students do not fit the definition of adult learners because they may not yet be self-supporting or psychologically ready to take responsibility for the direction of their own lives (Knowles, 1984).

**Self-authorship.** Kegan's (1994) theory of self-evolution describes five orders of consciousness that individuals may use to organize their thinking and respond to the demands of life. These are developmental orders, progressing from simple to more complex ways of perceiving and interacting with the environment. The fourth order, or self-authorship, is characterized by reliance on internal foundations or values, rather than on an external code of conduct, in cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal domains
Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2009; Kegan, 1994). This means that individuals who have reached or are near to a self-authored frame of mind are able to see knowledge as something fluid and changing; they also are able to differentiate more easily between their own values and societal or relational demands. Only one-half to one-third of all adults in the United States have reached this level of development (Kegan, 1994), and those who have usually do not reach it while still in college (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2009). Those who have not reached self-authorship tend to rely on following the formulas of traditional community values to inform their personal relationships, behavior, and beliefs (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2009; Kegan, 1994).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to examine how student veterans have progressed toward the developmental stage of self-authorship. In designing this study, I also hoped to discover what role, if any, their military training or experience may have played in that development. Finally, I also examined how these student veterans experienced learning in community college with the purpose of providing teaching faculty and college administrators with information to understand the needs, preferences, and strengths of self-authoring students, whether they are veterans or civilians.

Student veterans share certain characteristics with one another that set them apart from traditional college students. Most veterans or service members enrolled at colleges or universities are or were enlisted personnel because a four-year college degree is required to receive an officer’s commission (U.S. Department of Defense [DoD], 2013). Therefore, unless they are attending college while on active duty – and very early in their careers, which is highly unusual – most student veterans are older than the traditional age
of 18 to 23 years (Branker, 2009). In fact, many veterans are entering college at about the same age that traditional college students are graduating. Student veterans may also have spouses and children, be employed full- or part-time, and be accustomed to living on their own (Branker, 2009; Olson, 1973).

However, even more than age or family status, life experiences set veterans apart from other students, even those who are older, commute to campus, or attend class part-time because of employment obligations (Shackelford, 2009; Summerlot, Green, & Parker, 2009). Boot camp training, which seeks to break down the individual for the purpose of creating a cohesive unit is both physically demanding and psychologically violent (Herbert, 1998); this training also imprints the new recruit with the beliefs, values, and norms of military culture (Volkin, 2007). If service members are sent to a combat zone, they live daily in a culture of “order, structure, camaraderie, and violence” (Stone, 2013, p. 25). These young men and women leave home for their first military assignments at a young age – sometimes as young as 18 years – and, although sustained by an extensive system of peers, supervisors, and support services, must quickly learn to function in stressful and unfamiliar environments. For those deploying to combat zones, the challenges and stress are magnified. Returning from such intense conditions to begin postsecondary studies is an additional challenge for veterans (Branker, 2009; Ruh, Spicer, & Vaughan, 2009). Military culture is “necessarily dualistic, grounded in external authority” (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011, pp. 82-83). Those who are successfully persisting in college admit that part of their transition required putting away the military mindset in favor of a more relaxed and tolerant outlook (DiRamio & Spires, 2009).
Some student veterans who are persisting in college have also shown traits of self-reliance, self-discipline and self-motivation (Stone, 2013), which align with some categories used to assess levels of self-authorship such as perceptions of volitional competence, self-regulation in challenging situations, and capacity for autonomous action (Pizzolato, 2007). Although self-authorship does not universally accompany the worldliness or maturity that are often hallmarks of military service members (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011), the development of self-authorship in student veterans in their early 20s seems to challenge assumptions about the characteristics of veterans and their ability or inability to adapt to non-military environments. The presence of self-authorship or – perhaps more accurately – significant progress toward self-authorship adds a rich dimension to the portrait of returning veterans that should be examined more closely. 

Significance of the Study

The manifestation of self-authorship traits among student veterans warrants further investigation for three reasons. First, knowing more about how self-authorship develops in student veterans may be beneficial to the student veterans themselves. Few college students have reached the point of self-authorship by the time they graduate and even fewer do so during their college years (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2009; Kegan, 1994). As a developmental stage, the self-authored order of consciousness affects how an individual relates to others, what expectations he or she may have of those in authority, and how he or she makes meaning of events, new knowledge, and experiences of every kind. If some student veterans are operating from a self-authoring frame of mind, this means they are making meaning in a qualitatively different way than students who have not yet reached self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2009; Kegan, 1994). Knowing
this about themselves could help student veterans understand that the differences they perceive between themselves and other students may in fact be due to developmental progress rather than to combat experience or military cultural values, both of which will necessarily become less pronounced in their lives over time (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; DiRamio & Spires, 2009).

Second, structures and processes of the college or university, teaching approaches among the professors, and social opportunities may not meet the needs of more self-authored students (Branker, 2009). Even in the community college setting, where most or all students commute to campus and many have jobs, student veterans may nevertheless feel much more mature and adept at setting and meeting goals than the average non-veteran student (Stone, 2013). If some student veterans are arriving on campus with more highly developed ways of making meaning than most other college students, this may impact their grades and campus involvement, either favorably or adversely. If a significant minority of college students, such as self-authored veterans, is able to rely on their internal foundations to evaluate new information and make meaning of it according to Kegan’s (1994) fourth order of consciousness, then teaching methods and faculty understanding of student development may need to change to accommodate such students. One way this may be accomplished could be through greater incorporation of adult learning theories. Services offered by administrative and student affairs personnel, such as living arrangements, career counseling, and enrollment processes, may also need to be modified to better fit the needs and expectations, not only of student veterans, but of all students who are approaching or have achieved self-authorship.
Finally, an examination of self-authorship among student veterans may uncover clues about the ways military training and experience support or hinder progress toward self-authorship. The transition from military culture to the college environment can be difficult (Black et al., 2007; Danish & Antonides, 2009) and some student veterans encounter problems when they use the military framework they have lived within to respond to situations on campus or in their personal lives (Bonar & Domenici, 2011; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). However, other student veterans have demonstrated the ability to balance lingering military cultural values with the demands of new ways of living and relating to classmates, neighbors, and college learning experiences (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). One of the supporting characteristics of self-authorship development is confidence in one's own ability to act or make decisions based on internal foundations (Pizzolato, 2005). Many college students progress through cognitive stages of development but cannot truly become self-authored because they have not also developed to the same level in their interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2009; Kegan, 1994; Pizzolato, 2005). Student veterans, on the other hand, may not be as well-developed in the cognitive domain as traditional college students but may be more developed in the interpersonal and intrapersonal dimensions (Stone, 2013). If military training, which seeks to develop leadership traits such as self-confidence, and military experience, which provides the arena for the exercise of leadership behaviors, has helped service members develop in their intrapersonal and interpersonal domains, then student veterans may be well-positioned for developing self-authorship with the addition of the cognitive development most students experience in the college classroom.
We cannot know this, however, until student veterans describe what role, if any, their military service may have played in their journey toward self-authorship. We also need to discover how college-level learning may be assisting in that development. This study provided an opportunity for student veterans to reflect on their experiences and how they have developed internal foundations throughout adolescence, military basic training, active duty service, and college life. Their stories and insights contribute to our understanding of the development of self-authorship in a unique, sometimes marginalized, minority group on college campuses.

Sensitizing Concepts and Subjectivities

My own interest in the successful transition of student veterans comes from my roles as a military spouse, a family member of veterans who returned to school, and an adult educator. Even before I began to associate directly with the military community, I encountered stories of military service through my family. All four of my mother’s brothers and one of my father’s brothers were officers in either the Army or the Air Force. My mother’s oldest brother served a full-length career, retiring as a lieutenant colonel before returning to school to obtain a law degree. Her youngest brother, discharged from the Army with a disability acquired during service in Vietnam, returned to school for a master’s degree in business administration.

I have been part of the military community for 28 years. In the beginning, I was a member of a service sorority in college that sought to build bridges of understanding between the Air Force, particularly the Air Force Reserve Officer Training Program (AFROTC), and the campus community. It was during this period that I began to realize there is a significant lack of understanding about military life and service members
among the general public in the United States. I have also been a military spouse for 23 years, raising two daughters through multiple moves, including tours in three foreign countries and six U.S. states. My husband retired after serving 25 years as a family physician in the Air Force.

One of my core values is respect for members of the military community. I admire the commitment to duty that I see them express every day and their pursuit of excellence in even the smallest tasks they are assigned. As a teacher of adult learners, I also believe everyone should have access to quality education and that those with special challenges such as those encountered by military members should receive support to assist them in their educational pursuits. And as an educator from a liberal arts background, I am always pleased to see so many enlisted military members pursuing a college education, even though they have acquired skills and experience in high-demand trades.

I also realized, as I designed this study, that any or all of the participants might not have held the same high regard for military life as I do. They could have had different perspectives based on different, sometimes quite negative, experiences. It was possible that those stories were not as encouraging or helpful to other veterans as I had hoped they would be. In any case, I planned to record the stories for the sake of the experiences they related. Each one would have added depth and dimension to our understanding of the development of self-authorship in individuals engaged in extremely challenging, often dangerous occupations, regardless of the degree to which they did or did not agree with my own experiences.
I believed the veterans would speak frankly and comfortably with me because of our shared military ties. However, a few characteristics of mine could have delayed or even interfered with the establishment of rapport between me and the participants. First, my husband was an officer and my participants served as enlisted personnel. This put me in a position of power related to them which I was careful not to exploit. Although there is a rule in all branches of the military against fraternization between officers and enlisted, this rule really applies only to the military members themselves, not to family members. Nevertheless, I have found that many enlisted members behave more formally around me than they would if I were married to an enlisted person. Thus, I was sensitive to the potential power dynamic and took care to help the participants relax and begin to trust me. In a previous study I conducted with student veterans (Stone, 2013), I found it helpful to give only the most basic information to my participants about my status as a military spouse. If the participants questioned me about my husband's job, it was usually limited to curiosity about his branch of service and general occupational field. They accepted my non-specific answers without much further questioning. I used the same approach for the current study. The fact that this study involved service members who had not known or worked alongside my husband reduced the possibility that my participants and I could have had common acquaintances or shared duty assignments (i.e., lived at the same military base).

Another characteristic that made me more of an outsider was the fact that I am a spouse, not a veteran myself. There is no way I can imagine or identify with some of the most significant experiences of my participants. Also, my husband's combat experience was extremely limited. We went through deployments and separations, but I did not
worry daily that my husband could be wounded or killed. I sought to listen to the narratives my participants offered with empathy and respect but was careful not to suggest that I knew what they had been through or how they felt about those experiences.

Given the set of values and beliefs I have described here, I realized that I needed to be cautious in certain areas. First, since I believe that the military community is largely misunderstood by the general public, I was careful not to exploit this research to fulfill my own need to be understood. I was vigilant about my feelings and took care not to project them onto the testimony of my participants. I could not assume that my participants also feel misunderstood; they may, in fact, feel strong support and understanding from their extended families and communities. This deserves documentation even if it contradicts my own experience.

Also, I was careful not to presume that I knew what my participants’ experiences have been just because I am also part of the military community and have many friends who have experienced combat. My participants deserved my attention and active listening, not my presuppositions. In fact, if I had not guarded against this, I would have been guilty of perpetrating the same sort of misunderstanding I myself feel from the larger society.

Conceptual Framework

This study examined a developmental journey among a special population of students and the effect, if any, that that development had on the ways those students learn. Therefore, a single theoretical foundation was insufficient to support the investigation and my analysis of the findings. Instead, I utilized three different, yet related, theoretical frames as a new multi-faceted conceptual framework. Those frames
included the theory of self-evolution, the theory of epistemological reflection, and theories of adult learning.

Theory of self-evolution. The foundational developmental theory for self-authorship is Kegan’s (1994) theory of self-evolution. This theory employs a holistic structure, comprised of cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal domains. People make meaning of their lives with the tools they possess, which Kegan (1994) designates as orders of consciousness. Stress enters life, relationships, and decision-making when the tools available to a person do not match the task at hand. In other words, the task requires tools from an order of consciousness higher than the person has yet developed.

Kegan (1994) posited that there are five orders of consciousness in human psychological development, each more complex than the last. It is the area leading from the third order into the fourth that is the focus of this study. In the third order, older adolescents and adults can subordinate personal desires in favor of group needs, feel loyalty or devotion to ideals and community, and think abstractly. It is in the fourth order of consciousness that self-authorship emerges. At this stage of development, the individual possesses a mental structure that operates as “a complex or integrated system” (Kegan, 1994, p. 92). This level of making meaning is required in the modern world because we live in close contact with competing value systems and need to be able not only to understand our own values, but also our relationship to those values. In the modern world, a single traditional system, such as that employed by individuals in the third order of consciousness, cannot provide all the support the individual needs to interact with diverse world views. Instead, the individual must author meaning as well as construct the mental structure required to house that meaning.
The organizing principles for these orders share five important features. First, the principles describe how the individual constructs meaning in multiple domains: cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal. Second, they are principles defining how meaning is constructed, not what type of meaning is constructed. Third, "[t]he root or 'deep structure' of any principle of mental organization is the subject-object relationship" (Kegan, 1994, p. 32). Individuals progress to the next higher order by recognizing the self as separate from those objects which once were considered integral to the self. In other words, "We have object; we are subject" (Kegan, 1994, p. 32, emphasis in the original). Fourth, the different principles are related to each other in ways that are "transformative, qualitative, and incorporative. Each successive principle subsumes or encompasses the prior principle. That which was subject becomes object to the next principle" (Kegan, 1994, p. 33). The fifth and final feature of these orders of consciousness is that our perspective of what is subject and what is object can change over time.

Theory of epistemological reflection. In epistemological reflection, Baxter Magolda (1992, 1999) sets forth a four-stage constructive-developmental pedagogy based on Perry's (1968) scheme of intellectual development. However, as this theory developed over time she also observed how college students' epistemological understanding contributes to their development of self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 1999). Baxter Magolda (1999) described her theory as constructive-developmental because it has roots in the constructivist tradition but also relies heavily on student development theory to inform teaching practice. Epistemological reflection also allows for gender-related patterns in learners' reasoning, something that Perry's original scheme
lacks (Baxter Magolda, 1992). However, Baxter Magolda (1992) noted that these patterns, although gender-related, are not gender-limited and therefore apply to both men and women even though each pattern tends to be favored either by men or women.

The three principles Baxter Magolda (1999) offers to help students progress through these levels of epistemological reflection are: validating the student as a knower, situating learning in the student’s own experience, and learning as mutually constructing meaning. The goal of a constructive-developmental pedagogy such as epistemological reflection is to help the learner achieve self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 1999). Therefore, the underlying assumptions both educators and learners must have about the learning process are learner-centered and socially framed. In epistemological reflection, knowledge is regarded as complex and socially constructed; the self is central to that construction of knowledge; and expertise is shared among all involved in knowledge construction (Baxter Magolda, 2001).

Theories of adult learning. There is no single theory of adult learning which explains the experiences and learning strategies of adults (Merriam, 1993). There are, however, three that are relevant to this study: andragogy (Knowles, 1980, 1984; Knowles & Associates, 1984), self-directed learning (Knowles, 1975; Tough, 1978, 1979), and perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1991). I drew on these to inform my investigation and analysis of the ways my participants experience learning both in and out of the classroom.

Andragogy has sometimes been presented as a theory in opposition to pedagogy (Knowles, 1970) where the first is the “art and science of helping adults learn, in contrast to pedagogy as the art and science of teaching children” (Knowles, 1980, p. 43). The
differences between andragogy and pedagogy lie in the assumptions teachers and learners make about the educational process, the responsibilities of the involved parties, and the level of self-directedness expected of the learner (Knowles, 1980, 1984; Knowles & Associates, 1984). Self-directed learning occurs when an individual takes the initiative to embark on some program or project in order to improve a skill or gain new knowledge (Knowles, 1975; Tough, 1979). Finally, perspective transformation in adult learning involves meeting a “disorienting dilemma” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 168), which moves the learner through exploration of new perspectives, resulting in plans for action, the action itself, and reintegration of the various parts of his or her life based on the framework of the new perspective (Mezirow, 1991). The common assumptions underlying all three of theories are the social construction of knowledge and meaning, with the learner, rather than either the teacher or the content, as the focus of the learning experience.

**Joining the Frames into a Framework**

Development and learning are related, but not identical, concepts. In this study, I investigated both the psychological development of student veterans and the impact, if any, that development had on the ways student veterans experience learning in the college setting. Self-evolution theory is solidly developmental but nevertheless has implications for learning because of the cognitive dimension involved in the way individuals progress through the orders of consciousness. Theories of adult learning are less concerned with psychological development and tend to focus more on practical issues of communicating with adult learners (Elias & Merriam, 2005; Knowles, 1975, 1980, 1984; Knowles & Associates, 1984; Mezirow, 1991; Tough, 1979).

Epistemological reflection focuses on the cognitive dimension of development, but is also
solidly within the realm of developmental theory and allows for gendered differences in ways of knowing. All three are needed for this study because student veterans are adults according to the definition given above: their ways of experiencing learning may be best understood with and described by the language and concepts of andragogy or perspective transformation. However, as young adults, they are also still developing according to the theory of self-evolution. That theory may help explain the ways student veterans are beginning to construct their own beliefs and values, relying on those internal foundations to guide their decisions and relationships. Finally, because I am interested in examining how adults who have achieved self-authorship – or are close to achieving it – experience learning in the college environment, the theory of epistemological reflection helped focus both my data collection and analysis during this study. Figure A shows a model of this conceptual framework.

Figure A. Conceptual framework linking developmental and learning theories.
Although these three theoretical frames focus on different aspects of learning or development, they nevertheless share an underlying epistemology of constructivism. In Figure A, the hexagon representing adult learning theories does not lie completely within the constructivism circle because not all theories of adult learning are founded on constructivism; some are based on philosophical foundations such as behaviorism (Elias & Merriam, 2005). However, the theories of andragogy, self-directed learning, and perspective transformation, which are relevant to this study, do embrace constructivist assumptions. Self-evolution and epistemological reflection also are both grounded in constructivism. Therefore all three theoretical strands needed for this framework (i.e., self-evolution, epistemological reflection, and adult learning theories) accept the assumption that both knowledge and meaning are constructed by learners (Baxter Magolda, 1992, 1999; Kegan, 1994; Knowles, 1975, 1980; Mezirow, 1991).

In Figure A, the double lines joining the three hexagons represent the similarities between those two theoretical frames. These connections serve as metaphorical bridges that instructors may use to travel between the three frames as needed, depending on learner stage of development, classroom context, and teaching and learning preferences. At the same time, the figure is a way of describing the complexity of each learner in the college classroom as it illustrates the interrelation of the three frames and the freedom for learners also to move between them. Some of the common connections are described below, but many more may be discovered as this framework is implemented and practiced in contexts beyond this current study.

The theory of self-evolution and adult learning theories have in common the recognition of growth and development in the learner across the lifespan (Kegan, 1994;
Knowles, 1984; Mezirow, 1991). In particular, self-evolution and perspective transformation describe the ways individuals reorganize the frameworks they use to make decisions and take action. Adult learning theories share ground with epistemological reflection because both value the learner as a knower and therefore build on the past experiences of learners in the construction of new knowledge; these theories also have in common the principles of shared authority for learning, reflection as integral to learning, and a focus on learning rather than teaching (Baxter Magolda, 1999; Knowles, 1980, 1984; Mezirow, 1991). Finally, epistemological reflection shares fundamental principles with the theory of self-evolution (Kegan, 1994) because it describes ways of knowing among learners progressing toward self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 1999).

The bridges between theories, as described above and shown in Figure A, are supported by certain principles all three have in common. For example, all three require the condition of dissatisfaction (Kegan, 1994), dissonance (Baxter Magolda, 1999, 2001, 2009), or disorientation (Mezirow, 1991) to begin growth or learning. In each theoretical arena, transitions occur when individuals are appropriately challenged and supported (Kegan, 1994; Baxter Magolda, 1999; Knowles, 1980, 1984; Mezirow, 1991; Sanford, 1966). All three also assume that growth occurs within a social context, including interior changes such as development of beliefs and values, perspective transformation, and emergence of reasoning patterns (Baxter Magolda, 1999; Kegan, 1994; Mezirow, 1991). These three theoretical frames, taken together, provided my investigation with a solid structure based on tested theory; they also accommodated the breadth of experience and special characteristics of the student veterans who participated in this study. In this
way, my conceptual framework permitted flexibility in my data generation and analysis and gave me three different vocabularies to help synthesize my findings.

**Research Questions**

It was my investigation of persistence among student veterans with disabilities (Stone, 2013) that led to this current study. That earlier study showed high levels of self-authorship behavior and reasoning (Pizzolato, 2007) among my participants, including a highly-developed sense of personal responsibility, self-motivation, self-reliance, and self-discipline. Four of the six participants in that study were between the ages of 25 and 27; three of those had started college around the age of 23. I did not conduct a formal assessment of self-authorship at that time because the focus of that study was college persistence. However, the appearance of self-authorship was unexpected and spurred my desire for further investigation. If student veterans under the age of 25 are entering college with levels of self-authorship that are higher than most college graduates, that could be meaningful – and helpful – to both instructors and student affairs professionals. This information could also help the student veterans themselves understand better why they may feel different from other college students (Branker, 2009). Thus, I examined the phenomenon of self-authorship among student veterans to determine more precisely how these students developed their self-authored voices and in what context.

The development of self-authorship among student veterans is a double paradox: not only is there some evidence that veterans may achieve self-authorship at an early age, but they may achieve it while living and working in a highly-structured, externally-supported environment.

This situation raises two primary and two secondary research questions:
1. First, how have service members learned to rely on internal foundations (i.e., progressing toward self-authorship) while operating within a rigid military structure?
   a. What experiences may have fostered development of their internal foundations?
   b. How, if at all, has military education and training helped or hindered them on this journey?

2. Second, what impact, if any, does self-authorship have on the way student veterans experience learning in the community college environment?

In order to examine the phenomenon of self-authorship, I employed a grounded theory research approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) within an interpretivist paradigm (Glesne, 2011; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). This required me to interpret the descriptions student veterans offered about their experiences and the meaning they seemed to be making about those experiences.

**Conclusion**

More veterans are enrolling in college due to both the drawdown in operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, as well as the availability of funds for education through the Post 9/11 GI Bill (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Shackelford, 2009). The transition from military culture to civilian life – especially life within the college environment – can be difficult for veterans (Black et al., 2007; Bonar & Domenici, 2011; Danish & Antonides, 2009) and postsecondary institutions are attempting to actively address the needs of this unique population (Branker, 2009; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; DiRamio & Spires, 2009; Shackelford, 2009). One area of growing interest is veteran-specific curricula (DiRamio...
& Jarvis, 2011). Some discussion has even occurred around the subject of assisting student veterans in their journey toward self-authorship through use of the principles of epistemological reflection (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). However, no study of how self-authorship develops in military service members has yet been conducted.

With this study, I begin to fill that gap by gathering the stories of student veterans who have been identified as closely approaching or within the stage of self-authorship. I asked them to describe experiences they feel have contributed to the development of their internal foundations, and whether those experiences occurred before they entered the military, sometime during their military service, or even during their transition to college. Finally, I examined with them how they experience learning in the college classroom and what impact, if any, their sense of self-authorship has had on that experience.
Chapter 2: Relevant Literature

Student veterans share certain experiences with one another that are particular to military culture. They are often older than traditional college students, with the perspectives and responsibilities common to adult learners. Also, they may be developmentally more mature, specifically in the area of self-authorship. Therefore, I reviewed three separate strands of literature, each relating to one of these three areas, indicating whenever possible where the strands intersect or share common principles.

Psychological Development

I address three strands of developmental theory in this section. The stage of self-authorship, which is the focus of this study, is part of Kegan’s (1994) theory of self-evolution. Although Kegan’s theory of self-evolution includes some application to cognition and knowledge acquisition, he focused more on overall development of the individual rather than how individuals learn. However, Baxter Magolda (2001, 2009) and others (e.g., Baxter Magolda & King, 2007, 2012; Pizzolato, 2003, 2004) have developed the theory to apply particularly to college students and how they experience learning. Baxter Magolda (1992) also posited a developmental theory of learning known as epistemological reflection prior to her research in self-authorship; in later writings, Baxter Magolda (1999) delineated connections between epistemological reflection and the stage of self-authorship. In this section, I describe both the theory of self-evolution
and the theory of epistemological reflection as foundations for a detailed exposition of
the model of self-authorship.

**Self-evolution.** Kegan’s (1994) theory of self-evolution describes the psychological
development of an individual in terms of how the individual organizes his or her thinking.
These organizational patterns, or orders of consciousness, are developmental stages that
emerge in succession; the first three also emerge at fairly predictable ages (Kegan, 1994). An
important element of the theory is its holistic nature, encompassing intrapersonal,
interpersonal, and cognitive domains. People make meaning of their lives with the tools they
possess, which, according to Kegan (1994), are these orders of consciousness. Stress enters
life, relationships, and decision-making when the tools available to a person do not match the
task at hand. In other words, the task requires tools from an order of consciousness higher than
the person has yet developed. Kegan (1994) stated that his work “examines the relationship
between the principles we may possess and the complexity of mind that contemporary culture
unrecognizedly asks us to possess through its many claims and expectations – the mental
demands of modern life” (p. 34).

Kegan (1994) posited that there are five orders of consciousness in human
psychological development, each more complex than the last and each organized
according to a distinct principle. The first order appears in young children and is
organized by the principle of independent elements. Children at this age, with the tools
available to them within this order of consciousness, cannot mentally organize the sights,
sounds, feelings, and personal encounters into any pattern with permanence or logic. The
result is behavior characterized by impulsiveness and egocentricity.
In the second order of consciousness, usually formed between ages seven and 10, the organizing principle is that of durable categories. Children begin to see the difference between momentary wishes and enduring needs and desires. They realize that others are separate from them and have a unique and distinct point of view. Thinking becomes more concrete and logical.

The third order of consciousness, organized by the principle of cross-categorical knowing, is generally expected of adults. Adolescents begin to take on this order of consciousness, but often not as quickly or smoothly as society — including parents — would like. Therein lies the difficulty of growing up. Society demands behavior and ways of thinking that are often beyond the capacity of the adolescent. The hallmarks of cross-categorical knowing include concentrating, not on the durable categories themselves, but on the interaction between the durable categories, remembering that people as well as things are considered to be categories. So, a person with the tools available in the third order of consciousness can subordinate personal desires in favor of group needs, feel loyalty or devotion to ideals and community, and think abstractly.

Kegan (1994) suggested that the third order is all that is necessary for living in what he calls the Traditional Community. This community is homogenous and secluded. It does not require members to create internal supports for making meaning because little happens in this community which has not already been encountered; rules for harmonious living have already been created, tested, and accepted by community members. Individuals in the Traditional Community make meaning based on these established rules.
The fourth order of consciousness is organized by the principle of self-authorship. At this stage of development, the individual possesses a mental structure "which gathers cross-categorical constructions into a complex or integrated system" (Kegan, 1994, p. 92). This level of making meaning is required in the modern world because we live in close contact with competing value systems and need to be able not only to understand our own values, but also to understand our relationship to those values. Kegan (1994) writes:

the mental burden of modern life may be nothing less than the extraordinary cultural demand that each person, in adulthood, create internally an order of consciousness comparable to that which ordinarily would only be found at the level of a community's collective intelligence. (p. 134)

In the modern world, a single traditional system cannot provide all the support the individual needs to interact with diverse world views. Instead, the individual must author meaning as well as construct the mental structure required to house that meaning.

The fifth order of consciousness "moves form or system from subject to object, and brings into being a new 'trans-system' or 'cross-form' way of organizing reality" (Kegan, 1994, p. 312). The organizing principle of this level of development is trans-systemic or cross-theoretical knowing. In the fifth order, the individual recognizes self and others, not as complete authors of systems of meaning, but as parts in relationship to one another, whose individual wholeness depends on recognizing and embracing opposing value systems. This order of consciousness rejects the idea that any one part can or should take priority over any other part. Kegan (1994) posited this order of
consciousness is instrumental to meeting the demands of post-modern life; however, he admits that few are able to achieve it.

When considering ways to help an individual advance to the next developmental order, Kegan (1994) suggested that the two necessary ingredients are challenge and support (Sanford, 1966). He writes, "[P]eople grow best where they continuously experience an ingenious blend of support and challenge; the rest is commentary" (Kegan, 1994, p. 42). When individuals face challenge without support, they experience discouragement and those who receive support without sufficient challenge become bored; the result of either imbalance is withdrawal from the developmental process (Sanford, 1966). Challenge balanced by support creates a bridge from one developmental level to the next.

Epistemological reflection. With epistemological reflection, Baxter Magolda (1992, 1999) sets forth a constructive-developmental pedagogy based on Perry's (1968) scheme of intellectual development. Baxter Magolda (1999) described her theory as constructive-developmental because it has roots in the constructivist tradition, but also relies heavily on student development theory to inform teaching practice. She offered:

Kenneth Stunkel (1998) wrote that "the best of all worlds for interactive pedagogy is to eliminate the professor altogether, to let students "take control of their own learning." ... This is not what I mean by constructive-developmental pedagogy. ... [C]onstructive-developmental pedagogy as I describe it in this book is not a know-nothing process. It requires that teachers model the process of constructing knowledge in their disciplines, teach that process to students, and give students
opportunities to practice and become proficient at it.” (Baxter Magolda, 1999, pp. 8-9)

Epistemological reflection consists of four stages, or ways of knowing, and offers three principles for creating a transitional culture, or bridge of challenge and support (Kegan, 1994; Sanford, 1966), to assist learners in their development and growth toward the next level of consciousness (Baxter Magolda, 1999). Absolute knowing is the first level in this developmental model. Learners who are absolute knowers see knowledge in terms of right and wrong, roughly corresponding to Perry's (1968) dualism; absolute knowers prefer to receive knowledge from an authority figure, such as a college professor or other expert. However, unlike Perry, Baxter Magolda (1992, 1999) separates each developmental level into two patterns of reasoning. In absolute knowing, the learner may reason with either a receiving pattern or a mastery pattern. The patterns tend to show gendered differentiation, with more women using the receiving pattern and more men using the mastery pattern. However, the patterns may be used by either men or women. The common characteristic of the patterns is that both rely heavily on external authority for making meaning of new knowledge.

The next level in epistemological reflection is transitional knowing (Baxter Magolda, 1992, 1999). At this level, learners realize that knowledge in at least some arenas is fluid, without absolute certainty. They begin to move past receiving knowledge toward understanding it. However, they continue to see their evaluation of what they are learning as necessary only for that understanding and not for the creation of knowledge. The two patterns of reasoning are interpersonal and impersonal, with more women tending to use the interpersonal pattern and more men tending to use the impersonal
Independent knowing is the third level of epistemological reflection and is characterized by "a core assumption of uncertainty" (Baxter Magolda, 1999, p. 47). The uncertainty becomes apparent to students when they realize that differences of opinion among experts may represent the existence of multiple, equally valid approaches to reality. This also presents the possibility that the student's opinion is valuable and may be as valid as that of any expert. The two patterns of reasoning in independent knowing are interindividual and individual. As with the earlier levels, the more connected and relational pattern, the interindividual, is used by more women and the individual pattern by more men (Baxter Magolda, 1992, 1999), although both of these patterns may be employed by either men or women. Independent knowers are approaching the threshold of self-authorship.

The fourth and final level of epistemological reflection is contextual knowing (Baxter Magolda, 1992, 1999). At this level, "contextual knowers looked at all aspects of a situation or issue, sought out expert advice in that particular context, and integrated their own and others' views in deciding what to think" (Baxter Magolda, 1999, p. 50). The patterns of reasoning merge together at this level, with learners making use of both relational and impersonal approaches to evaluating and constructing knowledge. Very few college students reach this level before graduation, just as very few reach self-authorship until confronted by the demands of work, committed relationships, children, and other challenges of modern life (Baxter Magolda, 1999, 2001, 2009).

**Self-authorship.** Self-authorship, or the fourth order of consciousness in Kegan's (1994) theory of self-evolution, has been described as the state of mind where an
individual relies on internal rather than on external foundations to guide choices, beliefs, and relationships (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2009; Kegan, 1994). Because self-authorship is a developmental theory, however, Baxter Magolda (2001, 2009) uses the metaphor of a journey to explain how an individual changes from one who relies on external foundations to one who relies fully on internal foundations. She offers three phases of the journey, with several substations within each (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2009). The first is Following Formulas, followed by the Crossroads where some type of dissatisfaction or dissonance occurs (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2009). Within the Crossroads, individuals begin listening to the internal voice, then cultivating the internal voice, and finally move into the phase of Self-Authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2009). Early in the phase of self-authorship, the individual begins trusting the internal voice, then builds an internal foundation, and finally secures internal commitments (Baxter Magolda, 2009).

Two longitudinal studies serve as foundations for the literature in self-authorship. The first was conducted by Baxter Magolda beginning with 101 participants in their freshman year of college and following them through college, their 20s and 30s, and ending with 30 participants after 20 years of annual interviews (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2009). The second was a qualitative, longitudinal investigation of self-authorship within the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education (WNS), conducted between 2006 and 2010, which examined the ways students at institutions of higher education developed in seven liberal arts outcome areas (Baxter Magolda & King, 2007, 2012; Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education, n.d.). The researchers in the Wabash study noted that college contributes to students’ journeys toward self-authorship by
challenging their understandings about the nature of knowledge and academic authority (Baxter Magolda & King, 2007). Instructors who are helping students develop in the cognitive sphere encourage “learners to develop their own purposes and meaning” (Baxter Magolda & King, 2007, p. 493). This creates tension between the ways students understand knowledge and the ways they are being asked to grow in that understanding, thus creating a crossroads experience for them (Baxter Magolda & King, 2007). This tension or “adversity, if accompanied by support, can promote the journey toward self-authorship” (Baxter Magolda & King, p. 493).

The participants in Baxter Magolda’s (2001, 2009) study also demonstrated through both behaviors and reflections that their need to choose their own vision emerged from two sources. One was dissatisfaction with the results of following the external formulas. . . . Second, employment, educational, and personal contexts in which knowledge was conveyed as complex and socially constructed . . . called relying on external formulas into question. (Baxter Magolda, 2001, pp. 37-38).

As participants became the authors of their lives, self-reflection and gaining perspective on self were important in the intrapersonal dimension. Standing up for oneself and renegotiating relationships were important aspects of development in the interpersonal dimension. Finally, deciding what to believe, living out those beliefs, and recognizing the inherent uncertainty in establishing beliefs were important aspects of development in the cognitive dimension (Baxter Magolda, 2009).

A significant limitation of the two studies cited above was the lack of diversity among participants in the areas of race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status (SES).
Pizzolato and others (Pizzolato, 2003, 2004; Pizzolato, Hicklen, Brown, & Chaudhari, 2009) have examined the development of self-authorship among high-risk groups of college students. The term “high-risk” is preferred to the term “at risk” because it indicates that risk of attrition (i.e., institutional departure) exists as a continuum and college students enter postsecondary education at various locations along that line; in other words, no student is without some risk of attrition (Pizzolato 2003, 2004; Pizzolato et al., 2009). Risk factors may include first-generation status, minority status, low SES, high school of low academic quality, high school GPA below 2.0, and SAT score more than two standard deviations below the mean for the university the student is attending (Pizzolato et al., 2009).

Pizzolato (2003) uses the term “provocative situations” (p. 798) to describe the catalyst or motivation that spurs and individual toward self-authorship. Her definition of self-authorship is:

a relatively enduring way of understanding and orienting oneself to provocative situations in a way that (a) recognizes the contextual nature of knowledge and (b) balances this understanding with the development of one’s own internally defined goals and sense of self. (Pizzolato, 2003, p. 798)

Her first study (Pizzolato, 2003) involved college students at high risk of leaving or failing academically. She found that they had encountered provocative situations before reaching college; in some cases, it was the process of applying to and entering college that served as the provocative experience (Pizzolato, 2003). Those who had received substantial assistance in enrolling and registering for classes – most notably the student athletes – had more difficulty adjusting to the demands of college whereas those who had
applied, enrolled, and registered with less outside assistance tended to fare better and
adjust more quickly (Pizzolato, 2003). The students also were mostly from racial and
ethnic minority groups and therefore felt marginalized from the dominant student culture
(Pizzolato, 2003).

Another study examined the coping strategies of high-risk students who also
demonstrated high levels of self-authorship (Pizzolato, 2004). When these self-authoring
students faced discrimination and marginalization on campus – sometimes even from
faculty members and academic advisors – they moved away from self-authorship (i.e.,
they regressed on the developmental continuum) as they employed various coping
strategies (Pizzolato, 2004). The three main strategies employed by study participants
included avoidance, self-regulatory coping, and supported coping (Pizzolato, 2004).
Those who practiced avoidance initially experienced positive feelings about themselves
and were therefore able to overcome the immediate occurrence of discrimination;
however, they were unable to adapt to the larger environment over time (Pizzolato,
2004). Self-regulatory coping, where students were able to reassure themselves of their
435), helped students in the particular class or social arena; however, it also isolated
them. Supported coping proved to have the most lasting positive effects in that students
not only returned to their self-authoring mind after the initial challenge, but also
progressed in their self-authorship journey over time (Pizzolato, 2004). Students who
practiced supported coping “sought clarity through conversation, and . . . constructed and
enacted plans for coping with challenge” (Pizzolato, 2004, p. 436). These students made
use of partnerships with peers and advisors to navigate through the challenge of discrimination or marginalization.

In a study that examined the relationship between development and learning in college students (Pizzolato et al., 2009), the authors posited that students' epistemological orientations have a direct impact on their expectations about what should happen in the college classroom. If they see knowledge as absolute and received (Baxter Magolda, 1992; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986), they will tend to expect the instructor to be an expert not to be questioned; however, if they see knowledge as fluid and mutually constructed, they will expect to be included in the construction of that knowledge rather than simply lectured to (Pizzolato et al., 2009). Students at high risk of attrition typically arrive at college with more complex epistemic development than their low-risk peers (Pizzolato et al., 2009). Nevertheless they underperform in academics when compared to the low-risk students (Pizzolato et al., 2009). In addition to coping strategies, one variable that may explain this is the pattern of attribution for success and failure that the student employs in relation to his or her academic work (Pizzolato et al., 2009). Students may attribute academic success or failure to either internal factors, such as ability or effort, or external factors, such as luck or contributions of others. Students who attribute success to factors under their control, such as effort in studying, rather than to factors beyond their control, such as personal ability or luck, tend to experience greater academic success (Pizzolato et al., 2009). Findings from this study showed that the correlation between epistemic development and belief that factors under the student’s control contribute to academic success was positive and significant, but small (Pizzolato et al., 2009). This suggests that epistemic development may not be “the sole route
toward such learning beliefs. Rather, epistemic development seems more strongly connected to a decrease in believing that others and/or luck have significant control over their academic performance” (Pizzolato et al., 2009, p. 485). Further, “the findings of this study suggest that, despite having complex ways of making meaning, achievement does not necessarily follow” (Pizzolato et al., 2009, p. 487). Students with deficits in prior knowledge or academic preparation will still need additional academic support even though they may organize their thinking in more complex ways than students at lower risk for attrition (Pizzolato et al., 2009).

Profiles of Veterans in Society, Training, and Higher Education

Veterans on campus cannot be understood apart from their military service experiences (Black et al., 2007), which, in turn, cannot be divorced from the larger U.S. society and the expectations of citizens regarding service members and what remuneration their government owes them (McGrevey & Kehrer, 2009). For this reason, the following discussion of relevant literature includes descriptions and definitions of military benefits focusing specifically on the GI Bill from its inception to the present day. I also describe the experiences common to military basic training, or boot camp, and the ways it affects individuals' identity development. Additionally, I explain the major characteristics of military culture in order to highlight the stark differences between it and the typical campus environment and culture. Finally, I discuss the challenges student veterans often encounter once they arrive at college and the various ways institutions of higher education are responding to those challenges.

Veteran educational benefits. Beginning during the British colonial period in North America, American soldiers received compensation upon conclusion of their
service in the form of pensions and disability benefits (McGrevey & Kehrer, 2009). After World War I, the enactment of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1918 provided vocational training and education to veterans with disabilities. This legislation was the beginning of educational assistance for veterans (Madaus et al., 2009) and it set forth the societal expectation of educating service members, an expectation which facilitated the passage of the Serviceman’s Readjustment Act of 1944, also known as the GI Bill (Kim & Rury, 2007; Olson, 1973).

Historically, the impact of the GI Bill on higher education has been manifested by markedly increased enrollments following periods of armed conflict (Madaus et al., 2009). For example, “... in 1947 more than one million veterans attended institutions of higher learning, some 48 percent of a total collegiate enrollment of nearly 2.4 million” (Kim & Rury, 2007, pp. 305-306). In the 1940s, most people from lower income backgrounds did not think college was a possibility for them until the passage of the GI Bill (Mettler, 2005). Public officials also doubted that many veterans would take advantage of the educational benefits: “Ultimately, more than twice as many veterans used the higher education provisions than the most daring predictions officials had forecast, and more than twenty times as many attended vocational training schools than anticipated” (Mettler, 2005, p. 42).

Olson (1973) also noted the surprise government officials expressed at the response of veterans. The bureaucrats expected veterans to appreciate, and therefore access, employment benefits in higher numbers (Olson, 1973). Originally, the return of veterans from World War II combat zones was expected to cause high unemployment, an economic downturn, and, quite possibly, civil unrest (Olson, 1973). The GI Bill had been
justified by lawmakers as a way for society to absorb returning veterans in a controlled manner (Olson, 1973). However, far from creating economic havoc and civil unrest, veterans contributed both to society at large and to higher education in particular (Kim & Rury, 2007; McGrevey & Kehrer, 2009; Mettler, 2005; Olson, 1973; Rose, 1994).

In fact, a majority of veterans who used the educational benefits offered by the GI Bill credit passage of that legislation as a turning point in their lives with regard to elevating their social status and career opportunities (Mettler, 2005). Mettler (2005) related the stories of two such veterans:

Luke LaPorta was certain that he would not have attended college had the G.I. Bill not existed, "for a lot of reasons: I didn't think I had the brainpower, I didn't have the money." He explained that military service itself had made him acquire a sense of "self-worth," which made him more open to the possibility of advanced education once it arose. James Murray, similarly, had served in the Air Force with college-educated men and had begun for the first time to imagine pursuing more education himself. . . . "The G.I. Bill opened the door. It was there, 'take advantage of it,' as my wife said." (pp. 46-47)

Other surprising characteristics of the World War II student veterans included the quality of their academic work, their maturity level, and the fact that they preferred to enroll in Ivy League institutions rather than in community colleges or vocational training (Olson, 1973). Because most colleges and universities were unprepared for the huge influx of student veterans, life on campus in the years immediately following World War II was marked by crowded classrooms, makeshift offices and dormitories, and long lines
for registration and other campus services (Olson, 1973). Student veterans were undeterred, however, seeming to realize that colleges were doing all they could and that there just was no alternative. No one had expected the overwhelming veteran response to the G.I. Bill, and even if he had there was neither time, nor labor, nor building materials available to construct new buildings. Nor were there enough professors. Too, military experience had helped condition the veterans to tolerate bigness, standing in lines, and improvisation. (Olson, 1973, p. 609)

Institutions of higher education adjusted as quickly as possible, and with whatever resources were available, to help with veteran needs, such as refresher courses; however, once the veterans graduated, these programs disappeared and the universities returned to their pre-war structures and administrative habits (Olson, 1973). But some aspects of World War II veteran enrollment did impact higher education for many years, even after the veterans themselves had graduated. For example, veterans who graduated from college were more likely to send their children to college (Kim & Rury, 2007). Getting a college education became a common expectation among those in the middle class, where it had previously been considered a luxury to be accessed by only the elite (Mettler, 2005). This was significant at this particular point in history because the children of World War II veterans were part of the baby boom generation – those born between 1946 and 1964 – and they comprised the next large surge of college students (Kim & Rury, 2007; Olson, 1973). In just four decades, there was “an unprecedented expansion of postsecondary education in the United States. In absolute terms, enrollments grew from less than 1.5 million in 1940 to more than 11 million in 1980, a rate of increase that
approached 800 percent" (Kim & Rury, 2007, p. 304). Also, the veteran presence on campus had helped make common the characteristics we now call “nontraditional,” such as being married, working full- or part-time, and living off-campus (Olson, 1973).

In spite of the phenomenon of veteran enrollment after World War II, it wasn’t until after the Vietnam conflict that combat veterans were seen as a unique population by college faculty and administrators (DiRamio et al., 2008). Unfortunately, the years many Vietnam veterans were coming to college campuses were the same years of anti-war protests and civil rights demonstrations. These events distracted college officials from the needs of combat veterans, and little support was provided to Vietnam veterans through campus services (DiRamio et al., 2008). Now, with large numbers of veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan and enrolling in higher education, student affairs professionals, faculty members, and administrators are realizing these student veterans need help reintegrating into civilian life and especially transitioning to the college environment (DiRamio et al., 2008).

Government educational programs continue to play an important role in the choices student veterans make with regard to higher education (Radford, 2009). There are two versions of the GI Bill in force concurrently: the Veterans’ Educational Assistance Act of 1984 (Montgomery GI Bill) and the Post-9/11 Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008 (the New GI Bill) (Radford, 2009). Both the Montgomery GI Bill and Post 9/11 GI Bill provide 36 months of postsecondary educational assistance (McGrevey & Kehrer, 2009). However, the Post 9/11 GI Bill greatly increases the value of educational benefits compared to the Montgomery GI Bill, streamlines the process of tuition disbursement, and provides a stipend for books and housing to the student...
Additionally, the Yellow Ribbon Program supplements any shortfall between the GI Bill and tuition costs (Radford, 2009). In the 2007-08 academic year, approximately 43% of military undergraduates chose to attend public two-year colleges and just over 20% chose public four-year colleges or universities; only 12% chose to attend private for-profit institutions (Radford, 2008). Military students were most likely to pursue either an associate’s degree (47%) or a bachelor’s degree (42%) (Radford, 2008).

As in the past, maturity and wider perspectives separate student veterans from both traditional and non-traditional civilian students (DiRamio et al., 2008; McGrevey & Kehrer, 2009). However, unlike their World War II predecessors, today’s student veterans are more likely to come from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds (Radford, 2009). There is also a higher percentage of females in the student veteran population than in the overall veteran population (Radford, 2009). Even so, the percentage of female veterans enrolled in college is still smaller than the percentage of nonmilitary female students: 24% of military undergraduates are female compared to more than half of the traditional student population and almost two-thirds of nontraditional nonmilitary students (Radford, 2009).

**Experiences of active military service.** The unique experiences of student veterans extend beyond the possibility of exposure to combat or war trauma. These are certainly important, and exposure to combat has been shown to have significant and lasting effects on military service members both in their readjustment to civilian life and in their academic pursuits (Barry et al., 2012). However, basic training and the day-to-day military lifestyle “can be thought of as a one-way door to a different way of being in
the world. Once you go in, you can never go back to the way you were before” (Black et al., 2007, p. 5). Military training and culture effect such deep-seated psychological change in military service members that these individuals cease to think of themselves as individuals and instead see themselves as part of a unit, without which they have a diminished sense of identity (Black et al., 2007; Herbert, 1998; Volkin, 2007).

**Military basic training.** The original purpose of basic training was to teach basic combat survival skills (Volkin, 2007). The modern basic training experience tests the physical and mental capacities of recruits in order to form them into warriors (Black et al., 2007; Volkin, 2007). Regulation of behavior in basic training is done for the purpose of preparing recruits to face life-threatening circumstances (Volkin, 2007). As one who has lived through the experience of basic training, Volkin (2007) offers following advice to new recruits:

> For the first time in your life you will need to ask permission to go to the bathroom, to talk, to eat, etc. Your personality, as you know it, will be lost and you will be expected to think and act like everyone else. The logical question everyone asks is why does the military do this? This is not done to scare you. Rather, it is intended to prepare you. I cannot stress enough the importance of mental toughness. So swallow your pride and ego and pay close attention to the orders you receive. (p. 2)

But besides preparation for combat, basic training “is also intended to vest each participant with a clear notion of what it means to be a soldier” (Herbert, 1998, emphasis in the original). In other words, basic training is an induction – and indoctrination – to military culture.
Military culture. Although the various branches of the military differ from one another in mission, history, and traditions, there nevertheless exist some underlying cultural values common to all five branches (i.e., Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard). The following values and their manifesting characteristics provide a framework for understanding what is meant in this study by the term, “military culture.”

Primacy of the mission. In the military services, the reason for being is to carry out the mission (Black et al., 2007; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). In the largest sense, this mission is to “support and defend the Constitution of the United States from all enemies, foreign and domestic” (U.S. DoD, 2013). In the more immediate sense, the mission may be combat operations, maintenance of boundaries or treaties, or simply sustaining the daily operations of a base, post, or ship. Evidence of the importance of the mission appears in the core values of the Army, Navy, and Air Force such as “Service before Self” (U.S. Air Force, 2013), “Honor, Courage, and Commitment” (U.S. Navy, 2013) and “Selfless Service” (U.S. Army, 2013). A result of this focus on the mission is unit cohesion (Black et al., 2007; Summerlot, et al., 2009).

Uniformity. Aside from the obvious expression through the wearing of the military uniform, this cultural value is expressed by blending in with other service members (Black et al., 2007). Especially in basic training, but also throughout one’s military career, service members learn to avoid negative attention at all costs (Volkin, 2007).

Regulation. Beginning in basic training, service members become accustomed “to being told what to do” (DiRamio et al., 2008, p. 93). Everything from dress to writing to speaking to schedule is regulated (Black et al., 2007; Volkin, 2007). Some
behaviors are regulated by the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) (Volkin, 2007) and others by military tradition.

Discipline. Discipline is closely related to regulation; however, discipline is the internal character trait needed to meet the demands of external regulations (Volkin, 2007). Discipline includes traits of punctuality, perseverance, and motivation (Stone, 2013) and can be relied on in unfamiliar situations when no familiar regulation applies to govern behavior or decision-making.

Masculinity. Historically, becoming a soldier was considered in many cultures to be a path to true manhood (Herbert, 1998). Even with the integration of women into the U.S. military, the values and images of the military services “are characteristically male” (Herbert, 1998, p. 9). Strength, aggressiveness, and intimidation are valued attributes, and necessary for carrying out the mission (Danish & Antonides, 2009; Herbert, 1998). In some cases, so are the actions of killing, destruction, and violence (Stone, 2013; Volkin, 2007). These are all traits our society tends to associate with masculinity.

Hierarchy. In military culture, rank is exceedingly important (Black et al., 2007). This focus on rank is manifested in the chain of command (Volkin, 2007) and creates a climate focused on achievement and recognition in the form of promotions, awards, and medals (Black et al., 2007). Obedience to authority is paramount (Black et al., 2007; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011), and failure to obey is punished according to the UCMJ (Volkin, 2007).

Nobility. From ancient times, through the Middle Ages, and even into the middle of the 20th century, officers were drawn from the nobility or upper classes and were expected to embody noble ideals. However, in a democratic society with an all-volunteer
military force, the expectation for altruistic motives and behavior now extends throughout the ranks of the U.S. military services. Every service member is expected to value and, to the greatest degree possible, emulate the virtues of honor, loyalty, integrity, courtesy, leadership, duty, respect, and personal courage (Black et al., 2007; Herbert, 1998; U.S. Air Force, 2013; U.S. Army, 2013; U.S. Navy, 2013; Volkin, 2007). Volkin (2007) based this on the democratic ideal: “By joining the U.S. military, you have answered the highest call of citizenship” (p. 124).

**Transition from military service to higher education.** When advising new recruits about basic training and military life, Volkin (2007) offered, “You have joined the best military in the world. Your transition from civilian to soldier will be taught in a disciplined and rigorous manner” (p. 3). If the transition into the military is disciplined and rigorous, it stands to reason that the transition from the military to civilian life ought to be at least as intentional. Unfortunately, this is not the case: “Transition from the military into civilian life is inevitable for the majority of military members; successful transition is not” (Black et al., 2007, p. 4). Transition to college is one of the most difficult things veterans are trying to do as they return to civilian life (DiRamio et al., 2008). This transition amounts to a cross-cultural migration and college counselors, faculty members, and student affairs professionals should be sensitive to these cultural differences just as they are to differences among other minority groups (Black et al., 2007).

**Student veteran characteristics.** Student veterans have developed certain behaviors and attitudes that have helped them both survive and excel in the military environment (Black et al., 2007). However, when veterans reach college campuses, those
same traits may actually undermine their successful transition (Bonar & Domenici, 2011). For example, a Marine who became a residence hall assistant found that his attempts to instill discipline and responsibility into the younger students in his hall not only failed, but caused the students to feel unsafe around him (Bonar & Domenici, 2011). Compared to military culture, campus culture is loosely structured, relaxed, and individualistic (Black et al., 2007; DiRamio et al., 2008; Summerlot et al., 2009). Danish and Antonides (2009) observed that upon return, surprisingly, some service members express a preference for returning to the combat environment. This sentiment may seem counterintuitive to many, and it illustrates how difficult it might be for those outside the military culture to appreciate their perspective. Perhaps this preference stems from the desire to be with those who they have become so close with and who understand them the best. (p. 1080)

When trying to connect with peers, student veterans find that maturity level, more than biological age, proves challenging (DiRamio et al., 2008). The veterans feel they have more perspective and have exercised a high degree of responsibility and leadership in the military; these qualities set them apart from other college students (DiRamio et al., 2008). Given these distinctive traits, it is no wonder that student veterans often prefer to socialize with other veterans, at least when they first arrive on campus (Branker, 2009; Burnett & Segoria, 2009; Shackelford, 2009; Summerlot et al., 2009).

**Women veterans.** Women experience military life in unique ways because of the societal debate regarding their status (or lack of status) as combatants (Baker, 2006). They also face pressure from within the military services to conform to masculine roles
Women in the military encounter negative attitudes about their characters and sexuality, often described by their male peers and superiors as either lesbians or sexually promiscuous heterosexual women in the most pejorative of terms (Herbert, 1998). The ways a woman in the military expresses gender — of kind and degree — affect her acceptance by her peers as both a service member and as a competent leader:

When military women enact femininity, they are subject to accusations that they are not capable of performing tasks that have been labeled as “masculine.” When military women enact masculinity, they are subject to accusations that range from lesbianism to incompetence. That is, even if they are doing “men’s work” (e.g., flying combat aircraft), they cannot do it as well as men. (Herbert, 1998, pp. 123-124)

Military women manage gender by carefully balancing masculine and feminine behaviors and physical appearance (Herbert, 1998). The conundrum facing women in the military is how to be accepted as warrior — a traditionally male (and masculine) pursuit — and yet develop in their identities as women: “The way in which we create and recreate what it
means to be feminine or masculine, or something in between, leads to gender's being not simply a descriptor but a structure in and of itself" (Herbert, 1998, p. 14).

Few civilian women can relate to what life is like for women in the military, which makes the cultural transition to campus life especially difficult for women veterans (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009). Their ways of forming identity as military women must change to accommodate new roles and new societal expectations:

... basic training forces servicemembers into a pre-assigned identity that, in most cases, is highly valued only within the military community. As a result, when the structured military community is removed, the individual is forced to again redefine who she is as a civilian, a veteran, a female, and a student. (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009, p. 40)

Women may be uncertain of how to express their gender identity in the civilian world after having formed it to fit within a highly masculine culture. This uncertainty may partly explain why women tend not to openly identify themselves as veterans, a behavior that college counselors and student affairs professionals should be aware of when reaching out to student veterans (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009).

**Student veterans with disabilities.** Student veterans often do not disclose their disability status to campus disability support services (DSS) personnel (Burnett & Segoria, 2009; DiRamio & Spires, 2009; Shackelford, 2009). This reluctance may be in part due to the implication that disability is a sign of weakness (Bonar & Domenici, 2011; Burnett & Segoria, 2009; Danish & Antonides, 2009; Shackelford, 2009) or to a desire to blend in with other students on campus (Black et al., 2007; Shackelford, 2009). Student veterans also regard injuries sustained from combat as worthy of greater respect than
even serious injuries sustained in the United States or during training (Kraus & Rattray, 2013). It is important for campus DSS providers and student affairs professionals to understand that many veterans leave the military with a disability rating from the VA equaling 100% or even more than 100%, but this is simply a classification to determine eligibility for cash benefits and may have little to do with the veterans’ capabilities and even less to do with their self-concept or their attitudes toward their disabilities (Kraus & Rattray, 2013).

Amputation is a common disability among student veterans (Kraus & Rattray, 2013), as is post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and traumatic brain injury (Barry et al., 2012; Burnett & Segoria, 2009; Church, 2009; DiRamio & Spires, 2009; Shackelford, 2009). The actual numbers of veterans leaving the military with PTSD or major depression are difficult to estimate due to inconsistencies in instrumentation and self-reporting (Ramchand, Karney, Osilla, Burns, & Calderone, 2008). Some estimate that 30% of student veterans experience symptoms of PTSD or major depression (Bonar & Domenici, 2011) and it is believed that many more veterans suffer from mental health concerns than the numbers reported (Danish & Antonides, 2009). This underreporting of mental health issues is certainly true for women, who are less likely than men to be diagnosed with PTSD (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009).

Yet, in spite of the significant minority of student veterans with serious disabilities, the vast majority does not have severe physical or psychological injuries (Bonar & Domenici, 2011; Danish & Antonides, 2009). Most also do not seek counseling services on campus, but would benefit from counseling to help deal with stress resulting from certain aspects of military experience, such as the deployment cycle,
and to ease their integration with the college environment (Bonar & Domenici, 2011; Danish & Antonides, 2009). Counselors and DSS personnel should be proactive in reaching out to student veterans, but also demonstrate a high level of cultural competence and understanding of the challenges students coming from a military culture may be facing (Bonar & Domenici, 2011; Burnett & Segoria, 2009; Danish & Antonides, 2009; Shackelford, 2009; Vance & Miller, 2009).

**Institutional responses.** After the influx of veterans following World War II, college administrators on campuses across the United States created many programs to meet veteran-specific needs (Rose, 1994; Summerlot et al., 2009). Some were in the jurisdiction of what we now recognize as student affairs and others related to teaching and learning:

Recognizing that these new students were adults with profound life experiences, colleges and universities introduced new counseling and career centers, instituted acceleration possibilities, and began accepting credit for learning veterans had gained while in the service. In addition, college faculty were exhorted to change their teaching and testing practices. (Rose, 1994, p. 47)

Today, colleges and universities are again creating new programs or tailoring existing ones to meet the needs of student veterans (Burnett & Segoria, 2009; DiRamio & Spires, 2009; Ruh et al., 2009; Shackelford, 2009; Vance & Miller, 2009). With regard to classroom challenges faced by veterans, one study found that participants had forgotten much of the academic content needed for college-level classes, especially in math: "Poor study habits and lack of focus, symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), were cited numerous times in the transcripts" (DiRamio et al.,
The same study found that some student veterans felt reluctant to let nonmilitary students know about their combat experience because that sometimes led to awkward questions about combat or killing other people (DiRamio et al., 2008). Additionally, student veterans often chose not to voice their own views when they contradicted the professor or majority of students (DiRamio et al., 2008). One veteran even chose not to take a final exam because he felt the professor was pushing an anti-military agenda with the exam questions (DiRamio et al., 2008). Sometimes student veterans reported that professors pushed students to share their experiences in order to hear their opinions fairly; the students who were uncomfortable with speaking about those things, however, had difficulty remaining motivated to learn (DiRamio et al., 2008).

Encouraging faculty to be sensitive to the experiences of student veterans as well as possible memory and cognitive difficulties may be one way to help prevent such awkward or embarrassing situations (Sinski, 2012). Another might be creating a veteran-specific curriculum, especially in disciplines such as English or political science where students are encouraged to write about their experiences (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). Finally, using adult learning theories such as andragogy or transformative learning to guide practice may engage student veterans by addressing their experiences as well as their learning orientation as adults (Minnis, Bondi, & Rumann, 2013).

Theories of Adult Learning

The literature of adult education is diverse, ranging from theoretical works to practical models and instructional advice (Elias & Merriam, 2005). This variety occurs because the field itself, its clients, delivery systems, and contexts are also diverse,
no single theory capable of adequately addressing all facets of adult learning or education (Merriam, 1993). However, Merriam (1993) identified the three most well-known theories as andragogy (Knowles, 1980), self-directed learning (Knowles, 1975; Tough, 1978, 1979), and perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1991). These theoretical strands are “most influenced by psychology, with its focus on individual learners, their growth and development, and their learning in and out of formal settings” (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007, p. 241). Other important trends in the field include individualized instruction (Hiemstra & Sisco, 1990; Rogers, 1969), attention to learning environments (Hiemstra, 1991), and more recent theoretical perspectives such as critical theory (Freire, 1970; Mezirow, 1991), feminist pedagogy (Belenky et al., 1986), and learning in social context (Jarvis, 1987).

**Andragogy.** Andragogy has sometimes been presented as a theory in opposition to pedagogy (Knowles, 1970) where the first is focused on helping adults learn compared to the common understanding of pedagogy as the methods or theories of teaching children (Knowles, 1980). However, Knowles (1980) wrote that he came to understand the difference between the two as differences in assumptions, not true differences in theory. In successive writings, Knowles (Knowles, 1980, 1984; Knowles & Associates, 1984) softens his view of andragogy as a theory and begins to describe it as a model which may appropriately be applied to children as well as adults. The differences between andragogy and pedagogy lie in the assumptions teachers and learners make about the educational process, the responsibilities of the involved parties, and the level of self-directedness expected of the learner (Knowles, 1980, 1984; Knowles & Associates, 1984). The four distinguishing assumptions of andragogy are
that as individuals mature: 1) their self-concept moves from one of being a dependent personality toward being a self-directed human being; 2) they accumulate a growing reservoir of experience that becomes an increasingly rich resource for learning; 3) their readiness to learn becomes oriented increasingly to the developmental tasks of their social roles; and 4) their time perspective changes from one of postponed application of knowledge to immediacy of application, and accordingly, their orientation toward learning shifts from one of subject-centeredness to one of performance-centeredness. (Knowles, 1980, pp. 44-45)

In an andragogical approach, the educator recognizes that adults tend to feel responsible for their own decisions and prefer a relatively high degree of self-direction in their learning. They also need to know what they are going to learn and why. Finally, adults learn best when the teacher anchors new knowledge within students' experience and shows how the class content is relevant to their needs (Knowles, 1984).

Pratt (1988) argued that, as different as adults may be from children in their learning needs, they are also different from one another due to life experiences, personal interests, and characteristics such as readiness to learn. In fact, some adults choose to relinquish direction in their learning, preferring to leave that role to an expert instructor (Pratt, 1988). For this reason, “andragogical practice should acknowledge and accept of its learners both self-directedness and its obverse, dependency; both can be viewed as phenomenological expressions of a specific, context-bound, and limited situation” (Pratt, 1988, p. 161). Rather than employ andragogical methods without discrimination, an instructor should consider a number of learner variables including desire for direction and lack of prior knowledge (Pratt, 1988). In the absence of such knowledge, the teacher
must provide more direction. Support is also important and varies according to the needs of the learner. A learner with prior knowledge but low confidence or commitment may need higher levels of support from the instructor. The higher the dependency of the learner because of the need for either direction or support, the more characteristics of pedagogy the instructor should use; conversely, the lower the dependency of the learner, the more characteristics of andragogy the instructor should use (Pratt, 1988).

Self-directed learning. Self-directed learning is not learning done in isolation or without assistance from teachers, experts, or peers (Knowles, 1975; Tough, 1979). Instead, self-directed learning begins when an individual takes the initiative to embark on some program or project in order to improve a skill or gain new knowledge (Knowles, 1975; Tough, 1979). In short, the learner learns how to learn (Knowles, 1975). Knowles (1975) offers four reasons that people in modern society need to learn in self-directed ways. First, self-directed learners “enter into learning more purposefully and with greater motivation. They also tend to retain and make use of what they learn better and longer than do the reactive learners” (Knowles, 1975, p. 14). Second, self-direction in learning parallels psychological development as individuals move from a state of dependency to a state of self-reliance. Third, new developments in the delivery of education, such as larger classes, will cause stress and anxiety for students who rely more on a teacher for knowledge acquisition than they rely on their own resources. Finally, modern society is becoming “a strange new world in which rapid change will be the only stable characteristic” (Knowles, 1975, p. 15). Those who cannot rely on themselves to initiate and direct their own learning will be severely disadvantaged in the acquisition of new knowledge or skills.
Knowles (1975) defines a proactive, or self-directed, learner as one who takes the initiative in learning; conversely, a reactive learner is one who waits passively to be taught. Most adults know only how to be taught, not how to learn (Knowles, 1975). However, proactive learning is more compatible with the natural course of human psychological development because it requires a high level of maturity and responsibility for one’s own life and decisions (Knowles, 1975). Just as learners need to understand how to acquire the new knowledge they lack, instructors also need to learn how to exchange their authoritarian roles and assumptions for more democratic and facilitative approaches (Knowles, 1975). Both learners and teachers may feel reluctant to engage in this type of learning, believing that the teacher is shirking his or her responsibility for instruction (Knowles, 1975). However, a teacher who is committed to the process of self-directed learning will reassure students that structure exists, but that the learners and teacher together will negotiate and define that structure together; if, at any point, the teacher must take a more directive approach, that should be carefully weighed and the reasons for the action explained to the students (Knowles, 1975).

**Perspective transformation.** Perspective transformation is an adult learning theory based on transformation theory, which, although developmental in the sense that individuals grow and mature, is not a stage theory such as Perry’s (1968) scheme of intellectual development or Kegan’s (1994) theory of self-evolution (Mezirow, 1991). Instead, it is

... the process of becoming critically aware of how and why our assumptions have come to constrain the way we perceive... our world; changing these structures of habitual expectation to make possible a more inclusive,
discriminating, and integrative perspective; and, finally, making choices or otherwise acting upon these new understandings. (Mezirow, 1991, p. 167)

Perspective transformation begins when an individual encounters a “disorienting dilemma” (Mezirow, 1991, p. 168), moves through exploration of new perspectives and/or roles and relationships, plans action, takes action, and reintegrates the various parts of his or her life based on the framework of the new perspective (Mezirow, 1991). This transformation relates to adult learning because learning, as defined within this theory, is the process of building new interpretations of the meaning of experiences as a way of guiding future actions (Mezirow, 1991). Transformative learning requires a strong sense of self, reflection leading to understanding of how one’s beliefs and assumptions have been formed, and the creation of strategies for action of some kind (Mezirow, 1991).

**Individualized instruction.** Hiemstra and Sisco (1990) advocate an individualized approach to adult education based on the limited amount of research done in the field of adult learning theory as well as their personal experiences as adult educators. They write: “The potential of humans as learners is greatest when instructors systematically provide opportunities for them to make decisions regarding the learning process” (Hiemstra & Sisco, 1990, p. 5). Individualizing instruction allows for the differences, even among mature adults, in competence, confidence, and self-discipline (Hiemstra & Sisco, 1990; Pratt, 1988). With encouragement, adults who have been accustomed to receiving instruction passively will be able to develop critical thinking skills and greater responsibility for their own learning (Brookfield, 1987; Hiemstra & Sisco, 1990).
Learning environments. A significant body of literature focuses on the environment in which adult learning takes place (Hiemstra, 1991). The learning environment should be understood in broader terms that just the physical space where classes are held – although the physical space is important and does affect the learning of adults (Hiemstra, 1991). This is primarily because no model exists that is specifically focused on how the environment affects learning as opposed to behavior (Fulton, 1991). Fulton (1991) challenges the traditional view that the physical space is important only as it affects social interaction. He contends that the environment is made up of both physical features as well as the learners' perceptions of those features. In other words, room temperature may be 75 degrees Fahrenheit, but one student may perceive that as hot and another as cold. Differences in the perception of crowding may also occur. The SPATIAL model has been proposed to address the learning environment on three levels. The first defines learning as satisfaction, participation, and achievement; the second relates to reality, including the perceptions of learners in the educational space (transcendent and immanent attributes); and the third address the nature of control in the classroom by giving attention to authority and layout (Fulton, 1991).

Even if not using the SPATIAL model in formal fashion, adult educators should give thought to how a learning space is to be used and perceived by adult learners (Vosko, 1991). This may include physical features of the entire building – not just the classroom – with regard to signage, adequate lighting, furniture size and arrangement, and aesthetics of the inside and outside spaces (Vosko, 1991). Hospitality, including food and drinks together with welcoming conversation and interest in the student's personal circumstances, plays an important role in focusing on the student (Vosko, 1991).
Each adult student arrives to class with a history of social, family, and employment responsibilities that they cannot leave at the entrance to the classroom (Mahoney, 1991). In a student-centered adult class, the teacher should remember that some students have encountered barriers trying to get to class, some are thinking about the reasons they are in class, and others struggle to recall material from the last time they were in school—which was possibly many years ago (Mahoney, 1991). Any of these states of mind may interfere with adult learning, motivation, and persistence (Mahoney, 1991). Instructors of adults, regardless of the venue, should be intentional in remaining student-focused, analyzing and controlling the physical space, helping learners feel at ease, being proactive in bringing about change, and making a personal commitment to change (Hiemstra, 1991).

**Alternative perspectives.** A major criticism of all of these adult learning theories is that they may not necessarily apply only to adults or differentiate the ways adults learn from the ways that children learn (Merriam, 1993). Additional approaches have emerged in an attempt to reframe the discussion of characteristics of adult learning (Merriam, 1993). Merriam (1993) notes especially the lenses of critical theory (Freire, 1970; Mezirow, 1991), feminist pedagogy (Belenky et al., 1986), and the sociocultural perspective (Jarvis, 1987), as contributing influences among adult education theorists. With critical and feminist theories, there is less focus on learning than there is on the power structures and larger society within which the learning occurs; these theories also challenge the nature of knowledge and authority in the classroom (Merriam et al., 2007). Sociocultural theory, however, both presents true theory based on the observations of
adult educators and also offers practical application to adult learning and teaching (Jarvis, 1987).

**Critical theory and adult learning.** Jürgen Habermas of the Frankfurt School in 1940s Germany is a foundational thinker in critical theory (Merriam et al., 2007). Habermas divides knowledge into three types: technical, practical, and emancipatory (Merriam et al., 2007). He also identified reflective discourse as a central component of critical thought and learning (Merriam et al., 2007). Mezirow (1991) hearkens back to Habermas when he describes reflection as “the central dynamic” (p. 99) in perspective transformation theory. Mezirow (Mezirow & Associates, 2000) also expands Habermas’s four conditions necessary for authentic reflective discourse (comprehensibility, sincerity, truth, and legitimacy) (Merriam et al., 2007) to include accurate and complete information, freedom from coercion, openness to alternative points of view, ability to weigh evidence, greater awareness of context, equal opportunity, and willingness to seek understanding and to accept the judgment validated by the discourse. Mezirow (Mezirow & Associates, 2000) saw this final judgment always as a tentative understanding which, through additional reflective discourse, may be amended or supplanted by future discourse and new understanding. Critical theory thus applied to adult education encourages participation among all learners and calls authority into question as temporal and fluid (Mezirow & Associates, 2000).

Brookfield (1987) also applies critical theory to adult education as a way of effecting positive change through evaluation of current ideas, power structures, and values. Critical scrutiny may lead learners to recognize the imperfections of the world and question the underlying assumptions of knowledge they are being taught (Brookfield,
The power of critical theory in adult education is to challenge ideology, contest hegemony, unmask power, and develop a liberated and democratic adult directed by reason (Brookfield, 2005).

**Feminist pedagogy and adult learning.** Both critical theory and feminist pedagogy recommend shared authority for learning, collaboration, and learner-centered teaching approaches. In feminist pedagogy, however, “individually focused feminist theories are concerned with women as individuals, how they have come to internalize patriarchy as the norm, and what needs to be done to obtain equal access, rights, and opportunities” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 248). Further, feminist pedagogy is concerned with women in teaching and learning activities, including structural issues of power and authority as well as gender issues such as recovering “women’s voices, experiences, and viewpoints” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 263). Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (1986) described five ways of knowing that women use when interpreting truth, knowledge, and authority. These five ways of knowing are silence, received knowledge, subjective knowledge, procedural knowledge, and constructed knowledge (Belenky et al., 1986). The element of connection is important in feminist pedagogy in both teaching and learning, with students coming to understand their role in the construction of knowledge and the fallibility of the teachers they had once seen as experts (Belenky et al., 1986). Likewise, teachers, whether male or female, should eschew any pretense of perfection and embrace a role more reminiscent of a midwife than a lecturer: “Midwife-teachers focus not on their own knowledge (as the lecturer does) but on the students’ knowledge. They contribute when needed, but it is always clear that the baby is not theirs but the student’s” (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 218).
Adult learning in the social context. Jarvis (1987) suggested a model of adult learning which “connects the process of human learning to the person, who may grow and develop as a result of a learning experience, may remain virtually unaltered, or may actually be harmed as a result of the experience of learning” (p. 24). This model of learning in social context is based on Kolb’s (1984) theory of learning and development, but allows for both non-learning responses and non-reflective learning responses to experiences, a dimension that Kolb’s theory lacks. Jarvis’s (1987) model also recognized the “significance of the idea that the self may be harmed in some way as a result of a learning experience . . . , although it has not been examined sufficiently in adult education literature” (p. 24).

The non-learning responses include presumption, non-consideration, and rejection (Jarvis, 1987). Both presumption and non-consideration are driven by socialization or simply preoccupation, which help the individual navigate the complexities of life. Non-reflective learning responses are those where the individual does gain new knowledge, but because of either the method, such as practice or memorization, or the shallow nature of the acquired knowledge, reflection is circumvented even though learning does occur (Jarvis, 1987). Finally, the reflective learning responses are contemplation, reflective practice, and experimental learning (Jarvis, 1987). These may or may not involve action or changes in behavior, but reflection on ideas or actions is the hallmark of this type of learning response (Jarvis, 1987).

Prior learning as a basis for further learning is important in the social context just as it is in andragogy (Jarvis, 1987). However, such prior learning experiences offer only potential reservoirs for adult learning depending on the social situation in which the adult
is attempting to gain new knowledge (Jarvis, 1987). The social aspect of learning not only affects students, but also determines how the teacher may best approach content delivery and learning activities (Jarvis, 1987).

The Community College Environment

The context of this study was the community college, which differs significantly in mission and public perception from four-year institutions (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2014). Historically, the movement in the early 20th century toward the creation of junior colleges sought to shift the burden of teaching lower-level courses from the university to an intermediate postsecondary institution (Cohen et al., 2014). Another driver of the movement was the democratization of education, of which open access and affordability were important elements (Cohen et al., 2014). Federal legislation, such as the Higher Education Act of 1965, along with larger numbers of students seeking to enroll in college in the 1960s and 1970s resulted in an explosion of community college campuses throughout the United States (Adelman, 1992). Today, “two years of postsecondary education are within the reach – financially, geographically, practically – of virtually every American” (Cohen et al., 2014, p. 37).

Although early proponents of junior colleges saw the educational mission of those institutions to be either an introduction to the university or a capstone experience finishing off what students began in high school, those who attended – the students themselves – used junior colleges in very different ways (Cohen et al., 2014). Vocational training, preparation for professional careers in business, and courses for personal enrichment appealed to large segments of the student body, a trend which continues today (Adelman, 1992; Cohen et al., 2014). Administrators responded and junior colleges,
which became known in their locales as community colleges, began to operate only nominally as transfer platforms for those en route to universities; the concepts of open access, affordability, and practical application of knowledge became hallmarks of the community college identity (Cohen et al., 2014). Transfer to larger institutions was still an option, but the prominence that goal held in the mission of the community college depended on the demands, needs, and goals of the students (Cohen et al., 2014).

The perceptions and attitudes of students toward a community college education impact their enrollment and attendance patterns. Adelman (1992) found that students approached college enrollment from a utilitarian perspective, taking courses that appealed to them or helped them advance in their jobs but not necessarily in order to ultimately attain a bachelor's degree. When this buffet approach involves taking classes at two or more institutions, it is called “swirling,” a term coined by de los Santos and Wright (1990, p. 32) regarding how students in Maricopa County, Arizona, pieced together credits from various community colleges along with credits from Arizona State University (ASU). A full one-third of students graduating from ASU engaged in swirling or even reverse transfer (i.e., beginning at the university and later transferring to a community college), an indicator that the traditional linear path from a two-year college to a four-year university is not the only path to academic success (de los Santos & Wright, 1990). Rather than discouraging swirling patterns of enrollment, many educational leaders have called for college systems and universities to collaborate, especially in the area of student tracking, in order to support the academic success of their students regardless of the institution from which they ultimately receive their degree or certification (Borden, 2004; de los Santos & Wright, 1990).
Although student veterans manifest unique characteristics in many ways, as noted above, those who enroll in community colleges display the same swirling approach to enrollment (Leporte, 2013). Their motives – convenience in scheduling or location – are similar to those of other students, but they also have the added pressure of time limits on their GI Bill benefits; this limited time line for benefits could explain why many student veterans enroll in two institutions concurrently or take classes at different campuses during summer or winter breaks (Leporte, 2013). They see swirling as a strategy for maximizing benefits within the shortest period of time.

Conclusion

These theories of adult learning, although varied in approach, have at their foundation a common assumption of respect for learners and mutual construction of knowledge. Brookfield (1988) describes the ideal adult learning environment as one in which each learner takes alternating responsibility for leadership of the group and where the instructor shares authority with the learners. This calls to mind the three principles used in epistemological reflection to create a transitional culture for learners to progress in their psychological development (i.e., validating the student as a knower, situating learning in the students' own experience, and defining learning as mutually constructing meaning) (Baxter Magolda, 1999). Maintaining a focus on the learner, to include experiences beyond the classroom, is also a common thread in the literature on student veterans (Minnis et al., 2013), adult learning (Brookfield, 1988; Knowles, 1975, 1980, 1984; Mahoney, 1991), and psychological development (Baxter Magolda, 1999, 2001, 2009; Pizzolato, 2004; Pizzolato et al., 2009). However, in spite of the fact that much has been written about the suitability of adult learning theories for student veterans (Minnis et
al., 2013) as well as the impact of military service on academic achievement and persistence (Barry et al., 2012; DiRamio et al., 2008; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Olson, 1973; Rose, 1994; Sinski, 2012), there have been no investigations of the development of self-authorship in veterans or of how student veterans experience learning in the college classroom. This study contributes to our understanding of how student veterans develop self-authorship and how that may impact their experiences of learning in the community college environment.
Chapter 3: Methodology

Student veterans may have encountered one or more provocative situations (Pizzolato, 2003) during their military service which facilitated their progress toward self-authorship. Baxter Magolda suggested in an interview with DiRamio and Jarvis (2011) that military members may even have experienced such situations, which she calls dissonance, prior to commencing their service. The literature reviewed above shows that there is a gap in our understanding of how veterans progress toward self-authorship, whether military service itself propels them forward on that journey, and whether those who join the military may have encountered provocative experiences in their adolescence, thus suggesting their choice to enlist was perhaps a manifestation of self-authorship.

In this study, I examined the development of self-authorship among student veterans using the theory of self-evolution as a conceptual framework (Kegan, 1994). The theory of epistemological reflection (Baxter Magolda, 1999) aided in linking students' psychological development to learning, whether in the secondary, military, or postsecondary environments. Finally, facets of adult learning theory, such as andragogy (Knowles, 1980), self-directed learning (Knowles, 1975; Tough, 1978, 1979), and perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1991) were used to augment interview questions and enrich data analysis.
Research Questions

The development of self-authorship among student veterans is a double paradox: not only is there some evidence that veterans may achieve self-authorship at an early age, but they may achieve it while living and working in a highly-structured, externally-supported environment.

This situation raises two primary and two secondary research questions:

1. First, how have service members learned to rely on internal foundations (i.e., progressed toward self-authorship) while operating within a rigid military structure?
   a. What experiences may have fostered development of their internal foundations?
   b. How, if at all, has military education and training helped or hindered them on this journey?

2. Second, what impact, if any, does self-authorship have on the way student veterans experience learning in the community college environment?

Research Paradigm and Approach

Because I wanted to discover how self-authorship may have developed in student veterans in a structured environment that seems hostile to individuality and at ages earlier than is typical for most college students, I used an interpretivist research paradigm, in which the researcher interprets the meaning participants make of their experiences (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glesne, 2011; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). It was possible that the student veterans themselves did not realize how they made this meaning until they verbalized their stories and experiences (Barber, 2012; Baxter Magolda & King, 2007).
Therefore, the primary means of data generation consisted of semi-structured, individual in-depth interviews. Additionally, I wrote memos summarizing my own impressions of each interview, as well as memos describing emerging themes and notable experiences that I wanted to explore further with the participants. I planned to complete the data collection process by holding men’s and women’s group interviews in order to allow the participants to discuss some of the common themes and experiences in self-authorship development that emerged during the interviews. However, due to scheduling conflicts among the students I was able to convene only the women’s group interview. The individual and group interview transcripts were coded according to a grounded theory approach (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I then compared the codes across the various data sources throughout the study period in order to identify themes and patterns that emerged.

Method

The context for this study was Tidewater Community College (TCC) in southeastern Virginia because of its high enrollment of military students. I chose to work through a community college because Virginia has a robust program of articulation agreements between its community colleges and four-year public institutions. Many student veterans who complete four-year degrees in this state began their studies in the community college system (Stone, 2013). Also, many veterans are using only half of their 36-month educational benefit (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). This may indicate that veterans are completing a two-year program and then returning to the workforce or transferring their remaining benefits to one or more of their dependents. In either case, those initial 18 months of higher education likely took place in a community college rather than at a four-year institution.
Participants. I recruited participants from a population of student veterans at TCC. The community college is located in an area with a high concentration of military bases, active duty service members, and retired military personnel. Approximately 16%, or 7,000 students, of the 2012-2013 student population of 45,000 at this college is either still in active service or has separated or retired from the military. For this reason, a military education center called the Center for Military and Veteran Education (CMVE) has been established on campus to meet the unique transition needs of veterans and to support their academic and professional success.

In order to examine the development of self-authorship, it was necessary that my participants were nearing or entering the stage of self-authorship at the time of our interviews. With assistance from CMVE staff members, I administered a screening questionnaire during the Fall 2013 registration period to all Navy student veterans who met the eligibility requirements detailed below. Only veterans of the Navy were invited to participate in this study in order to minimize the possible impact of any differences in training or job assignments which may exist between the various branches of the services. The Navy was selected over the other branches because Navy veterans comprise the largest percentage of student veterans at this particular college. Those students whose scores on the questionnaire indicated they were nearing or entering self-authorship, and with consideration also for their race/ethnicity and age (e.g., more diverse and younger given preference), were invited to a first interview designed to locate the participant on the continuum of developmental stages. I originally also considered service in combat zones as an element for selection; however, none of the students whose scores qualified them for an interview had served in combat. Based on my analysis of the first interview
transcripts, I invited four men and four women to a second individual interview to discuss in more depth their military experiences and learning preferences. These eight Navy student veterans comprised the final participant sample.

In order to be eligible to complete the screening questionnaire, participants had to be single-term veterans of the Navy who enlisted directly (i.e., within one year) from high school, were enrolling in college for the first time, and were in their first semester at the college. At the beginning of the recruitment period, I accepted surveys from only those students with no prior college credits (i.e., had not previously completed any course work for college credit in a classroom, online, or distance learning format). However, it became clear that maintaining that requirement would have reduced the participant pool to a level that was unable to support the study. For that reason, I accepted students who had completed 12 or fewer credit hours of college work. Participants were also required to be enrolled in one or more college classes during the data collection period of the study. The age range for eligible participants was 18 to 25 years old at the time of the first interview. Since self-authorship is a developmental stage in self-evolution, it is more likely to appear in older populations. I expected that the stories of younger participants who were nearing self-authorship could show more significantly how life experiences impacted the development of self-authorship. I made every effort to include participants from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds; however, as will be described in more detail in the Career Decision-Making Survey – Military Edition (CDMS-ME) Results section of Chapter 4, few students from non-White racial or ethnic groups completed the survey.
**Instrumentation.** The primary method for data collection in this study was in-depth individual interviews. I employed a quantitative survey as a screening tool to identify participants who were already in the developmental phase of self-authorship or very close to it. At the time participants completed the screening tool, I also collected demographic information including racial/ethnic identification, age, sex, years in active service, and disability status. After participants had been screened, they were interviewed individually twice, first to establish their location on the meaning making continuum (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012) and second to delve more deeply into personal experiences they believed had supported or hindered their development toward self-authorship. Finally, a women’s group interview gave participants the opportunity to discuss the similarities or differences among their experiences.

**Screening instrument.** Participants were asked to take a written assessment of self-authorship before being included in the final participant pool. The instrument, the Career Decision Making Survey – Military Edition (CDMS-ME), is an adaptation of a survey used among non-veteran college students and contains an 18-item questionnaire that measures the first three phases in the development of self-authorship in the cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal domains (Creamer, Baxter Magolda, & Yue, 2010; see Appendix A). The phases measured are External Formulas (EF), Crossroads (CR), and Early Self-Authoring (ESA) (Creamer et al., 2010). Correlations between the developmental phases support the validity of the instrument as a measure of self-authorship: EF with CR, \( r = .369 \); CR with ESA, \( r = .888 \); EF with ESA, \( r = .298 \). The correlation coefficients are all significant \( (p < .001) \). The weakest correlation is between the External Formulas (EF) phase and the Early Self-Authoring (ESA) phase, which is
logical given the developmental nature of the construct. Cronbach's alpha indicates the reliability of the CDMS (original version) to measure the three psychological dimensions (i.e., cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal) as well as the three phases of self-authorship (i.e., External Formulas, Crossroads, and Early Self-Authoring). Values of reliability for the three psychological dimensions are $\alpha = .595$ for cognitive, $\alpha = .614$ for interpersonal, and $\alpha = .713$ for intrapersonal. Values of reliability for the three phases of self-authorship are $\alpha = .58$ for External Formulas, $\alpha = .62$ for Crossroads, and $\alpha = .70$ for Early Self-Authoring.

Respondents marked a 4-point Likert scale indicating the degree to which they agreed with each item (1 = disagree, 4 = agree). Scores for each self-authorship phase subscale were totaled and averaged; lower averages showed less agreement with statements in that particular phase while higher averages showed more agreement with statements in that phase. For example, a score for EF-CR-ESA of 1-2-2 would show that the respondent relied less on External Formulas and agreed more with statements supporting the Crossroads and Early Self-Authoring. Participants who showed stronger traits of self-authorship were invited to continue with the study through in-depth interviews.

I modified the demographic portions of the CDMS (original version) in order to collect data relevant to military undergraduates. Those questions included reasons for enlisting, reasons for enrolling in college, disability status, and years in service. I also added open-ended questions that required written responses about how the participant handled feedback from friends and family when considering the option of returning to school; this change was suggested by Dr. Elizabeth Creamer (personal communication,
March 4, 2013), one of the developers of the original questionnaire. I did not, however, alter any questions that were part of the self-authorship decision-making matrix; therefore, the reliability and validity of the CDMS-ME should not have been affected by these modifications.

**Initial interview protocol.** The first interview followed the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education (WNS) first-year interview protocol (Baxter Magolda & King, 2007; see Appendix B). The interview had three parts: an introduction, which also included questions about the participant's expectations of college; a segment focusing on making sense of educational experiences; and a final section that asked how the participant was integrating the various parts of his or her life with college experiences. The format was semi-structured with suggested questions and follow-up probes. The interviewer is also instructed at various points to draw out meaning from the interviewee as necessary. The interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. Each participant was interviewed privately in a study room at the college library. The purpose of the first interview was to establish the student's level of development toward self-authorship.

**Second interview protocol.** The second interview was also semi-structured and followed an interview guide I developed based on concepts and themes that emerged from the initial interviews as well as from relevant literature (see Appendix C). In addition, I asked questions about military training and experiences and how, if at all, they helped or hindered the participants on their journey toward self-authorship. The participants all seemed more at ease and most talked longer during their second interviews, which lasted between 60 and 120 minutes. The purpose of the second interview was to gather information specific to the impact of military training on the
development of internal foundations (i.e., self-authorship), as well as explore emerging themes from the first round of interviews.

**Group interview protocol.** My original plan, based both on the literature about female veterans as well as the preferences of my female participants, was to hold two group interviews separated by sex. I wanted both men and women to feel comfortable discussing any topic that arose during the conversation, including topics related to sexual harassment or discrimination. Although there is some disagreement about optimum size for focus groups or group interviews, having at least four participants is generally regarded as sufficient (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas, & Robson, 2001). Unfortunately, only one of the three men I expected to come to the group interview actually arrived. I also expected three women to come for the women’s meeting; instead, two arrived. I canceled the men’s group and was not able to reschedule it due to holidays and personal schedules. I did, however, interview the two women because other practitioners had documented the value of the dyad in group interviewing (Frey & Fontana, 1993). The women’s group interview was an informal meeting with discussion of themes that were either very similar across the interviews or those on which there was some significant disagreement among participants. I prepared broad questions in four categories to guide the discussion (see Appendix D). We met for two hours in a college conference room on a Saturday morning; I provided a light breakfast to make the atmosphere as welcoming and comfortable as possible (Krueger & Casey, 2000). The conversation was audio recorded and transcribed for later analysis. The purpose of the group interview was to allow participants to comment on similarities and differences related to participant experiences of military training, decision-making development, and reintegration in civilian – and,
specifically—college life. These sessions also gave the participants the opportunity to reflect on the process of the interviews and comment on any new development they feel may have occurred as a result of their participation.

Data collection. Before the registration period for the fall semester began, I conducted a trial distribution of the CDMS-ME in order to test its readability and clarity among new community college student veterans. The eligibility requirements were the same for the trial distribution as they were for the study distribution. With the assistance of CMVE staff, I collected three surveys. After reviewing student responses to the writing prompts (see Section 2-10 of the CDMS-ME, Appendix A), I reworded the questions in hopes of eliciting more detailed information.

I gained access to eligible participants with the assistance of the CMVE staff. During the registration period for the Fall 2013 semester, I distributed surveys to every eligible student who visited the CMVE, asking them to complete and return the questionnaire before leaving. Based on the previous two years' enrollment numbers, CMVE staff estimated the total number of students who would meet this study's eligibility requirements to be between 100 and 200. However, the actual number of eligible Navy veterans was far smaller: I collected a total of 23 completed surveys during the registration period. Every eligible student I asked to complete a survey agreed to do so, and all who began a survey finished it and turned it in.

When I asked one of the members of the executive staff why he thought the enrollment numbers were lower this year, he offered three suggestions: 1) community college enrollment is always closely tied to the job market and the dynamics of the local economy may be such that more jobs are available outside the local area; 2) more
potential students are working, which is a good thing, but it means that those individuals
are not coming to school at all or are enrolling in fewer classes; and 3) there is a general
national downward trend in community college enrollment (R. Rice, Director of Military
Academic Programs, personal communication, August 20, 2013). His assessment is
supported by the most recent report on community college enrollment numbers
(Juszkiewicz, 2014).

Self-authorship is rarely achieved by the time an individual is in his or her mid-20s (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2009; Kegan, 1994) and it is possible that the development
of self-authorship in the students I interviewed prior to this study (Stone, 2013) was
incidental and not representative of most student veterans. By administering the
screening instrument, I hoped to increase my chances of finding participants who met all
the eligibility requirements and also were nearing or entering the stage of self-authorship.
The data collected by means of the screening instrument also allows for future
quantitative analyses as my research progresses with other branches of the military
services. Figure B shows the process for vetting participants and collecting both survey
and interview data.
Administer CDMS questionnaire → Select participants for interviews → Conduct interview

↓

Write memo of initial impressions → [Assess WNS; replace participant if necessary] → Review transcript; write member-check document

↓

Member check with participant; revise as needed → Repeat process for second interview and focus group sessions

Figure B. Process for vetting participants and collecting interview data.

Seventeen of the 23 student veterans who completed a survey had scores that indicated they were relying more on internal than external foundations. I extended invitations to interview to each of those 17 students and 10 accepted. I conducted the WNS interview (Baxter Magolda & King, 2007) to more accurately assess the participant’s level of self-authorship. One student’s location on the self-authorship continuum (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012) showed he relied more on external foundations and he was therefore not invited to a second interview. Another participant revealed during the course of the interview that he already had attained an associate of applied science degree, which disqualified him from the study. The remaining eight participants all showed evidence of relying more on internal than external foundations and were therefore invited to the second personal interview as well as the group interview.

The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Immediately following each interview and focus group, I wrote field notes in the form of a memo
summarizing my impressions of the exchange, including observations about the participant's manner, apparent levels of emotion (if any), and feelings I was experiencing during the interview. These field notes of first impressions became part of the data set and guided my analysis of transcripts of the interviews. Also, throughout the study design process, data generation, and data analysis, I maintained a reflexive journal to record my thoughts, questions, plans, and ideas related to the study.

Every student who completed the CDMS-ME was entered in a drawing for a $25 debit card. I also paid each participant a $25 cash honorarium for each interview, including the group interview. Although the men’s group interview was canceled due to lack of attendance, I compensated the participant who did come.

Data analysis. My data analysis occurred in three parts with multiple steps in each part. In all cases, I used a grounded theory approach, in which concepts emerging from the data as well as examples relating to self-authorship were identified and assigned codes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I compared these codes across transcripts and developed categories, identifying those data that fit within a particular category as well as negative cases that did not; this increased the rigor and credibility of the findings (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I also wrote memos throughout data generation and analysis to provide the detailed description of meaning and direct lived experience (Glesne, 2011; Janesick, 2000) known as thick description (Denzin, 2001; Geertz, 1973). The data analysis and data collection or generation occurred more fluidly in practice than is described below (Corbin & Strauss, 2008); however, the following structure helped guide my analysis with the understanding that the data took precedence over the method I planned to use for
their analysis (Richardson, 2000). In other words, I adjusted my method in order to understand and respectfully explore any surprising findings.

I enlisted the help of two peer debriefers who were doctoral students familiar with the construct of self-authorship and who had experience in qualitative analysis in order to minimize my biases and subjectivities as a member of the military community. These peer debriefers reviewed a total of four transcripts (23.5% of the total number of transcripts) coded according to a constant comparison analysis. I selected the transcripts randomly, supplied the reviewers with a code book I had created, and asked them to comment on the accuracy and completeness of the codes I had assigned. Both peer debriefers had suggestions for minor changes to the coding but overall agreed with how I had defined and assigned the codes. The suggested changes did not impact the interpretation of the transcripts for the current study.

I also asked two additional doctoral students to assist me by reviewing my analysis of one participant's transcripts for placement on the self-authorship continuum. That participant's first interview offered only minimal evidence of his location of the continuum so I analyzed his second transcript as well. Because he was very shy, he did not elaborate when he responded to my questions and I wanted to make sure that my understanding of his developmental levels were grounded in his narrative rather than in my own desire to include him in the study. The two peer reviewers had extensive research experience in the area of self-authorship and they agreed that he was indeed showing more reliance on internal rather than external foundations.

**Part 1: Establishing participant location on meaning making continuum.** My research questions assumed that the participants in this study were nearing the threshold
of self-authorship or had already entered that order of consciousness. Therefore, the first step in my analysis was confirming this through use of the Career Decision Making Survey – Military Edition (CDMS-ME) (Appendix A) and the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education (WNS) first-year interview protocol (Baxter Magolda & King, 2007; Appendix B).

After I summed and averaged the domain scores (i.e., cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal) for each developmental phase (i.e., External Formulas, the Crossroads, and Early Self-Authoring) on the CDMS-ME, I had a three-part score for each participant composed of means representing overall identification with each of the developmental phases. When the CDMS (original version) was tested for validity and reliability, it was administered to the same group of students as a pre- and post-test (Creamer et al., 2010). In that scenario, the means between one and two indicated less identification with a phase; means between three and four indicated more identification with a phase (Creamer et al., 2010). Therefore lower scores for the External Formulas phase along with higher scores (two or above) for the Crossroads and Early Self-Authoring phases should identify a participant as nearing or entering the phase of self-authorship.

However, before this current study the quantitative measure had not been used extensively; neither had it been employed as a screening tool for self-authorship development (Creamer et al., 2010). Therefore, I decided to invite participants to participate in an in-depth interview using the WNS interview protocol (Baxter Magolda & King, 2007; see Appendix B) if their CR or ESA scores were greater than their EF scores. I also coded the written responses for evidence of External Foundations (EF), Crossroads (CR), and Early Self-Authoring (ESA) in order to expand the pool of
potential participants. Students with numeric scores not indicating a clear trend toward self-authorship, but whose written responses received at least three CR or ESA codes were also invited to the first personal interview.

The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Before conducting the interviews, I received training from a researcher who has years of experience working with both the collection of data and analysis of the original WNS data. I reviewed the transcripts and coded them according to the WNS Phase 2 Summary Template for Assessing Developmental Meaning Making (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). Figure C shows the meaning making continuum with codes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Solely External Meaning Making</th>
<th>Crossroads</th>
<th>Solely Internal Meaning Making</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ea</strong> – Trusting external authority without recognizing shortcomings of this approach</td>
<td><strong>Entering the Crossroads</strong></td>
<td><strong>la</strong> – Trusting the internal voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Eb</strong> – Tensions with trusting external authority</td>
<td><strong>E(I) – Questioning external authority</strong></td>
<td><strong>Ib</strong> – Building an internal foundation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ec</strong> – Recognizing shortcomings of trusting external authority</td>
<td><strong>E-I – Constructing the internal voice</strong></td>
<td><strong>Ic</strong> – Securing internal commitments</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure C.** Developmental continuum of meaning making structures. Adapted from Baxter Magolda and King (2012, p. 19).
After completing a summary according to the WNS Phase 2 Summary Template (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012), I was able to locate the participant on the external-internal voice continuum; this indicated how much the participant tends to rely on internal foundations for making meaning of events and new knowledge. Only participants who showed more reliance on internal foundations than on external foundations (e.g., a score of IE, I(E), Ia, Ib, or Ic) were included in the study. As noted above, eight of the nine eligible participants who were interviewed showed more reliance on internal foundations. This process is described in detail in Chapter 4.

**Part 2: Identifying experiential themes.** Once an interview had been transcribed, I drafted a listing of the major points as I understood them to be expressed by the participant and sent this list to the participant for member checking (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). If the participant had wished to make any changes or clarifications, I would have noted those; however, all of the participants replied that no changes were needed and the summaries were accurate and complete. The transcripts of each interview were coded with NVivo (NVivo, 2013), a software application for qualitative analysis, according to the same process. This analysis included the transcripts of the WNS interviews which were also used to locate participants along the meaning making continuum. The experiences participants discussed in those interviews not only contributed to their development of self-authorship but also were military experiences pertinent to this study.

The three analytic tools I relied on most heavily were asking questions, making comparisons, and drawing on personal experience (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I employed those tools throughout the course of the study in various ways. Figure D shows the interaction that occurred during this part of the analysis.
Making comparisons
- Open and axial coding
- Within documents
- Between documents

Drawing on personal experience
- When designing interview protocol
- When writing memos
- When building theory

Asking questions
- When selecting codes
- Of my participants
- Of myself
- Of the literature

Figure D. Interaction of analytic tools.

The following subsections detail the ways I asked questions, made comparisons, and drew on my own experience.

Coding. I used both open coding and axial coding on the transcripts. Open coding is typically performed first by labeling segments and discrete ideas in the participants’ responses. Axial coding relates concepts to one another, effectively gathering discrete ideas together into a larger category (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). However, I performed both types of coding simultaneously and then again either separately or together throughout the study period. Corbin and Strauss (2008) advise that “[t]he analytic process, like any thinking process, should be relaxed, flexible, and driven by insight gained through interaction with data rather than being overly structured and
based only on procedures” (p. 12). I asked questions of myself throughout the coding process, made comparisons of concepts within each document as well as between different documents, and used the insights I gained to help guide my choice of codes and their organization.

**Dialoguing.** I approached the transcripts as fluid documents that could change as I continued to interact with the participants. In effect, I dialogued with the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) just as I did with the participants and with myself as I considered how to organize the concepts emerging from the data. I employed reflective listening during the interviews, where I checked my understanding with the participants as our conversations progressed. Additionally, I dialogued with the participants through member checking by means of a summative memo and also by asking for clarifications whenever necessary during my analysis and writing process. Many of the questions I included in the second interview and group interview sessions resulted from the feedback I received from the participants.

Another way I dialogued with the data was through memo writing, which helped increase my sensitivity in interpretation (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) and served as the earliest foundations of the theory I derived from the emergent themes. Additionally, my memos and reflexive journal documented the process I followed in gathering, analyzing, and interpreting the data, adding to the rigor of my study (Rossman & Rallis, 2003).

The method of constant comparisons, where I compared each incident in the data with other incidents to discover similarities and differences (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) was another way of interacting with both the data and my own interpretations. By considering the meanings of the participants’ words, how sentences were formed, what
concepts were repeated and so forth, I was able to ground my interpretation solidly in the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). As I wrote my memos and final analysis, this intrapersonal dialoguing became important for reaching a point of crystallization, a postmodernist analytic alternative to triangulation (Richardson, 2000). Crystallization allows texts to validate themselves and provides “a deepened, complex, thoroughly partial, understanding of the topic” (Richardson, 2000, p. 934). Just as triangulation in early qualitative research replaced the concept of validity in positivistic methods, the idea of crystallization relies even more heavily on texts themselves and a thorough interpretation of them rather than insisting on additional data sources to support textual data (Richardson, 2000). The concept of crystallization places a heavier burden for trustworthy analysis on the researcher, but it also respects the multi-faceted, multi-dimensional nature of narratives, experiences, and phenomena. Crystallization is also consistent with the process of grounded theory analysis, which requires “an intuitive sense of what is going on in the data; trust in the self and the research process; and the ability to remain creative, flexible, and true to the data all at the same time” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 16).

Part 3: Building a theory. Although developing a theory was not necessary in the grounded theory approach I used (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), I proceeded with my analysis with a view to building a theory of how self-authorship develops among student veterans. This is a substantive theory because it applies, not to the general public or even all student veterans, but specifically to student veterans enrolled in community college. In order to develop the theory, I continued the process of making comparisons but raised those comparisons to the level of theory. Theoretical comparisons helped make sense of
items or events in the data that did not fit neatly into the categories I constructed. In those cases, I looked at them from different perspectives, including comparing them to the literature or events from my own experience (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The following subsections detail the process of theory building.

**Analyzing data for context.** Context is comprised of "sets of conditions that give rise to problems or circumstances to which individuals respond by means of action/interaction/emotions" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 229). Rather than stopping my analysis with an examination and description of the stories my participants tell about their experiences and perceptions, I widened my perspective to consider also the environment, relationships, duties, and values within which these participants developed. This approach was especially useful in helping me understand the interaction of military culture with individual beliefs, behaviors, and values. I wrote memos and reflexive journal entries about my interpretive analysis and checked those interpretations with my participants as much as possible. In some cases, this required communication through electronic mail after the final interviews had been completed.

**Analyzing data for process.** In the context of this study, process was the events or influential factors that have or have not supported the development of self-authorship among my participants. This related to one of my original research questions and was therefore an appropriate – even necessary – avenue for analysis. In order to identify process, I read large sections of the transcripts again looking for overarching patterns consistent with most, if not all, of the participants' experiences.

**Integrating categories.** The final step in building a theory was integration of categories. In this step, I looked for ways the largest categories identified during the
earlier analysis fit together under a single, overarching category. It was at this point that negative cases became important, not only as potential challenges to the soundness of the theory, but also for their value in deepening the dimensions included in the theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Integration of categories occurred after my analysis reached the point of theoretical saturation. At that point, not only had the data reached the point of saturation, which occurs when no new concepts are being added and no questions seem to elicit unique responses, but the larger themes were also “well developed in terms of properties, dimensions, and variations. Further data gathering and analysis add little new to the conceptualization, though variations can always be discovered” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 263). As I attempted to link categories to form a larger, single theory, I constructed an “explanatory framework” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 264) for the development of self-authorship among Navy student veterans.

Ethical Considerations

I made every effort to protect the privacy and confidentiality of study participants. The interviews took place in a private setting and the participants were asked to select a pseudonym by which he or she will be identified in any reports or publications. However, those who participated in the group interview met each other and therefore some breach of confidentiality occurred. The participants were advised about this at the beginning of the study period and could have chosen not to participate in the group interview if they were concerned about revealing their identities to other students. In fact, that may have been the reason one female participant never responded to my invitation to the group interview. Those students who did participate in the group
interview were asked to maintain confidentiality about what was discussed during the session.

The screening questionnaire was assigned a unique participant number so that I would be able to identify and contact participants for personal interviews. However, the final page of the questionnaire that showed both the name and participant number was removed from the body of the questionnaire and kept separately in a locked drawer. At the close of the study period, these pages will be destroyed. The actual questionnaires, however, will be retained for potential future quantitative analysis. No identifying information appears on the body of the questionnaires.

Each student was advised about their rights as a study participant on an informed consent form (See Appendix E). They had the right to refuse to answer any question during the interview process; they also were allowed to withdraw from the study without incurring any penalty from their higher education institution. I provided each participant with information about how I plan to use the data I collected, the contact information for myself and dissertation chair, and contact information for the chairs of the School of Education Internal Review Committee (EDIRC) and the university Protection of Human Subjects Committee (PHSC).

Because the in-depth interviews asked for participants to recall challenging or stressful learning experiences, there was the possibility that some might experience emotional or psychological distress as the result of the interview process. I made every effort to explain in detail the nature of the interviews during the recruitment period and when securing informed consent from the participants. Additionally, I reminded participants at the beginning of the interview that they could refrain from answering any
question they found distressing and could terminate the interview at any time without penalty. If any participant had experienced distress, I was prepared to provide information about college resources, such as counseling services, and to assist the student with accessing those resources.

**Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations**

The underlying assumption of the grounded theory approach I used was that "how persons experience events, and the meanings that they give to those experiences" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 16) is both interesting and important. However, the world is complex and human experience is fluid. Although I did hope to develop a theory to cover all facets of my participants' experiences, I realized that "capturing it all is virtually impossible" (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Therefore, I proceeded with the understanding that I would emerge from this investigation with a "thoroughly partial" (Richardson, 2000, p. 934) understanding of what I had studied.

This study was delimited by my selection of participants from only one branch of the military services and one community college. Although I could have included participants from other branches if I recruited a larger participant sample, the practical issues involved in my qualitative approach demanded a smaller sample size and, therefore, required a more narrow focus. However, this boundary I have imposed on the study also helped accentuate the impact on the development of self-authorship caused by experiences the participants did have in common. I also limited participation to students no older than 25 years at the time of the first interview. Since self-authorship is a developmental stage, interviewing students at younger ages who are nearing self-
authorship or who have achieved it showed more significantly how life experiences impacted the development of self-authorship.

One limitation of the study was reliance on in-depth personal interviews for data generation. However, I sought to delve deeply into the narratives in order to enrich my analysis and provide a multi-faceted interpretation of the meanings my participants made from their experiences. The methods of constant comparisons and memo writing, along with member checking, added to the credibility and rigor of my analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Consulting with peer reviewers also increased the rigor and credibility of the analysis.

A second limitation was the CMVE and the services it offers to military students. This office is a unique entity which is not present on most community college campuses. It is possible that the support student veterans receive from the CMVE could affect their psychological development and integration into the college environment. Although I was not able to directly mitigate the possible influences of the CMVE’s involvement in students’ development, I was careful during my analysis and reporting to take such possible influences into account.

Conclusion

The construct of self-authorship is complex, involving cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal psychological domains (Kegan, 1994; Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2009). In order to examine the development of self-authorship in Navy student veterans, I employed a sophisticated research design. The design I have just described included a quantitative measure as a screening tool and multiple meetings with participants for in-depth interviews and group discussion. The analysis also had to be thorough, with
constant comparison of concepts; asking questions of myself, the data, and the 
participants; and consideration of my own personal experience, the context of the 
participants' experiences, and the literature in the field. The findings from my data 
collection and analysis are described in detail in Chapters 4 and 5 below. In Chapter 6, I 
posit an explanatory framework to serve as a theory of how military experience supports 
the development of self-authorship.
Chapter 4: Survey Results and Participant Profiles

The data collected during the study period generated one quantitative and two qualitative datasets. The quantitative dataset is derived from the Career Decision-Making Survey – Military Edition (CDMS-ME) results. It provides demographic information as well as some insights about why the participants joined the military and whom they consult when faced with making decisions or evaluating new information. Although it is not useful for the purposes of this investigation to report the results of all parts of the CDMS-ME, those data that do relate to the themes appearing in the interviews or which provide a deeper understanding of participant backgrounds and characteristics are described in this chapter and discussed further in Chapter Six. Additionally, and most relevant to this study, the CDMS-ME results include participant scores for the self-authorship screening questionnaire. These are reported for all participants and discussed in detail for those who advanced to the interview phase of the study.

The first qualitative dataset arises from my analysis of each of the transcripts for the first round of individual interviews according to the Wabash National Study (WNS) Phase 2 Summary Template (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). These first-round interviews focused on significant decisions and experiences in the participants’ lives. The purpose of this analysis was to determine the developmental levels of participants on the self-authorship continuum (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). The overall developmental level, as well as the levels in each of the three domains (cognitive,
intrapersonal, and interpersonal), are reported for each of the nine participants. I also provide illustrations from the interviews of how the participants demonstrate the hallmarks of their particular levels.

Finally, the second qualitative dataset consists of themes that emerged during coding across all the interviews and field notes as well as from memos I wrote during constant comparison analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In addition to emergent themes, I found rich descriptions from the participants about their backgrounds, reasons for joining and leaving the military, and reflections on how participating in this study had affected them. I have incorporated those excerpts with the WNS developmental analysis in this chapter to provide a deep, textured portrayal of each student. The emergent themes merited separate treatment and are therefore listed and described in detail in Chapter Five. I discuss connections among themes and possible overarching theories in Chapter Six.

Career Decision-Making Survey – Military Edition (CDMS-ME) Results

I distributed my survey widely during the registration period at all four campuses of Tidewater Community College (TCC) as well as at nearby Navy base education offices. I was able to collect 23 surveys from Navy student veterans who were 25 years old or younger, had 12 or fewer credit hours in college-level classes, and had enlisted within one year of their graduation from high school.

Of the 23 Navy student veterans who completed the CDMS-ME, 14 (60%) were men and nine were women with ages ranging from 22 to 25 years. Three (13%) identified as African American, 14 (60%) as Caucasian, two (8.6%) as Hispanic, two as Multiracial, and two as Other (i.e., American and Human written in response space).
I recorded the responses for the self-authorship portion of the survey, which is found in Section 2-9 of the CDMS-ME (See Appendix A) and found each participant’s mean score for questions relating to each of the three developmental levels: External Foundations (EF), Crossroads (CR), and Early Self-Authoring (ESA). At the External Foundations level, individuals are relying more heavily on external authorities to tell them how to respond to dilemmas; they also tend to accept the opinions of those authorities without any critical evaluation. At the Crossroads level, individuals are beginning to experience some dissatisfaction with the answers provided by external authorities or feel a sense of dissonance between what they have been told about the world and the ways they are encountering it for themselves. At the Early Self-Authoring level, individuals are beginning to listen to their internal voices and constructing a framework for decision-making and relating to the world that relies more on that voice than on external authorities.

Additionally, I coded the written responses in Section 2-10 of the CDMS-ME in order to provide additional support for my decision to include or exclude participants from the interview phase of the study. The six codes I created are:

- NAR – narrative; does not explain but does state an answer; cannot assign self-authorship code to this response
- IR – insufficient response; does not provide enough information for code assignment (this response does not even meet the requirements for the NAR code)
- – answer left blank
- EF – external foundations; respondent shows more reliance on external sources of information & influence for decision-making
- CR – crossroads; external influences are cited alongside internal foundations
- ESA – early self-authoring; internal foundations take precedence

The last three codes are based on those used in the validation study for the CDMS (original version) (Creamer et al., 2010). I added the others to adequately describe the actual responses I received from students.

I wanted to interview students who showed signs of being in the Crossroads or at the Early Self-Authoring level. The CDMS (original version) had been used to show development in individuals over time (Creamer et al., 2010), but it had never been used as a screening instrument for levels of self-authorship. There is no standard score that would indicate an individual has reached any of the three developmental levels. Rather, examining the relationship among scores, and especially the size of the difference between the External Foundations mean score and either of the other two means is more valuable.

It was necessary to differentiate between only the External Foundations score and either of the other two for three reasons. First, I needed to identify students who were at least in the Crossroads level of development and not necessarily in the Early Self-Authoring level, so a greater gap between External Foundations and the Crossroads would suffice. Second, as individuals leave the Crossroads and enter the level of Early Self-Authoring, the Crossroads score may actually dip below that of External Foundations; however, the difference between External Foundations and Early Self-Authoring will remain pronounced. And third, the correlation between the Crossroads and Early Self-Authoring parts of the instrument ($r = .888$) shows that there is a large amount of overlap in what is being measured and the two categories could justifiably be
collapsed into one (See the Instrumentation section of Chapter 3 for detailed validation and reliability information).

The mean scores across all surveys and all levels ranged from 2.7 to 4.0 (See Table 1). Given that this represented a difference of 1.3 points, I decided that an increase of at least 0.3 points, a 23% difference, between the External Foundations mean score and either the Crossroads or Early Self-Authoring mean scores represented a meaningful change in the way that that individual understands and interacts with the world. I made this decision based on intuition because I was using the survey in such an innovative way. I believed this 0.3 point criterion would help me select participants who were more likely to be at or near the threshold of self-authorship. I also knew that this selection was preliminary. The WNS Phase 2 analysis would confirm or contradict each selection and it was the overall developmental label resulting from that analysis that would determine my final participant pool.
Table 1

*Career Decision-Making Survey Scores*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>EF</th>
<th>CR</th>
<th>ESA</th>
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<th>WR 2</th>
<th>WR 3</th>
<th>WR 4</th>
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*Note.* Headings have been abbreviated as follows: EF=External Foundations; CR=Crossroads; ESA=Early Self-Authoring; WR=Written Response. Additional codes for the Written Responses are as follows: NAR=Narrative; IR=Insufficient Response.

I had originally intended to summarily remove from the pool of candidates those whose Crossroads (CR) or Early Self-Authoring (ESA) mean scores were not at least 0.3 points higher than their External Foundations (EF) scores. However, this would have left me only 10 potential interviewees. In order to expand the pool of potential participants as widely as possible, I used both the developmental category mean scores and the written response codes to identify these students. In order for a student with CR or ESA scores
less than 0.3 points higher than the EF score to receive an invitation to interview, he or
she would have to show either Crossroads or Early Self-Authoring traits in at least three
of the four written responses.

Table 2 shows the scores of six students who did not have at least a 0.3 point
increase between their External Foundations score and that of either of the other two
developmental levels nor at least three of the four written responses coded at Crossroads
or Early Self-Authoring. These students ultimately were not contacted for a personal
interview.

Table 2

Participants Not Contacted for Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>EF</th>
<th>CR</th>
<th>ESA</th>
<th>WR 1</th>
<th>WR 2</th>
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Note. Headings have been abbreviated as follows: EF=External Foundations;
CR=Crossroads; ESA=Early Self-Authoring; WR=Written Response. Additional codes
for the Written Responses are as follows: NAR=Narrative; IR=Insufficient Response.

Table 3 shows the students who were invited to the first interview, which was
conducted according to the Wabash National Study of Liberal Arts Education (WNS)
first-year interview protocol (Baxter Magolda & King, 2007). These students had Crossroads or Early Self-Authoring mean scores that were at least 0.3 points higher than their External Foundations mean score or at least three written responses coded at Crossroads or Early Self-Authoring.

Table 3

*Participants Invited to First-Round Personal Interviews*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
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<th>ESA</th>
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<td>M</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Asterisks indicate those students included in the interview pool based on the codes of their written responses. Headings have been abbreviated as follows: EF=External Foundations; CR=Crossroads; ESA=Early Self-Authoring; WR=Written Response. Additional codes for the Written Responses are as follows: NAR=Narrative; IR=Insufficient Response. Ethnicity labels are taken directly from the Career Decision-Making Survey. In the Other category, Participant 1018 wrote in “Human” and Participant 1022 wrote in “American – it shouldn’t matter.”
I included columns showing age, sex, and ethnicity because those characteristics were all factors I considered in trying to achieve a final sample that was as diverse and young as possible as well as balanced between men and women. In practice, however, I did invite all participants shown on this list. Some did not respond even after repeated e-mail messages; I followed up with telephone calls but was still unsuccessful in contacting a few of these students. My final sample size for the first round of interviews was ten students, four of whom were women. Four of the men and two of the women identified as Caucasian, two of the women as Hispanic, and one of the men as Multi-racial. Participant 1018 identified as “Human,” which he later explained was due to his multi-racial and international heritage as well as his unwillingness to participate in the type of ethnic categorization prevalent in the United States. Their profiles and developmental levels are described in the following section.

Participant Profiles and Developmental Levels

Nine participants who accepted my invitation to be interviewed met with me individually early in the fall semester for 60 to 90 minutes for the first interview. A tenth participant (Participant 1018), who was initially overlooked due to a clerical error, was invited to the first interview early in the spring semester; however, during the course of the interview he revealed that he had received an Associate of Applied Science degree from credits accumulated during his service in the Navy. Had I interviewed him during the fall semester, the number of credit hours represented by that degree still would have exceeded the 12 or fewer used as an eligibility requirement for participants. Therefore that participant was ineligible for the study and his interview is not included in the current analysis.
During our meetings, the participants chose pseudonyms for themselves, signed the informed consent form, and received the incentive payment of $25 (see Table 4 below for the list of participants). Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. I then checked each transcript for accuracy. I drafted a synopsis of the interview and sent it to the participant for comments and corrections, if any. All participants except Jack replied and noted that the synopsis was accurate and complete.

I analyzed the transcripts according to the WNS Phase 2 Summarizing Training Manual, which supplied labels to match the location descriptions on the self-authorship continuum (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012). These labels are shown below in Figure E within the framework of the self-authorship continuum. The transcript of one student was difficult to analyze because of his self-described shyness and reticence. Therefore, I analyzed his second interview as well for self-authorship development and enlisted the support of two peer debriefers to confirm his placement on the continuum. These peer debriefers had studied the construct of self-authorship and were actively engaged in research focused on integration of learning, an element of the WNS interview protocol. See the Data Collection section of Chapter 3 for a detailed explanation of this process.
Figure E. Developmental continuum with meaning making labels. Adapted from Baxter Magolda & King (2012, p. 19) and the WNS Phase 2 Summarizing Training Manual, an internal document supporting data collection for “Assessing Meaning Making and Self-Authorship,” (Baxter Magolda & King, 2012).

Table 4 shows the overall developmental placement for each of the nine interviewees as well as the labels for each of the three domains comprising the overall assessment. A description of each student’s level of self-authorship and examples of how that level was manifested in the interview appear after the table.
Table 4

Locations of Participants on the Self-Authorship Continuum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Overall Meaning Making</th>
<th>Cognitive Domain</th>
<th>Intrapersonal Domain</th>
<th>Interpersonal Domain</th>
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<td>Primarily Internal [I(E)]</td>
<td>Early Internal [la]</td>
<td>Primarily Internal [I(E)]</td>
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<td>Primarily Internal [I(E)]</td>
<td>Primarily Internal [I(E)]</td>
<td>Primarily Internal [I(E)]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>Primarily Internal [I(E)]</td>
<td>Mixed Internal [I-E]</td>
<td>Primarily Internal [I(E)]</td>
<td>Early Internal [la]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>Primarily Internal [I(E)]</td>
<td>Primarily Internal [I(E)]</td>
<td>Primarily Internal [I(E)]</td>
<td>Primarily Internal [I(E)]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash</td>
<td>Early Internal [la]</td>
<td>Early Internal [la]</td>
<td>Early Internal [la]</td>
<td>Primarily Internal [I(E)]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rusty. Rusty (Participant 1004) is a 23-year-old White man who dropped out of school at a young age. When he reached the age of 16, Rusty recognized that he could not have the future he wanted without more education, so he studied for a General Equivalency Diploma (GED). Rusty joined the Navy in order to get away from his hometown and begin a new life. When I asked why he chose the Navy over other branches of the military, he responded, “I thought about the Marine Corps and told my mom, and she cried. So I went Navy.” In the Navy, Rusty worked on an aircraft carrier. He was promoted quickly and selected to be a supervisor by the age of 20. His drive and determination to succeed were evident in our interview as well.

Rusty’s overall level is Mixed Internal [I-E]. Although Rusty shows some Primarily Internal [I(E)] characteristics in each domain, he nevertheless fits best with the descriptions of the Mixed Internal [I-E] level of development. Cognitively, Rusty is aware that his own knowledge is valuable as is his ability to direct his own learning. In the Navy, this manifested in his job:

I worked on heavy equipment. I loved it, . . . but I don’t want to do that the rest of my life. And there were some things I just didn’t understand, like electrical, like running wires and testing troubleshooting electrical systems. I didn’t understand that at all, but I put my mind to it, I started reading about it, and I’m not a master or anything, but I can definitely make your car run out there if it’s broken.

In college, this has translated into his understanding of the interdependent nature of learning:

Some things I don’t understand. I’m going to have to ask people. Don’t look down on people because they don’t know something. Like if you didn’t know
how to change your starter, I’m not going to look down on you because you don’t
know how to change your starter because I know how. Mixing and matching, I
guess, what you’re good at and what I’m good at, and all that.

Rusty is confident in his ability to learn and does not believe any person knows all the
answers. In his mind, people need each other to complete different facets of a project or
contribute to a body of knowledge.

In the intrapersonal domain, Rusty demonstrates confidence and a clear vision of
himself, but he is just now beginning to take steps toward fulfilling that vision. Part of
this vision includes being the first in his family to attain a college degree:

I guess it would have to be a pride thing for me. I’d be more prideful of myself
that I did the military and college, not or. So I guess that’s where it would come
in. And nobody, except for my Nana, which is my mom’s mom, has a college
degree. She has an associate’s. So I want to be the first person in my family to
actually do that.

Rusty realized he needed a college degree to do the kinds of jobs that interested him. The
first step toward that goal was attaining his GED through a program of self-study packets
and achievement tests. However, Rusty recognized the lasting impact this type of non-
traditional education has had on his ability to succeed in college:

Not going to the traditional school system, high school, middle school and all that.
I am behind. I’m not to the level where I should be and I see that. But I gotta
start somewhere . . . I gotta try harder. I’m not where I want to be . . . I’m a little
bit behind with not going to the traditional school and military, and all that. So I
gotta try harder. [Interviewer: And are you feeling that that’s going to be a doable
I can do anything if I want to. I have no doubt about that. If I want to, it’s going to get done.

Rusty showed confidence in his ability to succeed even from the beginning of his college journey. He is listening carefully to his internal voice to guide him through decisions related to his goals and desires.

In the interpersonal domain, Rusty asserts himself and is not concerned with the opinions of others for creating his sense of identity. This includes his relationships with faculty members. When describing an incident where he was penalized five points for a late assignment that he had actually turned in on time, Rusty said:

Doesn’t really affect me. I know who I am and I know I told the truth. So it’s on her. I don’t really care, honestly. [Laughter] I know it sounds bad that I don’t care. I do care about school and all that, but she doesn’t want to believe what happened, then that’s fine and it’s only five points.

His relationships with other students are casual, but friendly. Rusty explained, “I’m not an anti-social person. I’m not. I’ll meet people. I love talking to people. But if I build my mindset into I’m here to make friends, then I’m not going to do the schoolwork.” Rusty wants to have interdependent relationships with people but is determined to focus on his educational and professional goals first.

When I asked Rusty whether participating in the interview had affected his thinking, he replied:

Yes, the answer is yes and it’s a lot of things you’re subconsciously aware of, but you don’t really think about them till you get asked. I don’t know. [Interviewer:
And so being asked has brought it more to the forefront of your thinking?] Right.


Although Rusty admitted that his reflection on the interviews and himself became less frequent over time, he nevertheless appreciated the opportunity to discuss topics that no one had ever asked him about before.

**Abby.** Abby (Participant 1005) is a 23-year-old White woman. She grew up in the suburbs of a large city and described her upbringing as very sheltered with little exposure to people from ethnically diverse backgrounds. However, Abby did come into contact with other types of diversity during her adolescence. She recounted how her parents divorced because her mother is gay:

Right after they got divorced, maybe six months later, we moved into my mom’s friend’s house, who I thought they were just friends. But then they were sleeping in the same room, and I don’t think it clicked until a couple years later they bought a house together. And then she never directly told me until I was a little older.

Abby said her mother did not explain the relationship at first, seeming to think that Abby would “figure it out.” After graduating high school, Abby worked several different jobs and then joined the Navy about one year later. She wanted to join the Air Force but was not accepted and she did not want to be in the infantry in the Army. In the Navy, she never went to sea, although she did perform aircraft repairs on board ships for short periods of time. She married another sailor shortly after enlisting and had two children by the time she separated from the Navy after four years of active service.
Abby's overall level of development is Primarily Internal [I(E)], the final stage in the Crossroads and on the threshold of entering self-authorship. In the cognitive domain, she regularly evaluates external sources and mediates the influence of those sources on her understanding of the world through critical analysis. For example, Abby said she thinks one of the effects college has on people in general, and on her in particular, is to cause them to questions things more. She described how what she has read in her psychology text book conflicts with her own experiences as a mother:

I just don’t know how these people come up with these books, but . . . certain researchers have done these things that skin-to-skin contact shows that that child will be closer to the parent. And in my head, I’m going, “I did skin-to-skin contact with my youngest one, and he is in his own world.” My older one, I was like, “Give him back to me when he’s pretty,” and he's a mama’s boy. So I don’t really – maybe they’re not old enough to – I don’t know, but I’m just like, “What studies did you do that showed this stuff,” ’cause I don’t think that’s something they can really do a study on.

Abby chose to trust her own experience with her children rather than the theories of experts. And when evaluating new ideas, Abby said, “I will listen, but it’s usually based on my opinion. I’m like, ‘Uh, that’s not a very good – no, I don’t agree with that.’”

In the intrapersonal domain, Abby has learned that she can create her own emotions and happiness by choosing how to respond to reality. She described a period of time when her husband was away and she had to juggle family life and her work schedule. Her emotions became frayed from the stress and she often felt angry. However, she learned to choose how to react to this reality: “To dissipate it, you step
back, and I have to put the kids in front of the TV, have my own little moment, and just take a step back and relax.” Abby also throws herself into her school work in order to deal with the pressure she feels to succeed: “It’s just those moments where you lose confidence in yourself and you’re like, ‘What if?’ Then I’ll finish my homework or something and I’ll be, ‘All right, this is not bad. I’ll make it through.’”

In the interpersonal domain, Abby considers the opinions and advice of others, but often chooses to listen to her internal voice when making decisions. When I asked about who she had consulted when considering enrolling in college, Abby mentioned her mother but asserted that the final choice was her own:

I think going from the military to college is so different than just to college that – I mean she can give me advice, she can talk to me, but she doesn’t understand what it’s like. So her advice is helpful, her opinions are helpful, but it’s different ’cause she doesn’t understand.

Advice from coworkers and supervisors in the Navy also did not influence her decision very much:

I feel like these people that are in the Navy so long, that’s what they know; that’s what they’re used to. So in their opinion, that’s what you should do, you know what I mean? . . . So I think their opinion’s really one-sided. I mean at the end of the day, it’s my decision.

She does not see her identity as something that is defined by her relationships and is willing to reevaluate or even end relationships that do not support her own needs.

Abby talked a great deal about the stress she felt while on active duty in the Navy. The frustration she felt from juggling an unpredictable schedule with child care
responsibilities led to her decision to leave the Navy. Although her husband helped
equally with child rearing responsibilities, he occasionally left for temporary duty out of
town. That left Abby to carry the weight of the family alone in addition to the
requirements of her job. As she struggled with those competing responsibilities, she
often consulted her mother or husband for advice. However, in the end she almost
always chose to act as her internal voice led her to act. At the end of the first interview, I
asked Abby if she saw any connections among the stories she had shared with me. She
replied:

I’m usually really nervous and stressed out and anxious, and it ends up fine. I
don’t know why I stress out over everything, but I do. . . . I should trust myself
more in my opinions because if I look back on when I said I wanted to get out of
the military, I asked my mom, talk with my mom, stress out some more, talk to
my husband, stress out, and I have to have his okay, I have to have everyone’s
okay and everyone to be like, “Okay, you got this” – you know what I mean?
When if I would’ve just in the first place made my own decision, it would’ve
turned out the same way.

Abby said that part of the effect of participating in this study was the realization that she
made good decisions and should trust herself more. She thought she had begun to do that
even before the interview but that having the opportunity to verbalize her internal
struggles helped her see she was indeed capable of following her own voice.
Ranae. Ranae (Participant 1006) is a 24-year-old Hispanic woman. Her father served in the Navy and the family moved frequently between the East and West Coasts. Although Ranae identifies as Hispanic and, specifically, Mexican, she said in the interviews that her family is multiracial and includes members from Asian, Black, and Native American groups. Ranae first became involved with the Navy through Junior ROTC in high school and planned to make the military her career. However, she was medically discharged for a chronic illness that prevented her from deploying or working around heavy machinery. Ranae was married while in the Navy, but her husband filed for divorce at roughly the same time Ranae was told by her command that she would be discharged.

Ranae’s overall placement on the self-authorship continuum is at the Primarily Internal [I(E)] level. As Ranae told her story, she included a great deal of information about her background and upbringing. For example, Ranae felt pressure to keep the family balanced and stable because her father physically abused her mother and her mother often was unable to care for Ranae and Ranae’s younger brother. Ranae accepted the external structure of her traditional family and sought to keep it intact by taking on adult responsibilities even at the ages of six and seven years old.

When Ranae was in middle school, her mother began to take steps to change their situation:

She was a stay-at-home mom for a long time. Then she decided to go back to school to get her GED. . . . I think that being as traditional as my father was, his wife was to stay at home and that was it. . . . To her it was I gotta do what I gotta do to get my kids out of this situation, because again he was a very abusive man. . . . At that point, we didn’t see a lot of it and the majority of the time we didn’t
have to take any of the brunt of it, but when my mom wasn’t there to protect us, that’s when we got the brunt of it. I got most of it because again, I was protecting my brother. I made sure he was taken care of.

Even at the young ages of 11 and 12, Ranae was beginning to show development toward listening to her internal voice. The family structure and her Hispanic culture – as she would mention later – required obedience to elders, particularly to the father. However, Ranae began to act against those structures in order to protect her brother.

In time, the physical abuse Ranae had only occasionally received became a regular event, which continued for two to three years until her parents divorced. Ranae believed that her mother never knew about it because she was often sedated for her own physical and mental conditions. Ranae’s paternal grandmother, however, lived with the family during this time and slept across the hall from Ranae’s room. Yet she never intervened or tried to protect Ranae. In boot camp, Ranae entered counseling and realized that her grandmother must have known about the abuse but chose not to become involved. I asked Ranae how she made meaning of that and she replied:

At the time [of the abuse] I just told myself she didn’t know. She was in her room and that was it. . . . Now [I know] she was protecting herself instead of protecting her grandkids. I hardly have any type of relationship with her anymore because of it and because of the stuff that she admitted to other family members. You heard stuff but didn’t come and protect anybody. I don’t want to say hate because that would mean that at some point I would still care.
Once Ranae was away from her father and grandmother, she was able to reject one set of values, that of paternal and elder authority, in order to elevate and follow different values, such as protecting the vulnerable, which were more reflective of her internal voice.

This example shows development in all three domains of Ranae’s life. Cognitively, she learned to rely on her own values rather than traditional family structures. Her interior life developed as she recognized her own strength to act on behalf of herself and her brother. She also learned to separate herself from people who were destructive influences in her life. This integration of domains appeared in other situations Ranae described. For example, when I asked her what kinds of relationships she hoped to build with other students in college, she responded:

The same thing [as in the Navy]. . . . I did not join the Navy to make friends. I don’t come to work expecting to make friends. I do what I gotta do and I go home. I joined the Navy to serve my country, to do what I had to do for me to better myself. . . . [In school], I have friends. I have ways of meeting people if I really want to. But I’m not exactly an extrovert. I’m very much an introvert as far as the way I tolerate things and I’m not a fan of people. So I generally just come to school, do what I gotta do and go home . . . if I make a few friends along the way, I make friends along the way. I know that probably sounds antisocial, but that’s who I am. It is what it is.

Ranae is comfortable with herself and accepts her introverted nature as a valid way of being, which is a function of her intrapersonal development. As a complement to that domain, she does not look for friends to define her but rather accepts friends to the extent that they support her internal voice, a function of her interpersonal development.
In contrast to the way Ranae rejected her traditional family structure, she wholeheartedly embraced the structure of the military. This began in high school with Junior ROTC:

I started that program freshman year and I was on all the first-year teams, which was just basically our junior varsity teams. I loved it. It was easy. It came naturally, the drill, the uniforms, the following orders, the structure. . . . With the ROTC I found I had an outlet for that stress I was trying to deal with at home where I could just go and forget everything else and I loved it. It was the only thing that was actually mine.

Although graduates of a Junior ROTC program often go on to the ROTC program at a four-year university and then are commissioned as officers, Ranae chose instead to enlist upon graduation. She felt she was not ready for college because she did not know what she wanted to study at that time. However, she found the transition to boot camp and active service in the Navy to be relatively easy because of her experience in Junior ROTC. She enjoyed working on the electrical systems of helicopters and would have remained in the Navy for at least 20 years. However, Ranae was diagnosed with a chronic illness that required narcotics to manage her pain; this severely limited her ability to work around heavy machinery. She recounted how her treatment eventually led to her discharge:

So it got to a point where they were just like, “No, you can’t do this.” I couldn’t still cross train to something that wasn’t as physical because I was no longer worldwide deployable. I was not deployable to a ship at that point because it’s too much up and down the ladders and everything to get from one place to
another. They were like, "We really can't do anything with you. You're not
useless, but you're not useful." So I was like, "Well, screw you too." [Laughs]

Although she laughed in the interview about the decision of her command, Ranae said
adjusting to life without any association to the Navy – as a family member, ROTC cadet,
or active duty member – was one of the hardest things she has ever done. Ranae used the
situation to reevaluate her goals and finally decided to study accounting for a business
career. She said she still needs structure in her life but she finds structure more from her
own goals than from any external influence.

When I asked Ranae about her best and worst experiences in the past year, she
chose to talk about her marriage and divorce. She married against her mother's wishes
because Ranae felt it was what she wanted and needed to do:

I don't regret in any way, shape or form marrying my ex-husband. I feel like that
was probably the best decision I'd ever made for myself, was actually marrying
him. Because it was that one time where I didn’t care what anybody else thought
or felt or what their opinion was on the entire matter. And I just did what I did for
me. And him.

Ranae's husband left her after only six months but Ranae still believes she made the right
choice for herself. The divorce, though certainly devastating for Ranae, also played a
beneficial role in her development as she described in this way:

[The best experience] was still my divorce because I had to look at myself and
reevaluate. That gave me a point to say, "Okay, what do I actually want to do
with my life? What am I doing and what is the plan?" At that point it was like a
little light bulb went off and it was like, "Okay, this is what you're gonna do, this
is what you’re gonna go to school for and after that,” — it was still hard trying to get over losing my career and my husband — “it was like okay, there’s still a light at the end of the tunnel. . . . I’m actually doing this to make me happy, which is a new concept for me because I’ve always taken care of everybody else.”

At first, Ranae felt lost without her husband. She had intentionally traded her independent mindset in order to conform to his wishes for her dependence on him. When he left, she not only reacquired her independence but she strengthened it by formulating a plan for her life. She also learned how she wants to approach relationships in the future:

While you can love somebody you can’t let that blind you. You have to continue to move forward and do what you gotta do for you. You have to be self-sufficient and self-dependent before you can be co-dependent.

Ranae now looks for friendships and relationships that are interdependent (which she called “co-dependent”) and support her goals and internal values.

When I asked Ranae about how participating in this study had impacted her thinking, she replied:

It’s actually kinda made me think about things a little bit more in-depth than I probably would have. Simply for the fact that a lot of these questions nobody will probably ever ask me again and have never asked me before, so it’s actually making me think about life in general and life as a whole and not just, “Okay so this is what I’m doing right now. And yes, this is what it leads up to and everything,” but it’s like, “How does everything that I’ve already done affect everything that I’m doing or will do, and how are my decisions that I made in the past going to affect my future?”
This summation of her thoughts shows the personal reflection Ranae engaged in concerning the interviews and the topics we discussed. She said she is thinking more deliberately about how past and present actions are related and how both may impact her future and her happiness.

Danielle. Danielle (Participant 1010) is a 22-year-old White woman who said she joined the Navy because it was one of the only ways to leave her hometown. Danielle’s parents divorced when she was a child and she lived with her father most of the time. Her mother used drugs regularly, a lifestyle that Danielle initially tried to embrace but later eschewed because she saw the destructive influence it had on her life. Danielle married another sailor during the course of this study and her husband plans to make the Navy his career.

On the self-authorship continuum, Danielle’s overall developmental level falls with the Mixed Internal [I-E] approach to meaning making. In the interpersonal domain, she relates with others in interdependent ways; she is also moving toward a more complex way of viewing herself in the world in the intrapersonal domain. This suggests she is approaching the Primarily Internal [I(E)] developmental level. However, Danielle did not give many examples in her narrative about how she sees the world, especially with regard to authority or her role in constructing knowledge. Those she did give all fell within the Mixed Internal [I-E] level of development.

For example, Danielle faced considerable resistance from her supervisors when she told them she was considering separating. She found herself having to defend her point of view to them:
They were telling me that they didn’t think I was doing the right thing and that I wasn’t going to succeed outside the Navy. You can’t tell somebody that. And it took a lot for me to get over all that because here I am, I’m trying to do something I feel like I really want and they were making me feel like I had to do what they wanted me to do. It was like, “No, that’s not how it works.”

Danielle felt betrayed by her supervisors because she believed part of their role was to support her regardless of whether or not she decided to pursue a Navy career. She persevered through that conflict and acted according to her internal voice. However, the opinions of her supervisors clearly mattered a great deal to her, an indication that the noise of external voices still distracts her to some degree.

Danielle also told me about a time she had to make a difficult decision. Although she did follow her internal voice, the results were not what she expected they would be:

I usually try to do the right thing any time I get the chance. . . . I never try to do anything that’s going to have a long term bad decision. If I think it’s going to be bad or something, I usually try to avoid it. Because the one time that I did do something that I thought that I wanted for myself and then now that I look back, it was a very bad decision and it made things so tense in my life. Ever since then, I’m like, “I’m never going to do anything bad like that.” For me, it was a difficult decision, I guess, and I just made a wrong one.

Danielle’s concern for right over wrong and good versus bad could indicate a less complex understanding of the world. However, the standard she used to determine that her decision was “bad” had little to do with whatever the action was but rather how the
resulting tension affected her. She judged the merit of choices and actions in this case according to her own personal knowledge and values.

Danielle's interior life developed during her time in the Navy. She entered the service both to make her father proud and to be with her high school boyfriend. When she was in boot camp, however, she had time to reflect on that decision and whether it was right for her. This introspection led her to understand that she could – and should – choose her path based on her own needs and desires. This in turn motivated her to excel in her job and rise quickly through the enlisted ranks. She described her growth in the Navy and how she thought she would continue to grow in college:

I feel like through the Navy, I had already grown as an adult, but at the same time, through the military, you're babied. You know you have that secure environment, you know there is no way you're going to lose that unless you screw up and go out and do something intentionally to screw it up. School is kind of like my way of testing myself. Like, "Hey, are you really the grown up you think you are? . . . Well, here is the time to prove it." . . . I feel like a lot of people that come straight out of high school aren't ready for college, because they still do have that mind of a child . . . depending on the parents and stuff. I went into the Navy so I could depend on myself, but I still at the same time had the Navy to lean on. Now I'm finally on my own, trying to just lean on myself.

For Danielle, the Navy provided a safety net for growth, which she used to become more independent and confident in her own judgment.

After five years, Danielle realized she had exhausted the learning experiences available to her in her particular job. She described her rate, or job category, as the
lowest rate in the Navy. After the newness wore off, she realized she would be better off as a civilian. She described her trepidation as she approached this decision:

It was a very difficult decision for me to get out of the Navy. I was very scared, because like I said, I had always felt like the Navy was my fallback. So leaving my fallback to start out on my own was very scary.

When I asked her how she overcame that fear, she told me how she answered her detractors:

I don’t want to not get out of the Navy because I’m scared. I want to get out because I feel like I’m ready to get out . . . or I want to stay in because I feel like I want to stay in. And so I didn’t want to be one of those people that just reenlisted just because they were scared they weren’t ready to make it on their own. I felt like if I can succeed here [in college] then I have nothing else to be afraid of.

Danielle calmed the fears in her mind with support from a mentor and peers who encouraged her to follow her internal voice. This group of friends provided insight into her accomplishments and personal strengths, which allowed Danielle to trust herself and her decision.

Danielle’s way of making meaning in her relationships showed signs of complexity and interdependence. As an adolescent, Danielle began using drugs as a way of connecting with her mother who was involved in that lifestyle. Danielle said that halfway through her high school years she decided to stop that behavior even though it caused friction with her mother. She explained:

I felt like it wasn’t what I wanted to do. I felt like I was doing it because in my mom’s eyes it was cool and I wanted to be accepted by my mom, because I really
never was. . . . I finally was like, "This isn’t for me, I don’t feel right doing this. I need to be a good role model for my little sister, because she doesn’t have that through my mom."

Danielle also had engaged in self-harm practices with a group of friends. Around the same time she stopped using drugs, she decided to stop harming herself:

[My friends and I] all used to kind of self-harm. I broke myself away from them a little bit. I still was their friend, but not so much, because it was hard for me seeing them doing that, knowing I didn’t want them to and knowing that I got past it, I wanted them to get past it, and it was just difficult. So I had a big change of scenery with my friends.

Danielle recognized at a young age that ending harmful relationships, even important relationships, was necessary in order to follow her internal voice.

In the Navy, Danielle said she formed friendships with the people she worked with. She described the camaraderie as "family" and feeling of unity. Once she separated, however, she seldom saw those friends and missed having that close social contact in her life. Making friends in college was not as easy as it had been for her in high school or in the Navy. Yet Danielle continued to choose relationships carefully even though she felt lonely. She told me about her unmet expectations along with her willingness to be patient with the process of making friends:

I was really hoping to actually connect a little more because in my hometown, if you talk to somebody, you become friends. So it’s definitely different here than how it is from where I’m from. Now, I’m trying to get used to people [who are] are different. Everybody is brought up differently. . . . I don’t really have a plan.
I mean, the way I see it, I’m not really going to force friendships. Friendships are friendships. They happen for a reason. You know, you don’t really force them. You can’t really force them.

Danielle talked about her loneliness and desire for friendship throughout the interviews. However, she also reiterated her standard for friends: “I don’t want the wrong friendships, you know? I want people to be interested in what I want to do.” Danielle would not allow her friends to define her but rather insisted that they support the values and interests she had already developed.

When I asked Danielle how participating in this study had impacted her thinking, if at all, she replied:

You have asked me some questions that I have never really thought about. . . . It’s made me think of things a little bit differently than I did. Before I would’ve never even thought that I was doing these things and it actually made me think about how I did do them.

During boot camp and her time in the Navy, Danielle developed a finely-tuned process of self-reflection and had learned to accept herself and the decisions she had made. She is continuing that process in an effort to cultivate her internal voice.

Lucy. Lucy (Participant 1014) is a 24-year-old Hispanic woman. Her mother immigrated to this country and Lucy spoke often of her admiration for her mother and how hard she has worked to make a new life for herself and her family. Lucy’s stepfather served 12 years in the Navy. When Lucy considered entering the military, both of her parents steered her toward the Navy. Lucy is the oldest of five children and has a large extended family. When I asked about her personal interests or activities she said, “Just
spending time with family and friends. . . . Family is everything to me.” During her two and a half years in the Navy, Lucy worked as a boatswain’s mate.

Lucy did not say as much about the ways she sees the world compared to descriptions of her interior life and her relationships with others. Both her intrapersonal and interpersonal developmental levels are nearing self-authorship, but the imbalance with her cognitive sphere prevents an assessment higher than Primarily Internal [I(E)].

Some insights into Lucy’s cognitive level of development emerged when she discussed her transition from the military to college:

It’s just what you said, self-reliance. It’s nice. You’re not a kid anymore. You don’t have your parents telling you what you need to do. You’re not in the Navy anymore. You don’t have your chief, your master chief or your senior chief telling you what you need to do.

Lucy had been the victim of a rape while in the Navy and when she described the chain of events following the assault, she said:

I felt like I was just being a robot before everything happened. Everything happens for a reason. Maybe the event that changed everything for me was not the best thing, but it did open my eyes to the fact that it kind of felt like it put me back, in a sense, in touch with reality.

Although she expresses a fatalistic belief (“everything happens for a reason”), which seems to indicate a less complex approach to meaning making in her cognitive development, Lucy also affirms her recognition of the value of her experience in spite of its negative – even traumatic – qualities. She emerged from the experience able to reconnect with emotions she had buried for years and summed up her current outlook in
this way: “I just got everything out of my system. Now I’m to the point where I just focus on making myself successful.”

Lucy expressed a high degree of contentment with her life after suffering the assault and separating from the Navy. Her goals during college remain focused on making herself successful:

I get stuff done. I don’t sit around the house. I just see some of my friends that have gotten out of the Navy, and they just sit there and don’t do anything . . . I see myself and I don’t want to become that. I’m happy where I’m at now.

When Lucy decided to separate from the Navy, she could have saved herself a great deal of administrative trouble and emotional exhaustion by simply taking a medical discharge. She had been in counseling for both the rape and the ensuing substance abuse, which she described as her coping mechanism. However, she knew herself well enough to realize she would regret such a decision:

I know a lot of people when they can’t deal with the Navy anymore, they go to medical. You get a medical discharge, but I managed to get an honorable discharge and I fought for that . . . Because it will come back when you’re trying to get a job. That was so important to me, getting an honorable discharge. I don’t want a medical discharge. I’m not fucking crazy. I’m not on meds or anything. It’s just I had a bad time, a bad moment. I overcame it with my family and my good friends and the faith of God and just pushing myself. I’ve been through worse situations. I can overcome this. Here I am.
In this statement, Lucy shows she understands herself and her values. She is unwilling to allow one event to define her; she is also unwilling to allow herself to acquiesce to convenience by accepting anything other than an honorable discharge.

In the interpersonal domain, Lucy described close family ties, but recognized that she is the one with the ultimate authority for forming her own identity. She also described the bond with other service members that many veterans experience:

I’m here to get an education, not to make friends. If I make friends along the way, wonderful; if I don’t, I don’t . . . I have a handful of civilian friends, but the rest are military and Navy . . . All your other friends, your civilian friends, maybe your childhood friends, if they didn’t serve with you they don’t have that special bond. I can’t explain it. It’s just they understand . . . I know every time I’ve had an issue or something and I’ve gone to them, they don’t turn their back. They’re always there for me.

Near the end of the interview, Lucy made this statement about how coming to college has affected her:

It makes me want to learn more, to be honest. There’s so much out there, so much to do. I feel like it’s made me more of an ambitious person. I just want to better myself . . . I want to be proud of myself. I want to look back and be,

“Wow, after everything you’ve been through, you overcame those obstacles and here you are now, a little bit later than you expected, but you’re here now.” I’m really impressed with myself now. Now for sure, eight years from now I know for a fact that I will have a degree. That’s my main goal. I have no children. I’m not married anymore. With this [current] relationship, either you’re with me or
you’re not. As much as I love you, I’ve never loved somebody the way I’ve loved this person, but if you’re not gonna support me I’m sorry and there’s the door. I’m out of here.

In this single statement, Lucy demonstrates a complex understanding of the world, her identity in relation to others, and how she sees herself.

Lucy related her participation in this study to her success in college and her recognition of steps she could take to improve. She explained:

I talked about the class stuff, trying to engage with teachers and students here... With the classes that I’m not too in touch with the teachers, I’m not doing very well with. But the ones that engage with the students or that I at least engage the teachers – talk to the teachers and e-mail them – my grades are so much more better.

It was not until she described her learning experiences and preferences in these interviews that she noticed a common theme. Lucy planned to proactively engage with her teachers in the future in hopes of improving her grades and overall satisfaction with her studies.

Bob. Bob (Participant 1016) is a 24-year-old White man. Both of Bob’s parents are professionals, one in medicine and one in engineering. For that reason, Bob also expected he would go to college. However, he felt he would not be able to qualify for scholarships and did not want his parents to pay for his education. Therefore he joined the Navy in order to get the GI Bill educational benefits. In the Navy, Bob worked on the flight deck of an aircraft carrier. His work in the Navy led to his interest in becoming a
fire marshal or arson investigator. Bob is married with one child and a second expected during the spring semester.

Bob’s overall developmental level, as well as that of all three of his domains, was Primarily Internal [I(E)]. He was actively working to cultivate his internal voice and showed evidence that he engaged in introspection to analyze interests, goals, and desires. Cognitively, he evaluated external sources and mediated their influence through critical analysis. For example, when faced with difficult decisions during his time in the Navy, Bob approached the issue in this way:

I got into an argument a couple of times and those were difficult arguments because [they were] with way higher-ranking people than me, but it turns out I was right and I knew I was right because we had to study the manuals forever. So it was kind of difficult because it seems like people in higher positions are more hard-headed and they don’t want to – they don’t realize it, but the book’s been updated 15 times since they last read it . . . I was not just gonna do something and know it was wrong but keep my mouth shut because he’s a higher-ranking person. I’d speak my mind. So I think that’s what reflected off my evals and what got me the position of being a night check supervisor.

Bob was rewarded with good evaluations and more responsibility because he spoke up even when doing so was not popular. He was adamant throughout the interviews that adhering to safety rules was more important to him than doing what might please his supervisors. Bob’s approach to solving problems was also centered in his own way of thinking. He described how he looked at problems creatively:
Everyone deals with it different, I guess you would say, but to me I hear what the problem is, if there's a problem. Then instead of going straight into an argument or something, I try and come up with a different way to figure it out.

Bob evaluated the situation to determine whether a problem even existed before seeking a solution. He then tried to look at the problem from different perspectives before settling on a response.

In the intrapersonal domain, Bob accepted himself and was increasingly aware of his own identities, refining them to mesh with his values and desires. His career goal was to become either a fire marshal or arson investigator:

When I finally worked my way up to being a supervisor in the military, it's something I didn't want to give it up, but at the same time I wanted to move on with my life so I had to give up being a supervisor. I just think I like it better when we can work as a team, but I want to be the quarterback of that team. I don't want to be just one of the guys having to follow directions. I want to be the guy that tells you how to get it done.

Bob did not want to lead the team for the sake of his ego. Instead, he knew he was competent and could trust the plan he envisioned. Bob understood himself, his skills, and his desires. He also showed evidence that he recognized he can choose how to react to reality in order to minimize stress and increase personal happiness:

I have more pride now than I did [before joining the Navy] because I had the pride, "Yeah, I'm gonna join the military" and stuff like that, but still it was, "Oh, shit. What did I get myself into?" Now that it's all said and done and I'm
actually doing it, I feel like I’m a lot more proud and a lot more confident in my abilities to do stuff now . . . I feel awesome about it.

Bob talked a great deal about how important it was to him to put himself through college. He did not want to depend on his parents for his education. Now that he has left the Navy, he can see that his plan was sound and is taking him into the life he wants for himself.

Finally, in the interpersonal domain, Bob depended heavily on his wife for advice and support, but shared the burdens of family and career with her in an interdependent way. He described how they decided together that he should be the first one to attend college:

We both didn’t want to be military any more. It came time for her to reenlist or get out and that’s when we sat down and talked about it. I know we’re making good money, but it’s really, really hard both of us being military, so one of us has to go. I got in trouble earlier in my career, so I didn’t think I would go any higher than I was . . . We figured she’d have more of a chance to advance and do other things in her career, so she reenlisted because she also didn’t know what she wanted to go to college for yet, where I already had an idea.

Bob has recalibrated many of his relationships to harmonize with his internal values. He also showed strong signs of seeking out interdependent relationships. One example of this was the relationship he has with his house mates. Bob had invited two of his friends from the Navy to stay with him and his family while they put their financial affairs in order:
All of us respect each other, our own opinions. We all tease each other and stuff like that, like on different decisions, but if I want to do something then they know I’m going to do it regardless of what they say and vice versa. If they want to do something, I’m not talking them out of it. There’s no way.

Bob asserted in the interview that, as much as they liked and respected each other, neither of his two friends would be able to pressure him into doing something that contradicted his own desires and goals. In this situation, the three, along with Bob’s wife, were mutually respectful of the plans, goals, and worldviews of one another.

When I asked Bob whether participating in these interviews had affected his thinking, he was the only one of the participants to say they had not. He gave the following response: “Not really had an impact on my thinking. These [interviews] are just being honest with yourself, I guess you could say. And I never was one to lie, so it really hasn’t changed my thinking at all.” Bob did say he had reflected on the experience but reiterated that he felt unchanged by it.

Jack. Jack (Participant 1017) is a 25-year-old White man. His interview showed he was relying more on external foundations than on his internal voice. I have included excerpts from his interview and descriptions of his developmental progress here to show the full range of the data. However, I did not code this interview for emerging themes nor conduct a second interview with Jack since he did not meet the eligibility requirements of the study design (i.e., with regard to his location on the self-authorship continuum).

On the self-authorship continuum, Jack’s overall approach to meaning making was at the Mixed External [E-I] level. He still relied on the expectations of friends and
family to make sense of the world and his place in it. In a few instances, he described his
goals but then retreated to a position of ambiguity concerning those goals, indicating
either that he has not yet crafted a clear vision of his internal identity or that he is trying
to craft such a vision but does not know how to hear his internal voice over the noise of
external influences.

Jack showed a range of cognitive perspectives from the Late External [Ec] to the
Mixed External [E-I] levels. Some of his answers showed a reliance on fate for the tools
he needs to address a problem or find answers to his questions. This was especially clear
when he remarked:

I used to tell brand new guys that would come into the Navy, “You just do the
best you can with what you got. You’re not always gonna have the perfect tool
for the problem that you have in your life. So just do the best you can with what
you got . . . if it was that important, somehow the most important tool that you
would have needed to solve that most important problem your life would exist. It
would be in your life somehow.”

Although the idea of doing one’s best with the tools at hand can accommodate complex
ways of seeing the world, here it seems that Jack has no concept of constructing his own
tools to meet challenges. Instead, he is content to choose from a menu of pre-existing
options even when none are satisfactory for the task.

However, Jack also showed evidence of listening to his internal voice when he
described sifting through the ideas of others and considering how they fit into his own
world view:
You should take that information that you learned from those conversations, and you should apply it and rethink – re-morph your idea of what that whole conversation was about, and then think about it for a week or whatever, and go back and re-conversate with other people or the same people or – and just keep evolving. It never hurts to have more information.

Likewise, Jack stated that he had formed a set of internal values that might actually cause others to shift in their values if they were willing to engage in conversation with him:

Be open-minded and let things in and out and wing it, but you also have to have concrete things. You can be as mad as you want. That doesn't change my set of values. If we were to talk and mingle I think a lot of people would find that their set-in-stone values aren't as set in stone as they think. And they evolve [as] you get older and all that.

Both of these statements show that, although the external still predominates, Jack's internal voice sometimes wins. This is a characteristic of the Mixed External [E-I] level.

In the intrapersonal domain, Jack showed some movement toward the Mixed Internal [I-E] level. For example, he mentioned that he valued his freedom and independence as a college student. When I asked him how long that value had been growing within him, he replied:

Probably since I’ve joined. When you – I dunno – in my opinion when you are told for a really long time that you don’t have freedom, you just protect it. . . . That’s the way that structure [in the Navy] thrives is by taking those away and making you do this. Like I said, you can’t get fired from the Navy. You can’t do a lot of things in the Navy. So getting out and getting that fresh breath of air
again finally is just like, “Oh dude, that’s what fresh air smells like. Nice. All right.” So now everything just brings a smile to your face. It’s like, “Sweet, dude, I love grass,” and not like the bottom of a steel hold ship. It’s so cool. So I think that experience makes you appreciate much more things.

However, Jack also showed signs of struggle to maintain this level of self-confidence. When I asked him what had surprised him the most about the college experience, he replied:

Surprised me the most. Probably about how much fun I’m having. I think I thought I was gonna go into this going, “Okay I’m not that good at school. I’m doing college . . . and I’m gonna get overwhelmed, and I’m gonna never pass these classes, and there goes my GI Bill,” and then the panic attack starts. [But] I’m having a really good time, and it’s nice. It’s been pretty awesome.

Jack elaborated on how anxiety intrudes upon his optimism:

I am a work in progress. Like I still get anxiety attacks. I get a phone call and it’s like, “Oh... all right. There goes the day,” [laughter] I’m freaking out. So yeah I’m not perfect at it at all. And I think the more time I spend out of the Navy the better I’ll get at it.

Although Jack recognizes that his response to unexpected news or stressful situations is not healthy, he has not yet begun to see how he can create his own emotions and happiness. Instead, he is relying on the passage of time to alleviate his anxiety.

In the interpersonal domain, Jack is aware of diverse others due to his service in the Navy. However, he had not yet become comfortable associating with people who were very different from him. He explained his perspective in this way:
I would think if you were some hardcore redneck from – not racist, but from “Pennsyltucky” – and you ended up in the Navy and never seen a Black guy before all of a sudden – and he’s from Alabama, there’s gonna be some clash. Like – and it’s not either one of theirs fault, it’s just that’s the situation that they’re in. And you all gotta try to mingle professionally together, and it just doesn’t always work.

Jack recognized differences and similarities between himself and others and was aware of the potential for conflict among diverse groups. He talked about this at length but came to the conclusion that some people simply should not talk to each other because the emotions arising from different perspectives cannot be regulated.

Joe. Joe (Participant 1021) is a 23-year-old White man who is married and spent five years in the Navy. He saw joining the Navy as a way of getting away from his small hometown. Joe has a strong relationship with his wife, his parents, and his wife’s parents and prefers to confide only in people he knows very well. He talked about his determination to make a new start in college in order to find friends and build relationships with people outside of his family. Taking the step to participate in this study required a great deal of courage on Joe’s part but he found the experience pleasant and thought-provoking.

Joe’s overall level of development is Mixed Internal [I-E]. In the cognitive domain, he was very much in a state of transition, showing traits ranging from Mixed External [E-I] to Primarily Internal [I(E)]. He evaluated external influence through critical analysis as shown in his descriptions of how he accepts or rejects the opinions of others: “I try to go into every situation with an open mind and don’t judge a book by its
cover basically. I will form my own opinion based on how they present their opinion.”

And when asked how comfortable he is with doubt concerning the rightness of his or any opinion, he replied, “I’m fairly comfortable. If doubt has been put into my opinion I will go and I will do research on whatever they were saying could be right. I’ll either reinforce my opinion or re-evaluate.” On the other hand, Joe still seemed to expect external structures to equip him with life skills: “The Navy life really didn’t prepare me for college life or outside life, really.” And when he described connections between his experiences, he saw a common thread in the way they push him toward a goal:

   It’s them pushing themselves towards the goal of bettering myself whether it be through school or a job or even in the home life, anything along those areas they’re all trying to push to better me . . . Sometimes I feel as though I’m the facilitator of those experiences, and other times I feel as though I’m just going with the flow.

Another example of development toward more internal foundations was shown by Joe’s description of how he evaluated an argument:

   It’s not really winning or losing, it’s planting that seed of, “Hey, my opinion might be wrong,” or make them reinforce their opinion . . . As with any debate, opinion, disagreement there’s always that, “I’m right, but maybe I’m not right because of how this person presented their opinion.”

In this domain, Joe showed increasing confidence in expressing and defending his views, albeit within the confines of his shy personality; he recognized the relevance of his own personal knowledge.
In the intrapersonal domain, Joe was acutely aware of the gap between his thought processes and his ability to communicate them either orally or in writing:

I'm an optimistic pessimist . . . I'm confident in what I do, but I doubt how I'll finish . . . math is one of my favorite subjects, I'm excellent in it, and I'm very confident in it. It's just I doubt how I'll be able to do the work, because of the way my mind processes math problems it's getting that process on the paper and when I start writing it down I doubt that what I got and what I'm seeing will be the same thing.

Joe talked a great deal about the difficulty he has always had with moving his thoughts to paper or other concrete expression. One of his best learning experiences from childhood involved his relationship with two teachers in middle school. They encouraged him to persevere in spite of his difficulty expressing himself, which in turn made him feel more positive about his ability to learn.

Joe's shyness may be related to this learning difficulty. He explained how much effort it took for him to volunteer for this study:

I try to be positive and I try to open up, but unless I'm poked and prodded for information at first I'm one of those that are wrapped in a leather binder, and don't openly share information with anyone I'm not entirely familiar with. Like this. This was a huge step for me. [Interviewer: Coming to an interview?] Not really . . . not just the interview, even answering the questionnaire on me . . . but I'm trying to open up.
Joe's step toward being more open showed that he not only understood himself but that he was intentionally seeking to refine his identity to include more social contact. He explained how he realized he needed to work on building friendships:

[Interviewer: So is this new approach now that you're taking as a way to build up a base of friends . . . How did you decide or how did you become aware of that lack and the need to?] I was aware of it myself. Like I said I'm one of those closed book people and unless I hang out with you more than once I'm not even going to start opening up.

The lack of friends caused dissonance in Joe's life and he decided to respond by taking action. Although some people relish solitude, Joe wanted to have friends. He followed his internal voice to connect with me and, ultimately, with his peers in spite of the protective habit of reticence he had developed.

In the interpersonal domain, Joe had no supports for decision-making aside from his wife, parents, and parents-in-law. After he separated from the Navy, some family members pushed him to go to college while others pushed him to immediately get a job. Joe described how he mediated those competing interests:

So it was a teetering balance of you need to find a job, you need to find a job. What are you going to do in school? When are you going to start school? . . . I'm doing both. I'm still looking for a job, but I'm in the moment doing college. So hopefully whenever I finish college I'll have a job lined up or even before I finish college I'll have a job lined up so that will help ease more of the stress.
Because of his strong connection to his family, Joe found it difficult to say "no" to one side and "yes" to the other; he chose a middle course that allowed him to assert himself in this dilemma:

I'm trying to please them while I'm trying to please myself. Ultimately, I'm focused on what I need to do to better myself for that better job. But now that I've started school I have more of the support that I needed to start school. But between separation and school there was the butting heads type of deal... I took the best of both and was like, "This is what I'll do. I'm going to do this while still look for this."

In Joe's mind, this was the way he could emerge from the conflict as the winner. When asked why the opinions of his family mattered so much to him, Joe replied, "They're family... Their way of thinking is important to me; not just their opinion, but how they go about forming that opinion." One of Joe's values was respect for the experiences of his closest supporters; this sometimes caused stress when their opinions ran counter to his own. Joe said, "It wasn't really easy, but in trying to appease them I also found strength in myself." He would not, at least for now, break with those relationships. He seemed to be trying to assert himself slowly and carefully so that he did not disrupt these familial ties.

When I asked Joe whether participating in this study had had an impact on his thinking, he replied, "It has. It's made me think more dynamically on what has happened in the past and how it's affecting me now." Joe said that he had begun looking back a week at a time and thinking about what had happened in his life. Although these periods of reflection were "off and on," they nevertheless gave him a platform for regarding
personal events and the meaning he made of them.

**Cash.** Cash (Participant 1023) is a 24-year-old man who identified his ethnicity as Multiracial. Although his father was in the Marine Corps, Cash and his family did not move very often. Cash said he joined the Navy because toward the end of high school he developed an appreciation for the United States and the part the military played in protecting its freedom. Cash also felt his enlisting would provide a sense of connection to family members who had served in various branches of the military. In the Navy, Cash worked as a police officer and dog handler. He never went to sea but was stationed for two years at a base in a Persian Gulf nation. His primary duties were security and explosives detection.

On the self-authorship continuum, Cash sees himself and the world around him in ways that indicate an Early Internal [Ia] perspective. This means that, although sometimes he still encounters difficult times as he begins building internal foundations, he is learning to trust his internal voice. He sometimes still relates to people around him in ways that show a Primarily Internal [I(E)] frame of mind but some examples of his attempts to form interdependent relationships that allow for his internal voice to lead him also emerged during the interviews. For this reason, Cash’s overall position on the self-authorship continuum is Early Internal [Ia], which is the most advanced position on the self-authorship continuum of all the participants in this study.

In the cognitive domain, Cash began showing characteristics of a Primarily Internal [I(E)] way of relating to new knowledge in high school. He had held a negative view of the military early in his high school years, which he attributed to the ways the
military was portrayed in the media. Cash described how he began to evaluate those
news sources:

Doing my own research of the news, not just basing my ideas on CNN and Fox
News, MSNBC. I was actually going online, finding other alternative news
sources, that and I’m big on just Googling stuff. If I come across a country I
never heard of, Google. If they have a certain crop that we don’t have, Google.
From there I just became really interested in the world.

The result of his research and critical thinking was a change of mind about the military in
general, which raised for him the possibility of joining the Navy.

Once in the Navy, Cash followed his own values and internal voice when he made
decisions, even when those actions violated standard procedure or regulations. He
described his thought process in this way:

There’s been a few [situations] where I struggled with what was doing the right
thing and which was doing the legal thing – legal in the sense of what was proper
for the Navy. . . . Morally – I should go the other way. But it was never really a
struggle. I always went with the right thing. I always had the mindset I’d rather
beg for forgiveness than ask for permission.

Cash said he sometimes “caught flak” for such actions. I asked how he processed the
negative feedback from his supervisors. He replied:

I listened to what they had to say. I listened to their point of view, but I always
took it with a grain of salt. . . . If my conscience was clear, I would take the
punishment. I didn’t care, because I did the right thing.
Those instances of acting according to his internal values indicated that Cash was learning to trust his internal voice even in the face of adverse consequences. Doing what he believed was right for himself or those he supervised was more important to him than blindly following orders.

Cash's way of relating to authority in the Navy extended to the ways he evaluated new knowledge in the college environment. When I asked how he reacts to hearing ideas from different perspectives, he answered:

I take new ideas. I listen to them and I evaluate them compared to my own ideas. I wouldn't say I pick and choose what I think is a good idea, what I think is a good part of that idea, but I kind of meld those into my ideals. [Interviewer: How do you decide what is valuable enough to keep?] It sounds selfish, but I guess I would decide by if it benefits me and if it benefits my view of people and life. I'm not gonna keep an idea in my head if it does nothing for me or if it doesn't help other people.

This statement indicated that Cash was comparing even expert opinions from text books or professors to his own internal framework of beliefs and values. He incorporated new knowledge with that framework based on how much it supported his own well-being or the well-being of other people.

In the intrapersonal domain, Cash also began listening to himself and evaluating his strengths and weaknesses at an early age. He said he entered the Navy because he needed to grow up before taking on the challenge of college:

I made a decision at that time that I was way too immature to go to college. . . . I actually told myself that. I wasn’t doing that well in high school. I was passing,
but I wasn’t doing well enough to where if I go to college it would be a waste of my parents’ money. So I decided to go to the military, mature a little bit, and then they’re also gonna pay for my college.

This introspection coincided with Cash’s development of critical thinking and evaluating sources of information. At the time he was researching the various viewpoints presented in the news media about the military and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Cash also was learning more about himself and his place in the world:

I think it was more my maturity growing and becoming more and more appreciative of the country. I started realizing my dad was gone a lot, but he did it for a reason. He loved what he did. He loved doing it for the country, and I started getting that mindset like I did when I was a child, dressing up as a Marine for Halloween. So it was not only just the training I could get or the money for school, it started becoming more and more of a responsibility because of my family history all being military.

Cash had rebelled against military life during adolescence because of the strain it had put on his family. He also had formed many of his beliefs about the military based on its portrayal in the media. In his junior and senior years in high school, however, he came to understand himself and his family history better within the context of ideas he had researched on his own.

One of Cash’s most meaningful recent experiences involved a friend who “was like an older brother” and was killed by an Improvised Explosive Device (IED) in Afghanistan. Cash and several others went to meet the funeral detail when their friend’s casket was brought out of the aircraft. He described the effect that had on him:
It was one of those things that really sunk in like, "Hey, you just lost a really good friend in a horrible way. What are you gonna do now?" Not necessarily like how am I gonna cope, but how are you gonna step up and be a better person, being the better person he expected you to be? . . . I became a better sailor at that point. I advanced to the next pay grade. I started kicking my own ass. Yeah, I started doing good towards the end of my Navy career.

This loss propelled Cash toward introspection and consideration of his goals and personal values. He responded by changing his behavior to conform to a higher standard that met, not only his friend's expectations, but also his desires for his own future.

In the interpersonal domain, Cash said he did not expect to pursue an active social life with other college students:

I didn't really expect to go out to lunch and hang out afterwards, because I'm here for school and that's it. I have my friends outside of school and that's gonna be two separate things, just like work.

He did not feel the need to be accepted or included in college-based social activities because he did not see that as instrumental to his goal of graduation. He wanted to have cordial, professional relationships with professors but did not consider feeling connected to them as vital for his success. He did mention that he felt more at ease talking with older students and other student veterans because they could relate to his life experiences.

One of the most difficult recent experiences Cash discussed in his interview was the day he found out, not only that his grandmother had died, but also that his wife wanted a divorce. As difficult as it was to work through the grief of losing his
grandmother, the dissolution of his marriage left Cash questioning his own judgment when it came to trusting other people. He explained:

I felt like it was just a challenge in my life, something to get over, not necessarily over, but to learn from and become a stronger person from that. I didn't dwell on it too much. . . . I definitely have reserves when it comes to relationships now. I'm a lot less trusting right off the bat. But honestly, that's probably the only thing. It's been three years now and, honestly, it's not even in the back of my mind anymore.

Cash naturally felt hurt and betrayed when his wife left him. However, he learned that he was still a whole person and could form interdependent relationships that supported his internal values. When I asked about boundaries in relationships, Cash responded:

I've never sat down to discuss that with someone, but I've definitely cut people off. Because they were immature, they weren't going anywhere with their lives, and they were just dragging me down with them.

One of the hallmarks of an Early Internal [Ia] perspective is the continued reevaluation of relationships and a willingness to end those that do not allow individuals to follow their internal voices.

Part of the reason Cash separated from the Navy was due to what he called the "alpha male mindset" prevalent among the military police. He did not like some of the favoritism and bullying he saw taking place in his career field but he also missed the excitement and was considering returning to law enforcement as a civilian career.

However, he did not regret his decision to leave the Navy to come to college. He said, "I felt like a part of my life was done and over with, in a good way, like it's time to move on
to the next step . . . and it felt good to take that next step.” Once again, following his internal voice reinforced Cash’s ability to trust himself and chart a course for his future that gives him hope and personal satisfaction. When I asked how all of his recent experiences helped him in his transition, Cash replied:

All of them together, they’ve made me grow. They’ve pushed me to focus on me and do my best and don’t worry about other people. That’s pretty much it, just keep my head in the game and focus and worry about me, and don’t worry about what other people are doing.

Cash described this sense of focus, a trait several other participants mentioned, as the result of his experiences. However, it was clear that he has played an active role in the development of this focus by engaging in personal reflection, critical evaluation of new knowledge, and a reevaluation of relationships that did not align with his internal voice.

As with the other participants, I asked Cash whether participating in these interviews had had an impact on his thinking. He replied:

They kinda did. They made me go back to my memory to find certain things. I never really opened up to people before about certain situations. It kinda felt like a little bit of weight was lifted off of me. Like some of the things I was just holding in that I didn’t wanna talk about.

Cash did not say that he had developed a habit of personal reflection due to the interviews. However, he did experience a change in his thinking by recalling his past and thinking about the ways it was affecting his learning in college.
Gendered Patterns of Reasoning

In this study, one lens I chose to help analyze and describe how student veterans experience learning in the community college classroom was the theory of epistemological reflection (Baxter Magolda, 1992). That theory offers an explanation for gendered patterns of reasoning, which I expected to find in the participants' narratives about how they make meaning of new knowledge. Although the interviews included descriptions of participant learning that were sufficient for analysis according to the WNS protocol (i.e., to establish placement on the self-authorship continuum), some students did not offer examples that would have allowed me to adequately describe their understanding of their roles in the creation of knowledge, the place of the teacher in their learning, or what patterns they exhibited when evaluating new knowledge.

Table 5 shows my assessment of each participant's level of epistemological reflection to the extent that the data are available to support it. Descriptions of learner characteristics for each level as well as specific examples for each participant appear after the table.
Table 5

*Epistemological Levels and Patterns of Reasoning*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Level of Epistemological Reflection</th>
<th>Pattern of Reasoning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rusty</td>
<td>Transitional</td>
<td>Impersonal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abby</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Interindividual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ranae</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danielle</td>
<td>Transitional</td>
<td>[Impersonal]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lucy</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bob</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jack</td>
<td>Absolute</td>
<td>Mastery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joe</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cash</td>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* The label in brackets indicates that the participant showed that pattern in past educational situations and nothing in the current interviews suggested it had changed. A dash indicates that there were not enough data to support application of a label.

**Absolute.** In the absolute level of knowing, individuals rely on experts and authority figures to disseminate knowledge. They believe a “right” answer exists and their role as students is to absorb right; good evaluations reflect their ability to reproduce those answers when tested (Baxter Magolda, 1992). Jack was the only participant, of those whose levels could be determined, who operated as an absolute knower; he was also the only participant whose placement on the self-authorship continuum (i.e., Mixed External) showed he relied more on external foundations for guidance in evaluating new knowledge. He talked a great deal about finding experts, such as pilots or ordnance
developers, to answer his questions. He described an exchange he had with one of those experts:

Any information is good information, in my opinion. The guy knows more. If he’s able to teach me something, then I automatically feel like, “All right, well the guy – maybe he is wrong, but he knows more about what I wanna know than I do.” I try to be a sponge and absorb as much information as possible.

The metaphor of a sponge suggested Jack might be using a receiving pattern of reasoning. However, as he continued to talk he showed a public approach to learning rather than the private approach of the receiving pattern. He continued:

Asking one of my engineering professors, you know, pull him aside and ask him a simple question that I had heard, let’s say, from the F-18 pilot guy. And he goes, “Yeah, there’s some truth to that, but tweak it a little bit and it’s more like this.” It’s like, “Oh, okay.” So next time I see the F-18 pilot it’s like, “Yeah I also heard from a professor that it kinda morphs into this kind of answer.” Then he’s like, “Oh, that’s cool,” and it’s just really this like this bouncing off effect, ‘cause yeah I’m not talking to the actual weapons development dude that traded the blueprints and all the paperwork and stuff like that – which would be great. I could get some concrete evidence.

Jack seemed to believe that a correct answer to his questions existed and the discrepancies among expert responses needed only to be “tweaked” or “morphed,” a characteristic of absolute knowers. He sought to demonstrate his interest publicly with professors or other experts and appealed to authority during debate; those behaviors indicated a mastery pattern of reasoning.
Transitional. Both Rusty and Danielle exhibited characteristics of transitional learners. At this level, individuals recognize that some knowledge is uncertain. Although they know that not all experts agree, they have not yet begun to value their own opinions as valid additions to the larger body of knowledge. They believe instructors should foster understanding and application of content rather than simply disseminating information (Baxter Magolda, 1992). Application and relevance to their lives was an expectation shared by Rusty and Danielle. In Rusty's case, he had become disillusioned with classes because he could not see the practical application for his life: "They talk a really good game about college, but I'm not seeing it so far." Danielle did not see the value in her history class, which was lecture-based, or her music appreciation class, which seemed to have no connection to her daily life. She enjoyed the class discussion promoted by her speech professor, as well as his teaching approach that communicated his equality with the students as co-constructors of knowledge. When asked about the division of responsibility in the classroom for teaching and learning, Danielle replied:

It's really figuring out the teacher's style of teaching and how you're gonna benefit from their style of teaching and what you need to do to follow and learn from that. . . . You can't really go off of just trusting them. You kinda have to trust yourself. You have to trust yourself to know that you're gonna do what you need to do to learn the material and realize it's not just the teacher. I think it's 40 percent teachers, 60 percent student. Probably in that area, because you learn from your teacher. But there's still more expected from you than the teacher. Although Danielle appreciated the way her speech professor engaged the class, she did not mention that she learned through collecting the ideas of her peers. When she talked
about how she studied and how her work was evaluated in the Navy, she demonstrated an
impersonal pattern of reasoning; it is possible she also followed that pattern with her
work in college. Rusty also demonstrated the impersonal pattern of reasoning. He
expected to be challenged by his instructors; he acknowledged his peers could contribute
to his fund of knowledge, but he did not indicate that he talked to them in order to form
his own views; and he was frustrated by the evaluations in English that seemed unfair and illogical.

**Independent.** Abby, Ranae, and Cash all showed characteristics of independent
knowers. Part of the nature of independent knowing is the assumption that knowledge is not
absolute and that their opinions are as valid as those of the experts; however, independent
knowers tend to regard every opinion as valid and are reluctant to assert that one belief or
opinion has greater merit than any other (Baxter Magolda, 1992).

In her child development class Abby showed that she valued her own opinion
above that of the experts; she expected teachers to promote discussion and exchange of
ideas: “My English teacher is very hands on, interactive. She’s on your level. She talks
to you like she would talk to anybody else. And I just follow that much more.” Abby
saw teachers as central to her learning, but did not believe they were always right: “I see
the teacher as the person who is supposed to be the expert in what they’re teaching me,
but I don’t see them like up on like a pedestal, you know, like all high and mighty about
it.” Ranae appreciated different teaching approaches depending on the subject and her
confidence with it. She described three of her fall classes:

> I think they all depend on the class, the instructor, the students. My business class

– I love it. I love the instructor; I love the students that are in with me; I love
every aspect of that class. We can go before the class and look at all the slides, go over the chapter and everything. And then we go through the Power [Point] slides and have discussions, and most of the time she lets us lead the discussion as far as where we wanna take it. And I think that with that class it's actually a great thing, because thankfully in my class most of the students are older; it's not a lot of high school kids. And so, for me, that class is awesome. I absolutely love that class.

Now, my computer course – again it's a lot of older students. But it’s a hybrid class. So we do a lot of stuff online but when we go in the classroom he still has an activity for us to do. While you can't really deviate from what the activity is, . . . if you had a problem with some certain section he’ll go through it and talk to you about it.

And my English class, it’s very structured. He goes over certain topics every day, and that’s it. But it works, because a lot of the kids in that class are younger. And for me that works, because I’m horrible when it comes to English.

Ranae appreciated exchange of ideas with her peers when her peers were also thinking independently; she did not like classes in which the students expected the teacher to give them answers without any debate or discussion. Cash also exhibited traits of an independent knower. He considered his own perspectives just as valid as those of any expert. He focused on his own views in addition to listening to the views of his peers. He showed an individual pattern of reasoning when he said, “It sounds selfish, but I guess I would decide [if information is valuable] by if it benefits me and if it benefits my view of people and life.” Abby differed from the other two participants in that she valued sharing her views among peers while simultaneously demonstrating confidence in her
ability to form her own interpretations. This indicated she was using an interindividual pattern of reasoning.

Uncategorized. Three participants did not give enough information in their responses to allow for placement in a level of epistemological reflection or pattern of reasoning. Lucy appreciated the practical application of knowledge and expected instructors to encourage understanding over mere acquisition of material. Bob also talked about the value of applied learning but did not share anything about how he regarded experts compared to his own opinions. Both Lucy and Joe preferred that instructors guide rather than direct learning, with Lucy explaining: “I much prefer them to guide. I feel like when you’re directing, you’re just giving out commands.” None of the three talked about interactions with peers in their classes or to what degree they relied on them for forming their own opinions.

Patterns in Student Characteristics

During the course of the interviews, certain traits or behaviors emerged across all of the participants’ narratives that were not necessarily related to their backgrounds, the experiences they described, or the jobs they performed. These personal characteristics may help explain how self-authorship develops in some individuals in the rigid environment of the military. The three traits appearing most often across the 17 interviews were drive (47 times), initiative (33 times), and responsibility (57 times). Participants also mentioned supportive relationships as aids to decision-making a total of 151 times. These four labels were codes I used in my constant comparison analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). The definitions for these codes were:
• Drive – This characteristic is an expression of self-motivation and is differentiated from Initiative by its persistence over time. Initiative describes incidences of volunteering for extra duties or exploring new possibilities.

• Initiative – This code describes times where students volunteered for extra duty, explored new possibilities, or took some action on their own initiative. It is differentiated from Drive by the fact it describes the beginning of an action whereas Drive persists over time.

• Responsibility – This especially refers to significant levels of responsibility on the job or in family life.

• Supportive Relationships – This node identifies instances where the student mentions relying on friends and family in order to succeed. [Mentors and Role Models formed two subcategories of this code.]

The frequency of each trait by participant is shown in Table 6 below.
### Table 6

**Frequency of Personal Traits by Participant**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Drive</th>
<th>Initiative</th>
<th>Responsibility</th>
<th>Supportive Relationships</th>
<th>Family Dynamics</th>
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<td>Military Mentors</td>
<td>Friends and Family</td>
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<td>Ranae</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danielle</td>
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</table>

**Note:** The totals shown above indicate the number of times during the interviews that participants mentioned or demonstrated the trait or topic. The category of Supportive Relationships, therefore, does not show numbers of relationships but only how many times those relationships were mentioned. The parentheses around Bob's reference to military mentors indicates he was dissatisfied with that relationship. In the Family Dynamics category, only marital status is shown for participants with no children. Jack is not included in this table because his interview was not coded as part of the constant comparison analysis.
The frequencies in Table 6 do not describe levels or intensities of that trait or behavior in each participant; instead, they represent the number of separate utterances that included either a reference to that trait or an example that I coded for that trait based on my code definitions. The length of each utterance differed among the participants; some spoke extensively about a single example while others may not have elaborated on the episode. The salient point, however, is that all three traits or behaviors (i.e., drive, initiative, and responsibility) appeared in every participant’s narrative.

The number of references to supportive relationships is noteworthy within the framework of this study because one of the supports for development toward becoming self-authored is Good Company (Baxter Magolda, 2009). One metaphor of Good Company is the image of a tandem bicycle being pedaled by the individual in question and a supportive person “who offered guidance from the back seat, encouraging them to steer the bicycle and shift the gears while the partner contributed to the forward motion by pedaling” (Baxter Magolda, 2009, p. 12). The stories of these participants support this image and the vital role Good Company played in their development.

Conclusion

All of the participants in this study, with the exception of Jack, demonstrated levels of development that aligned with their responses on the Career Decision-Making Survey – Military Edition (CDMS-ME). This rate of accuracy (88.8%) suggests that employing the CDMS-ME as a screening instrument was helpful for identifying students who were likely to be in or near a self-authoring frame of mind. Furthermore, the addition of prompts for written responses assisted in widening the pool of potential
participants. In this study, three of the nine participants (33.3%) were invited to interview based on their written responses rather than their numeric survey scores.

The experiences of these student veterans illustrate how diverse the paths toward self-authorship may look in spite of the fact that each journey shares similar components. All of the students experienced times of dissatisfaction or dissonance that prompted them to reevaluate their perspectives and ways of making meaning of the world and themselves. However, for some that dissonance occurred before enlisting and for others it occurred during the transition from the Navy to college life. For Rusty, the dissatisfaction came when, as a teenager, he realized he could not work in a physically demanding job as he aged. For Joe, it was loneliness and despondency after leaving the Navy that pushed him into acting according to his internal voice. The trauma of sexual assault led Lucy to consider her own desires for her future and her relationships with her family and boyfriend. And Ranae traded the traditional structure of the family for the structure of the military, only to find she needed to build an internal structure once she was discharged.

In addition to their personal stories, these participants described their learning styles and preferences, how the military affected their growth, and why they chose to attend community college after leaving the Navy. I discuss those themes in the next chapter.
Chapter 5: Themes Emerging from the Interviews

This chapter describes the themes participants discussed in the first-round interviews (based on the Wabash National Study [WNS] interview format), the second-round interviews focusing on supports for growth and development, and the women’s group interview. As noted in the Data Collection section of Chapter 3, the men were not able to attend the group interview for various personal reasons. I selected these 11 themes based on frequency across all interviews and relevance to the research questions. The emergent themes are: 1) community college as a transitional platform; three themes grouped under the heading of Learning Preferences: 2) hands-on learning and problem-solving; 3) teachers as leaders; and 4) unpopular teaching approaches; six themes grouped under the heading of Military Supports for Development and Learning: 5) flexibility of mind; 6) open-mindedness toward diversity; 7) discipline; 8) challenge and support; 9) being forced; and 10) soul-searching; and a final theme as its own category: 11) sex and gender identity. Although the participants showed a high degree of agreement in some areas, negative cases did appear and these are also described below. In particular, the women’s perspectives on sex and gender identity in the military diverged significantly from those of the men.

Community College as a Transitional Platform

The students had various reasons for choosing the specific community college they attended. Some cited proximity to home, others that the location was more desirable
or less expensive than their home cities, and yet others mentioned the appeal of a diverse 
student body and a range of program offerings. Coordinated enrollment, advising, and 
VA benefits counseling – which the veterans perceived as signs of a veteran-friendly 
campus – also contributed to their choice. Finally, recommendations from other veterans 
influenced some to select a particular campus or institution. However, in all cases the 
participants in this study chose community college over a four-year university because 
they believed it would serve them well as a staging area for simultaneously readjusting to 
civilian life and beginning their postsecondary education.

Danielle, a 22 year old White woman, had not wanted to attend community 
college in her hometown, but found that the two-year format fit her current needs:

I'm basically just getting a lot of my starters, starting some of my labs. And then 
us having our marriage coming up, I really want everything to go smoothly with 
that. And then within a year, we're hoping to see ourselves stationed probably in 
[another state], hopefully, and then I can actually start going to the university out 
there, instead of the community college. And that's kind of what I had myself 
visioned for within a year. So just one year of community and then over to a 
university, if I can. That's what I'm trying for.

Separating from the Navy gave Danielle the opportunity to attend college, but personal 
life events such as her impending marriage to another active-duty sailor and the 
likelihood of his being transferred caused her to modify her educational plans. She chose 
the particular college over others in her geographic area because she believed it would 
give her the greatest number of transferable credits. She also came to realize that 
reentering school was not as easy as she had thought: "I'm kind of glad I'm at a
community college rather than a large one, trying to get used to that, because any bigger
than this, I probably would be even more lost.” For Danielle, the community college
provided a place to ease into academic life that still fit with her long-term goals.

Cash and Bob believed from the beginning what Danielle eventually understood:
that the community college environment could help them adjust to being students again
after a five-year gap between high school and college. Both intend to transfer to a four-
year university but wanted to begin their postsecondary education at a community
college. Bob, a 24 year old White man, cited personal knowledge as a factor in his
decision:

I kind of wanted to get my feet wet in the college area, so I decided to go to
community college. My stepbrothers both went to major four-year universities.
They always talked about college like it was a little overwhelming at first. So I
didn’t want to be overwhelmed as soon as I got out of the Navy, so I tried
community college first.

Cash, a 24 year old Multiracial man who served as a military police officer, did not
mention how he came to believe transitioning directly to a four-year university would be
too difficult. However, he did cite ways he thought the community college would
support him:

I knew that just coming out of the military it would be hard for me to jump into a
four-year university. I felt like this would prepare me better to transfer. The
hours are more flexible. It’s a better college for someone who is planning on
working full-time.
These three students articulated specific perceptions about how they would experience learning differently in the community college environment compared to a four-year university. They also recognized that personal life demands entered into their educational decision. This recognition held true for the other participants with regard to other challenges they encountered during their transition period.

Several students described a feeling of trepidation when approaching a college education. For Joe and Rusty, this was due to the years spent away from school. When asked what goals he had for the academic year, Joe said, "I really haven't thought much about that; right now I'm just trying to wrap my head around college, because it's been five years since I went to [high] school." Due to his lack of traditional schooling, Rusty also expected to meet with difficulties in his studies: "[I thought] that I was going to be slower than everybody else, because I hadn't really done the high school thing." For Rusty, a 23 year old White man, age and experience also contributed to difficulties during his transition:

What did I expect? I guess it was, I was going to be treated like a kid again, pretty much, and I hadn't been treated like a kid in eight or nine years. . . . I went from a position where I wasn't the head honcho, but I was running things, and now I'm back to being a student with 18-, 19-year-olds. And I'm 24, and it's a little adjustment.

Joe, a 23 year old White man, had experienced stress, depression, and a lack of direction following separation from the Navy and he credited college with giving him a new beginning. However, adjusting to being a student again also required Joe to invest a great deal of mental and emotional effort. Rusty felt acutely aware of differences between
himself and the other students. Although this was a common theme among the study participants, Rusty specifically linked “being treated like a kid” to having difficulties with his teachers.

The sudden change from an active, physically-demanding job to an environment where the primary activity involves sitting still also proved difficult for these students. Lucy, a 24 year old Hispanic woman, reacted by filling her life with activities since she was no longer constrained by schedules or responsibilities:

There was this year transitioning from military to civilian life. I remember the first three weeks being like, “Oh my god. What am I gonna do?” I didn’t have a schedule anymore. I didn’t know what to do with myself and I went crazy. I traveled. I got it all out, went skydiving, rock climbing, went to Florida, to California, just visited places. I don’t know. I just got everything out of my system.

Then Lucy decided to enter the community college, but she said, “Unfortunately I did the poor decision of just focus on work, work, work and school was my second thing. . . . Now there’s no competing. I just found the priority of school and then work.” Lucy realized she had committed more time to parts of her life that did not contribute to academic success; she therefore intentionally reduced her work schedule in order to concentrate on school.

Cash also described a sudden absence of activity and particularly felt this affected his learning:

Waking up early again, going to class, getting books, sitting down for hours at a time. I hate that. It was a rough transition from go, go, go to sitting there for
hours. . . . I feel like it's harder — a little bit harder after the military just sitting in
the classroom — sit there and paying attention. . . . Because even with learning in
the military, learning was hands-on. . . . So, "Hey we're gonna learn how to cuff
people today." Hands-on learn how to cuff. I'm so used to go, go, go . . . do this,
do this, do this . . . not just sitting around and sitting around. Like, I gotta make
myself concentrate and focus while I'm just sitting there for two — three hours a
day.

Cash also was able to find balance with school and his job. However, unlike Lucy, Cash
found the extra workload and responsibility of a full-time job filled his days but did not
unduly burden him. He had half-expected to fail in school:

Part of me did [expect I'd drop out] 'cause part of me is like going to school full-
time, working full-time, this is not gonna be fun. I'm not gonna enjoy it
whatsoever. But surprisingly, I actually do enjoy it. I enjoy leaving in the
morning, going to school and coming back at night after work. It's like my
routine in the Navy. I'm comfortable with that.

For Cash, establishing a familiar routine was instrumental in helping him succeed in
school.

Two students described the transition in terms of forming a new identity.

Danielle, a 22 year old White woman who had risen quickly through the ranks in her five
years of service, described her adjustment as a process of "figuring out" who she is
becoming:

Now I'm trying to find myself in a whole new pool of fish and trying to find out
what group of fish I'm supposed to be with. I'm trying to figure out who I am
outside of the Navy, because I do feel like I know myself, but at the same time as a student, you're always learning more about yourself, figuring out different things, you know? I'm just in that process right now, trying to figure out all that.

In particular, Danielle felt she had lost her friends. As a student, Danielle was not able to sustain relationships that had depended on constant presence in the workplace:

When you're also in, you feel like you have that unity. You feel like a family . . . but right now I feel like I'm on my own. I don't have friends right now. I have my Navy friends, which I don't see them all the time anymore. I barely talk to half of them now, because they talked to me because I was on the ship with them every day. Now, I'm not there.

Likewise, Ranae, a 24 year old Hispanic woman who had first become associated with the Navy through Junior ROTC in high school, felt lost due to her untimely medical separation for a disability as well as the sudden dissolution of her marriage:

That was a really hard time for me because that was like a lot of transitions all at the same time because my husband left me. I was told you're getting out on this day and I thought I had a little longer. Then I had to figure out how to actually be a civilian because since I was 14 I knew nothing but military – even before then because I was a military brat . . . So to go from that to being actually in the military to being – you're like oh shit, what do I do? I was – I didn't know what to do. I had the hardest time trying to readjust.

This transition has been more than a simple change of job or schedule. Both of these women spent considerable mental and emotional energy on personal reflection in order to understand who they are in the world and how they now will relate to others. By the time
of her second interview, Ranae was able to offer an optimistic view of her future that suggests her introspection has been worthwhile:

I think that [sigh]... for me, my experiences from the military and the transition from military life to civilian life has made me realize that there’s something more than military life out there for me. . . . That was my life, and seeing not only for me that there’s other things out there, but seeing other people doing it – going through the same steps as I am – is actually helping me to realize, “Okay I can do this. This is possible, and I will make it. Without having to be in the military.”

And that has been probably one of the best things for me right now.

In the days immediately following her separation, the time and commitment Ranae had given to her military career seemed, in her mind, to have been unwisely invested. She had planned to make the Navy her life’s work but was abruptly discharged. Nevertheless, she recognized that other veterans at the community college were successfully adjusting to civilian life and that observation helped her imagine the same for herself.

Unfortunately, the Navy did not always provide adequate preparation for service members who desired to separate and pursue postsecondary education. When describing the Navy’s Transition Assistance Program, Abby said,

They focused mainly on if you were going straight into the workforce. The majority of that class was what to wear to an interview and how to write a resume . . . They had one day talking about VA benefits and within the VA benefits, they talked about the GI Bill, but it was like 20 minutes. That’s it.
The bureaucratic red tape accompanying veterans’ benefits also proved to be a stressor. The lack of information provided by the Navy or the VA affected Abby’s peace of mind concerning her program of study:

I agree that they want to know that you’re using your GI Bill towards something, but I literally have to have my curriculum picked out, and I can’t take any classes out of that curriculum, or they won’t pay for it. That just irritates me. . . . ’Cause what if I switch — God forbid I change my mind and I switch, I don’t even know if I have to pay off that class or not. I don’t know how that works. I would ask, and I’m too scared to ask. It’s a pain. If you call them you’re on the phone forever, and then hopefully the person can answer your question. It’s just irritating.

Abby found herself taking required classes in a program of study she was not sure she really wanted to pursue. By the time of the second interview, Abby had changed her major, having found answers to the questions she had about her benefits. But initially, the difficulty involved in that process undermined Abby’s confidence and drive to change to the program she really wanted.

Nevertheless, some parts of military life assisted students in their transition. Ranae credited her job with helping her keep up with class schedules:

Where most people I feel kind of struggle when they go into college, it’s been a very easy transition for me as far as okay, I know I have this deadline so I can structure my time so I can meet that deadline. . . . I was actually a shop supervisor, so I had to make sure that everybody else was meeting deadlines that I had given out or I was making sure I was giving out the right information and keeping track of other people. So I think that the last two things I actually did
before I left the military helped me transition to be able to just go back to school, which I’m grateful for.

So although Ranae was struggling with a new identity as a civilian, the skills and discipline she acquired on the job in the Navy supported her during the transition. Likewise, all of the other participants specifically mentioned discipline, structure, and time management skills gained in the Navy as benefits that helped them succeed in their transition to college.

The students described significant and varied difficulties involved in their transitions from the military to college. Leaving the Navy and beginning a new period in their lives not only gave students a sense of self-direction and confidence, it also brought a sense of sadness, loss of meaning, reduced levels of responsibility, and isolation from friends. These changes produced more stress for the students even though separation from the military had been, in most cases, their choice and fit with their long-term goals. They saw the community college as a safe haven for experiencing these difficulties.

Learning Preferences

When discussing learning preferences, the participants overwhelmingly expressed preference for andragogical approaches such as self-direction, hands-on learning, and problem-solving with practical application. In classes where hands-on learning was not feasible (e.g., English), the participants described their preference for “engaged” or active learning. All the participants preferred adult learning methods in high school as well as in college; in other words, this preference remained consistent over time. Cash described one of his favorite teachers in high school as one who, “treated us as adults and equals; he didn’t talk down to us at all.” Lucy also described the approach of her favorite teacher in
high school: "I think when you’re at that age . . . I dunno. I liked the fact that my teacher
treated us like adults." In addition to their teachers’ attitudes, Cash and Lucy appreciated
the project-oriented classes that allowed them to function as independent adult learners.

Conversely, participants mentioned being treated as children as a negative quality
in the community college classroom. The immature behavior of traditionally-aged
college students also garnered considerable criticism. Ranae compared her experience in
college with babysitting younger siblings during her teenage years:

I’m in classes with adults and I feel like I’m in a nursery. I didn’t expect that. I
guess because again, I kind of had to grow up faster than most people anyway.
But then on top of that, when you go in the military you’re not allowed to just act
however you want. . . . They [the college students] are all just talking and not
listening and doing what they want to do.

These comments from Ranae, Cash, and Lucy illustrate the multi-faceted
interaction, not only between teachers and students, but also among students in the class.
Ranae had a suggestion for improving the experience of student veterans in certain
general education courses:

I feel personally, especially because there are so many current active duty
military, retired military, veterans coming to this school, when it comes to a class
like that, I feel like you might just need to break it off to military students only.
Even though in one class you might have two or three students, I feel like it would
be more beneficial because there are certain things we don’t need to talk about.

There are certain things we don’t need to go over.
In most cases, student veterans have already acquired the time management skills that many traditionally-aged entering freshmen lack. Military training instills a certain level of mature behavior which student veterans, such as Ranae, expected to find in the college classroom. It is important to consider this underlying expectation as I further describe the teachers’ roles and approaches preferred by study participants.

**Hands-on learning and problem-solving.** As noted above, all the participants expressed preference for hands-on learning, on-the-job training, or problem-solving. They described these formats as helpful for both acquisition and retention of knowledge. Danielle explained her preference:

> When I acquire new knowledge I usually like to be taught it first and then after I have learned it already, then I like to use it. And I'm a hands-on person so if I've learned something and then I can use it afterwards in some kind of way, I learn more from it... I think it’s more about the memory of how you used it or whatever you learned that just works better for me... from then on I think of what I did and I relate it to what I learned.

Lucy also described herself in this way:

> I'm more of a hands-on kind of person in order to learn. Sitting in the classroom having the teacher just talk about a lecture is not my way of learning. I'd rather do hands-on activities. That's the best way to learn. It's always been like that.

Abby explained how helpful it was to her to have three-dimensional models available in one of her pre-nursing classes:
I have to learn hands-on. I just started the prereq to anatomy and physiology and you have to learn all the body parts and regions and all these words that are insane to spell, but I’m very hands-on. I have to look at the model and point to it.

Cash differentiated between strictly hands-on learning and problem-solving. Although he described his favorite high school learning experiences as predominantly hands-on activities in electrical engineering and sports medicine, he was able to translate that type of learning to other subjects in college that were less conducive to the hands-on approach:

I don’t like math, but I’ve always done pretty decent in it, because it’s like, “Okay I’ll show you how to do this. Now you do it. Show you how to do it. Now you do it.” More like going up to the board and writing problem out and doing it.

Math is probably one of my stronger subjects even though I really dislike it. Because it’s – I’m actually doing something.

So although Cash was not building an electronic board with tools or learning how to wrap and ankle or cuff a suspect, he found working out the math problem step by step to be an active method of learning.

In the absence of hands-on activities, Rusty described the learning environment as “not good,” with the implication that he was not succeeding. Abby described classes without hands-on activities as “really boring.” Although the participants acknowledged that teaching methods depended to some extent on the content and goals of the class, they nevertheless strongly preferred some type of participatory activities – including lively, engaging class discussions – to lecture and reading.
Teachers as leaders. Besides commenting on preferred teaching approaches, the participants also talked at length about the roles and attitudes of their teachers. One word that appeared again and again in their descriptions was "command." When I asked more about what this meant, Rusty explained the leadership paradigm to which he was referring:

The ones that are the best teachers are the ones that — I think there’s like three types of leaders. There’s command respect, command and respect and the pushover. And I think the ones that command and respect are the best teachers. . . . Command respect is, you’re going to respect me. You’re going to. You have no other choice. Command and respect, all right, we’re doing this and you also respect that person. Like, as a subordinate, you respect your leader. And they don’t tell you you have to. You just do because they’re a good person, I guess. . . . And then the pushover, you can imagine what they’d be like.

To illustrate this concept, Rusty offered examples from his own classes that semester:

My English teacher, she is a command respect person. Ten to fifteen minutes of the first class is her arguing with one of the students every time. . . . And she’s not a very effective teacher. My math teacher comes in, “Hey, everybody. How you doing?” Somebody goes with a problem, “Hey, I couldn’t do — something ’s wrong.” And she’ll be like, “Oh, sure enough, there was something wrong.” She has the command of the classroom, but she doesn’t command respect. She has our respect because she’s here for the overall good. . . . My SDV teacher, he had an assignment that was due and it was this day, I had it all ready and I was prepared to turn it in and I was the only one that had it. He gave us three weeks
and he came in, "When was this due?" And he's going through this disorganized binder, and they convinced him that it was the next week, the whole class convinced him and he's the pushover.

Rusty described the qualities he looked for in a good teacher as similar to those of strong leaders in the military. He acknowledged during the above description that the model involved superiors and subordinates – which translated in the classroom to teachers and students – yet he also said he did not regard college teachers as authoritative figures. He related to them respectfully but as equals in the classroom.

Lucy also talked at length about this idea of command. For her, the authoritative manner of the teacher was instrumental to her learning:

[The] majority of my teachers command their classroom no matter what's going on, that is what I need. Because as far as I'm concerned, when you're in the classroom you still need that authority figure. Even if your students are older than you in some cases, you still need to have that control of the classroom. . . . I feel like if you can't control your classroom, what are you really gonna teach? What do you have to offer? While I'm very much a self-learner, if I need something – if I have a problem I need to be able to have that confidence in you as an instructor to come to you and be like, "Look, how do I do this?" And I feel like if you can't command your classroom, what am I gonna come to you for?

The ability of the teacher to control the classroom, or to command as these students described it, lent credibility to their expertise as well as stability to the learning environment. The important distinction between "command respect" and "command and respect" as Rusty defined it, relates to the andragogical attitude of respect for the
experience of adult learners and the epistemological reflection principle of validating the student as a knower. These students not only responded better to these affirming attitudes, but they recognized them as valuable to their learning.

Unpopular teaching approaches. Although I did not ask any questions to elicit information about teaching approaches the students disliked, they nevertheless offered numerous comments on this subject. By the time of his second interview, Rusty had become disillusioned with teachers who focused on particular means of response rather than the work he actually produced:

I don’t see how much of this will play into daily life. I really don’t. When we had our last interview, I’m pretty sure I would have answered, “Yeah, I can see how this is going to help me” and all that. I just don’t know. . . . I don’t have very much motivation left to – it’s like in English class, you get points deducted if you have – Well, Blackboard, there’s a discussion board on there and we were supposed to put proper and improper nouns. Pretty simple. Well, I did it, but I messed it up somehow and made a new discussion instead of going into theirs and I didn’t get credit for it. She saw it, said I did it wrong so I don’t get credit. Well, that’s kind of B.S. I mean, come on. Come on. So it’s little stuff like that that’s building up. . . . I really don’t like technicalities.

Rusty had had an earlier encounter with this same professor who deducted points from his first paper for lateness. However, Rusty had submitted the paper on time; the course management system had failed to deliver it properly. He contacted the teacher about the problem but she did not believe his explanation. At the time, Rusty decided not to argue further but clearly, by the end of the semester, this teacher’s focus on technicalities had
demotivated Rusty. Although precision and attention to detail is part of military culture, a higher value is primacy of the mission (Black et al., 2007; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). As I will discuss further below, methods and regulations are often subordinated to mission completion, or “getting the job done.” Here, Rusty seemed to believe that being penalized for technicalities detracted from the goal of learning the material, his mission as a student. In his second interview, Rusty told me about his plans to leave school in order to begin a business venture with one of his Navy friends.

Some students mentioned feeling demeaned or ridiculed by teachers and that this had an adverse effect on their learning. Abby described her psychology professor in these terms:

I like it when [professors] are not on a pedestal. Like if I have a teacher who – my psychology teacher is a lot like that. She stands up at her podium, reads the book. If you ask a question, she looks at you like you’re stupid. I cannot stand that. It makes me not like the subject, you know what I mean?

Abby mentioned this professor in her both of her personal interviews and also in the group interview. She found the class “really boring” and the teacher “horrible.” The lecture approach and scornful attitude of the teacher led Abby to conclude that the class was “pointless.” Danielle also experienced unpleasant interactions with one of her professors. Her experience related to the idea of an authoritative figure but also hearkened back to her drill sergeant in boot camp:

I only have one teacher I really feel has that authoritative thing and that’s just because she’s very nitpicky about everything. Like if you even do the slightest bit
of a thing wrong in class, she'll call you out in front of the class and I think she's the only one that I see as an authority figure 'cause she does that.

In boot camp, the penalty for answering a question incorrectly was performing calisthenics, sometimes with the intention of humiliating the recruit:

I mean, obviously, I wish I would’ve just got it right the first time ‘cause it’s not only does it suck having to do all the workouts, it’s embarrassing, because the entire other division was in there at the time, not my division but the other division that I didn’t really know any of ‘em and I’m sitting here doing eight counts. It just makes you like, “Man, this is so embarrassing.” ‘Cause not only are you doing your PT, you’re doing it right – there was a couple times he made me actually go out in the middle of the compartment and do it in front of their entire division.

Learning to avoid negative attention in boot camp such as the episode Danielle described is one of the main goals of recruits. Joe also noted this behavior in himself and said that even good attention could inspire jealousy among peers. So learning to conform and remain unnoticed becomes second nature. For that reason, student veterans may be even more sensitive to open criticism than non-veteran college students.

Danielle offered more insight on this point in the group interview. She said she appreciated constructive criticism and responded best to positive learning experiences:

If you’re always getting negative remarks back on everything you do, it’s not very motivational. It kind of beats you down. I’d rather a teacher hand me back an assignment that has a bunch of marks on it, but it has a paragraph of how I hit certain points really, really well but I just need to work on this, rather than, “This
is the worst paper I’ve ever read. You didn’t even hit any of the things that I
asked.” You know what I mean?

Abby also contrasted her psychology professor’s dry, critical style to the more positive
style of another professor:

[My psychology professor] stands up at the podium and paces back and forth and
reads straight from the book, doesn’t go over anything, your quizzes are open-
book, your mid-term and your final are open-book, and that’s it. There’s no – you
know what I mean? She doesn’t interact with the students, she doesn’t – And
then my English teacher – who’s amazing – she interacts with the students, it’s a
constant conversation, she keeps things... uplifting, she loves her – the field she
loves – English – you can tell. So I think that to be a good professor you have to
love what you do.

The interaction and engagement missing from Abby’s psychology class contrasted
sharply with her English class, which was accessible, interesting, and memorable. Abby
credits the teacher with providing a positive learning experience by exuding passion for
the subject as well as engaging students in discursive analysis of the content.

The comments from these participants about their learning preferences show how
important the teacher’s attitude is for engendering learning. Not every teacher will have
a charismatic personality, but these students did not describe their favorite teachers or
classes in terms of charisma. Instead, they appreciated teachers who took charge of the
classroom while showing respect to the students as adult learners with valuable
experiences. This idea of “command and respect” can be intentionally cultivated as can
andragogical approaches such as hands-on learning projects, learner-directed discussions, and experiential learning.

**Military Supports for Development and Learning**

The participants in this study entered military service within one year after graduating from high school. While in that period of 18 to 20 years old, they began taking on adult responsibilities for both equipment and other people. They also entered a new culture with specific values, intensive training to inculcate those values, and a strict chain of command to enforce them. The two months in boot camp were, for most of the students, a time of intense activity, stress, learning, and soul-searching. Then in active service, the study participants not only learned new job skills but also learned how to progress through the ranks by showing initiative and taking on additional responsibilities. These lessons supported their growth and development, sometimes in surprising ways. The elements within this theme that appeared most often are described in detail below.

**Flexibility of mind.** The participants manifested this attribute when they described how they approached problem-solving and resolved dilemmas in both personal and work relationships. Ranae explained how the structure and flexibility of mind grew together in her own experience:

> When you’re in the military it’s very structured. You’re told when to be, where to be, how to be, everything else. Okay, and we have to figure out how to do everything ourselves. Like they tell you how to do it, but you have to figure out is that really how I need to do it or is there a better way to do it?

From this we can see that the structure serves more as boundary lines rather than specific instructions for every task. Although regulations may exist to guide service members
through a decision-making process or task, Ranae asserted that they are still free – and encouraged – to think for themselves to apply those regulations to the situation at hand.

Several other students attributed flexibility of mind to their military training. I asked each participant how they were taught to respond to dilemmas. Danielle responded:

I had always just seen things “This is how we do it, this is it, that’s it” and [the training] just made me more open-minded, more creative thinking because you just start thinking of different ways to do it and that’s a huge learning thing, because so many people stay stuck in their ways and are so stubborn that they don’t ever learn from other people.

Lucy described how her mentors taught her to face difficult situations:

Well, definitely taught you to try not to panic. They always – they told me to work around the dilemma there’s always two ways – or more than two ways to get out of that situation. You just gotta make sure which one’s gonna be best for you and your people.

Bob described his approach to resolving dilemmas with the old adage, “There’s more than one way to skin a cat.” Likewise, Joe said his training, “Taught me to look at every facet of the dilemma.” Finally, Cash also credited mentors with developing this type of flexibility: “I would say that they helped me learn other ways to approach situations.”

Ranae also described flexibility of mind when she faced dilemmas during her service. The process of making decisions based on consideration of multiple perspectives related directly to Ranae’s concept of leadership:
You have to look at all sides of it. You can't just look at, "Okay, well this is gonna be easiest for me." Well, what about the next person, and what about the people that have to deal with it on the flight? We have to look at the pros and cons for every aspect. And that's a big part of what it takes to either be a good leader or get to a point where you can be a good leader. You can't just think about the immediate effects. . . . Military leaders are structured, yes. They are very much goal-oriented. . . . But they know that sometimes there's different ways to do something. And different ways are sometimes the best ways to do it.

Where I feel corporate leaders -- it's their way, that's it, you're done. And you can't do that while you're in the military, because you have too many people from too many different backgrounds and learning experiences and life experiences to dictate only one way to do something. . . . Where the business world's concerned, you get a lot of people from the same walks of life going into the same businesses. And with the military you have people that come from every walk of life to join the military. . . . I think that with the military it gives you a lot of leeway as far as doing what you gotta do to get the job done.

For Ranae, becoming a leader in the military involved developing an open mind that could consider multiple points of view. In her business courses at the community college, she saw inflexibility among corporate leaders that she felt hindered them when it came to making decisions.

One military value that contributed to this flexibility of mind was focus on the mission. Just as Ranae did in the example above, several participants used the phrase, "get the job done" to describe this focus. Training for focusing on the job at hand began
in boot camp, as Joe explained, “The more you work together, the less discipline you got.
. . . Meaning the quicker you got stuff done, the easier the next half hour would be.” Bob explained that a more experienced crewmember showed him how to stay within the parameters of the regulations for crash and rescue while saving time extracting a pilot from a damaged aircraft:

He was like, “What you’re doing is correct, ‘cause it is by the book, but we need to save time, you need to get out of there quicker.” So then he was the one that teaches shortcuts, but you’re still going by the book.

Lucy also described times that she suggested creative ways to organize the crew in order to finish a job quickly:

I swear my – one of my supervisors, she wasn’t the brightest. I don’t know how she made it to that rank, but she would have us do stuff certain ways that you knew it would take us all day to do. . . . ‘Cause we did a lot of maintenance, and there’s times where she just wanted that one group to be together to do all the maintenance. I’m like, “Why? We have four different spots that we have to take care of before all these spot checks.” I’m like, “Why don’t we just split the group?”

Lucy said that supervisor did not have the backbone for leadership. Instead of focusing on getting the job done quickly, she insisted on following a predetermined pattern. Lucy felt that breaking out of that mindset required initiative and leadership that also contributed to her growth and development:

Taking action. Instead of just sitting there complaining and bitch about it. . . .

When I first got to that ship, I was just learning everything, but I would sit there
and you would see – hear the other older seamens complain about stuff, but they wouldn’t do anything about it to make it better. And I didn’t want that.

Lucy, Bob, and Joe described how they learned to focus on the mission as a team member. For them, focusing on getting the job done allowed for processes and methods that were not necessarily prescribed by military regulations.

Students who had worked as supervisors talked about applying this creative thinking to personnel management. When he was only 20 years old, Rusty was selected to supervise a section of nine personnel, all of whom were older than he. I asked how he approached the challenge of that situation and he replied:

Anybody can do it if they apply themselves, and nobody’s going to like you. Not nobody, but when you’re in that situation, you have to get the job done, and everybody wants to go home, and you’ve gotta bark out what we’re doing now:

“No. Lunch is in an hour and a half. I’m sorry that you’re hungry. Go get a snack and then come right back. You’ve got five minutes.”

Rusty said that he had not wanted the responsibility of that particular job. However, when those higher in his chain of command selected him, it was not a request; it was an order. He knew he had to accept the responsibility and make sure those in the workshop performed the mission.

Abby described both personnel management issues and equipment troubleshooting from the perspective of getting the job done:

When I was in the shop, say if somebody was like, “Oh, I can’t come in today. My kid’s got an appointment,” you just make the decision to where the first priority was really the work. You know, let the work get done and then try to
accommodate everybody if you can. Or if you have a problem on a piece of gear you’re working on and you have to troubleshoot it, just figure out what’s wrong with it and – the military is very centered on just make sure the work gets done.

As a mother of two young children, Abby understood that people occasionally needed flexibility in order to care for their families. However, she also was responsible for the successful completion of equipment repairs regardless of personal issues among her crew. She, like the other participants in this study, found ways to creatively address conflicts while still focusing on the mission.

**Open-mindedness toward diversity.** The military environment and mission helped most of the participants become more open-minded toward people from diverse backgrounds and with perspectives different from their own. This included others from different racial or ethnic backgrounds or sexual orientations within the Navy as well as foreigners the participants encountered overseas. Ranae’s experience was an exception to this theme because she came from a richly diverse family background that included cousins who were Black, cousins who were Asian, and a mother who was both Mexican and Native American. She entered the Navy with an acute appreciation for people from other ethnicities and backgrounds. In fact, she described a time when she stood up to another sailor who made strong negative statements about people from a particular ethnic group.

However, Ranae’s comfort with diversity prior to entering the Navy was unusual among the participants. For example, Abby described her surprise, not only about encountering more African Americans than she had ever before met but also the fact that one man she met came from her hometown:
I think I met more people from more diverse backgrounds and cultures in the Navy than here [in college]. It was different. This may sound bad, but the first thing I noticed when I joined the military – I mean I’m from outside of [a large city], it’s like a little suburban area. It’s very conservative, very right-wing. I joined the military – I’ve never seen this many Black people in my life. I was like, “What?” I didn’t know there was that many African Americans in the country – that’s how ignorant I was to it all. And I actually met a Black guy that is from [the same city], just like the opposite side, and I was just like, “Wow – how much in a bubble have I been?”

During visits home, Abby was aware of how much she had changed from her former, sheltered perspective. She described how being required to work with people from many races and backgrounds affected her:

   Either you both have to open your minds to each other and whether you agree or disagree, just be open-minded. And now even when I go home and I’m around my family, the things that they say, and I’m like, “You sound ignorant.” I don’t tell them that, ’cause they don’t know any different, you know? You just have to be open-minded. That’s the only way that it really makes any sense.

The Navy played an important role in Abby’s development toward acceptance of diverse perspectives. She found herself in work relationships that she would not necessarily have chosen but was required to maintain in order to accomplish her assigned tasks. This foreshadows another theme, “being forced,” which is described in more detail below.

Also, the Navy supplied sensitivity training – again, a requirement – which Abby thinks certainly affected her:
You’re around tons of different people and they constantly do their training – your sexual harassment training, your diversity training, all this different training. I don’t know if it’s so much that or it’s just you’re told you’re going to work with these people. This is who you got to work with. So you work with those people. So you can either be, you know, against it – I don’t want to work with these people – or just do it and you get to talking, you get along.

To what extent the training compared to the practice of working with diverse others supported Abby’s development is unclear. However, both training and practice were present in her military experience and they supported her growth toward a greater acceptance of diversity.

Danielle described the preparation the Navy gave her before leaving the ship while in foreign ports:

The Navy always has briefs. Every time before you pull into a port, they always do briefs. You know, just kind of warning you of some of the customs and some of the beliefs they have, some things you shouldn’t do, some things that are recommended to do.

The goal of these briefs was not only to protect the sailors from inadvertently transgressing either civil law or custom but also to help them show respect to the local people they encountered. Danielle brought this point up again in another interview:

I just basically just tell myself always keep in mind not everybody is the same. What might be going through my head is totally different than what might be going through theirs, you know? For the most part, I try to be understanding. I try to be as understanding as possible. If I feel like I’m not being understanding,
then I'll just sit back, re-think the situation and go back into it. And I always try
to be polite, I always try to put a smile on my face even if it's conflict. They see
that I'm trying to be friendly, so they shouldn't be that way to me, you know what
I mean?

Danielle had learned how to monitor her own emotions and recognize when she needed
to retreat from a conflict. She also described how her experiences in the Navy were
continuing to influence her personal interactions in college:

In my speech class, I have a girl who is Filipino, an older woman who is Indian.
And then there is a couple others in there, but they are all different races, so you
hear it in their accents when they talk. But they are all very friendly people, and
for me, I'm used to it, because in the Navy, I was always so used to that. But you
can tell other people in the class, they are having difficulty trying to understand
them, or just understanding where they're coming from, because it's different for
them. And I can see the ones that are new to college by how they react to it.

Danielle was also new to college but saw herself in this particular way as more mature
than other first-year college students.

Both Bob and Cash described coming to terms with differences they encountered
in the Navy. For Bob, growth came in the sphere of respecting different religions and
worldviews. He said:

Then you just be open with it, but don't try to dog [your coworkers] on their
ideas. There's a lot of differences in what other people believe. So that right
there, if we're having a conversation about that, you just have to go at it with an
open mind and don't just try shooting down their ideas, just listen to them; hear
them out. If you disagree with them then you can tell them how you disagree, but just keep it respectful. Don’t try and say anything bad about it. Everyone’s going to have a different point of view.

By living and working with people with beliefs different from his own, Bob learned to listen respectfully, disagree cordially, and offer his point of view unassumingly. For Cash, however, the change was even deeper. In his first interview, Cash described how he had been very conservative on both political and social issues at the time he entered the Navy. When I asked him how he navigated interactions with people very different from himself he responded:

I think for what it was I listened. I soaked up the information. I learned a lot of new things from different people. My views on a lot of things changed. I used to be against gay marriage and now I’m 100 percent for it. It’s different looking on the outside, in. Like gays shouldn’t serve in the military, but then on the inside it’s like, why not. They’re doing the same job as me. They’re no different. Their sexual preference is different and that’s it. But navigating through it, it wasn’t necessarily navigating. I just went with the flow.

After working with gay people in the Navy, Cash found his views on gay marriage had completely changed. Underlying this change of opinion, however, were relationships he had built with people he might never allowed within his circle of friends had he not served with them in the military. The open-mindedness toward diversity that the Navy fostered in these participants continued to affect them in college and in their personal lives, clearly supporting their growth and development toward self-authorship.
Discipline. In addition to open-mindedness and the ability to see problems from various perspectives, skills resulting from military discipline followed these participants from the Navy into civilian life. Each of the participants mentioned organizational skills or time management as benefits of being in the military. These skills were helping them adjust to civilian life and balance their workload in college. Another theme related to discipline but not explicitly articulated by the participants was their ability to compartmentalize the various parts of their lives, such as separating work from personal time or the military mission from personal goals. The theme of discipline surfaced more often across the interviews than any other type of support to the participants’ growth and development.

Abby described her life before the Navy and lessons she learned in the area of self-discipline:

Before I didn’t like schedules. It was not something I liked at all. But with the military, it teaches you to look at time management skills, and you’re set on a certain path, and when you deviate from that, something’s gonna go wrong.

That’s just the way it is. You gotta stay on course.

When I asked Abby how the military has affected her transition to college, she expanded on this idea of self-discipline, crediting it with making her successful in college:

I think that if it wasn’t for the military part of my life, I don’t think I would have the self-discipline to go back to school. Because I didn’t wanna go to school before. That’s why I went in to the military. But I think that within the military you have deadlines you have to meet, and you have so much on you, but nobody’s gonna hold your hand and do it. And so I had to not only be self-sufficient, self-
reliant, but I had to learn that self-discipline and get everything done on time. And I think that without that I probably would not be doing as well as I am in school, because I would be like, "Yeah okay, don’t feel like going in," [laughter] and just not go.

Ranae, Rusty, Lucy, and Joe concurred with Abby on this point, with Joe articulating a common aphorism in military culture: “If you’re on time you’re late, if you’re early you’re on time.” It was this type of extensive training and practice of time management skills that led Ranae, as noted above, to suggest that the required course in study skills be offered with veteran-only sections.

In addition to time management, Bob learned important lessons about organizational structure from his time in the Navy:

I used to have jobs before I joined the military, but I really didn’t understand the whole chain of command. But [laughter] that definitely – you figure it out really quick when you’re in the military, like how the structure actually works in a regular business.

Bob was able to transfer his understanding of structure from the military environment to both the classroom and workplace. He considered this a lasting benefit of his military experience.

Another facet of discipline that all of the participants talked about was their ability to compartmentalize the various parts of their lives. Further, they demonstrated the ability to separate how they thought about those parts. This ability illustrated one way they learned to hold their work as object as they developed more complex understandings of themselves in relation to their work. This skill helped them focus on serious issues on
the job even though, personally, they may not have had the maturity such responsibility suggested. This separation also allowed for personal growth within the rigid structure of the military environment and helps answer the first research question of this study about how self-authorship can develop in an environment that depends heavily on external foundations. Rusty talked about a dichotomy between maturity on the job and immature behavior during personal time:

We were still kids. Like me and my buddy, we worked in the flight deck. We played that game several times on the flight deck. Like flight ops is over and me and the other guy, we would wrestle on the flight deck. Not the place to do it. It wasn’t safe. It was immature. But we did it anyway. We were still young and wanted to have fun. But we weren’t doing our job. Our minds weren’t engaged. So it was all right. We got the job done, now we can play.

In his second interview, Rusty added to this idea of separating work and play, crediting the military with helping him learn when it was all right to have fun. As an adolescent, he had worked full-time and felt he had to be serious at all times, not allowing himself to relax. But after entering the Navy, Rusty learned otherwise:

One thing, you don’t have to be serious all the time, but when there’s a job to do, do it. You can joke and have a good time, but as soon as you need to do your job, then do it. Doesn’t mean you have to be all serious while you’re doing it. I mean, depends on the severity, I guess, of the job.

The military structure actually helped Rusty learned how to relax and have fun when it was appropriate by allowing him to engage in joking and games after duty hours. This is
a form of self-regulation that Rusty was still practicing after leaving the Navy and entering college.

Ranae used her ability to compartmentalize to help her focus on the important tasks in her workday, not allowing herself to become distracted. She described a typical day in the repair shop:

So you have 800 different things going on at one time. You have to know who you’re honing in on to get that information that you need. So that has probably taught me a lot more than anything, especially when you have your shop leaders and they’re yelling out different things to different people and they’re yelling out different things to different people. You have to figure out who you’re listening to.

This type of focus was also helping Ranae with her homework in college. She had learned how to sort and categorize tasks by importance and that directly related to the smoothness of her transition and success in her classes.

Danielle spoke directly about her growth and development within the military environment. She did not see a conflict between learning to listen to her internal voice, which she came to understand as an important element of self-authorship based on our conversations, and following orders:

Outside of work is a big part of the self-authorship, ‘cause that’s where you kinda figure out what you want. But the same time I feel like when you are at work, although you have orders to follow, you still have your goals. Like, you still go, “Hey this is my main priority. This is what I need to deal with first. This is what’s important to me more. Although I still need to do these other things, this
is my arrangement of priority.” And I think how we figure out our priorities and what they are to us is kinda our way of figuring out self-authorship. Because, like, when you get qualifications you’re told what ones to get, but you still overall have control of what ones you want to get and in what order and how to go about that. So I think that kinda helps that.

Danielle understood that setting her own priorities even within the structure of requirements was a way she could follow her internal voice. This was a clear example of one participant’s shift from being Subject in the military structure to holding that structure as Object and reflecting on it (Kegan, 1994). This approach allowed her to fulfill the expectations of her supervisors without compromising her ultimate goals and desires.

The skills learned as part of a disciplined military lifestyle, such as time management and setting priorities were described by all the participants. This was not unexpected. However, the frequency with which they mentioned different ways they compartmentalized segments of their lives and the different benefits they derived from that compartmentalization was surprising.

**Challenge and support.** The second interview protocol contained a section entitled “Challenge and Support” (Sanford, 1966), which examined challenges the participants had encountered during their service as well as the support that helped them meet those challenges. I focused on this concept because of its importance in helping individuals move from one developmental level to the next (Baxter Magolda, 1999; Kegan, 1994). Much of what the participants described focused on leadership, making difficult choices, and standing up for themselves or others. They also mentioned the
challenge of taking on new responsibilities, especially at young ages and especially when those who worked for them were older.

Cash’s experience encompassed both leadership and accepting higher levels of responsibility. I asked him about the challenges he faced while in active service and he responded:

I feel like new positions were the most challenging, because you had to be able to approach people the right way for certain things. You had to be willing to do the same things they had to do. Because I’ve always hated having a leader that was lazy, that wouldn’t go do anything and they just told everyone else to do things. And it was challenging keeping people out of trouble, being the person they go to immediately using the chain of command for certain situations. I think the most challenging part in my life was just being in charge of other people.

Cash found support for this challenge from his mentors and superiors whom he felt comfortable approaching for advice. Not only had he been trained for responsibility as a military police officer but he also took advantage of ongoing, albeit informal, instruction from leaders he respected.

When Rusty received instruction in leadership skills, it was not due to his own initiative. Instead, a supervisor noticed that Rusty continued to do tasks he should have been delegating and forced him to stop that behavior. Although he was the workshop leader, Rusty felt he could do jobs better and faster than his crew members. He recognized that he should be communicating better in order to train them but did not know how to improve. In the end, Rusty’s supervisor intervened and pulled him away from the job:
I really couldn’t not incorporate [his feedback] because your chief says, “Look, you’re done. You’re not turning any more wrenches,” it wasn’t because I did something faulty. It’s because he saw that I had my junior guy following me around watching me, and I didn’t realize it at the time, that that’s all he did is watch me. . . . So yeah, I had to change – and when I was pulled aside and like, “You’re done. You’re training now. Think of yourself as the training PO.” All right. It hurt ‘cause that’s all I’d been doing for how long? But it made sense and I figured it out and I was grumpy for a little while, but then I figured out that one day, they were going to leave and they were not going to know what to do.

Rusty, like Cash, received support for his new role from his superiors and other supervisors. But Rusty also described reaching into himself for the resolve to carry out the task of training. He was not happy about shifting from working with his hands to leading others in those jobs but he realized his personal preference had to give way to the ship’s mission requirements.

When I asked Danielle about challenges she had faced, she immediately recalled an activity from boot camp where she led a group through simulated battle stations. She described the change she saw in herself as a result:

I learned a lot about myself from battle stations because when they put me in charge of my event that just made me realize how much of a leader I could actually be because every person in your group has to lead one event and I was like “No way. There’s no way I’m gonna be able to do this one.” But I got the highest grading. Out of all the events that we did, mine was the most successful. And that just made me realize how much better off I was at leading than I had
ever thought. I never thought I had it in me to ever be the leader. I always seen
myself as a follower and just do what I was told to do ‘cause it’s easier that way. .
. . And doing that in boot camp made me realize how much I liked that feeling.
That’s what made me such a go-getter was because I liked that feeling of being
the leader and not the follower. So that’s what urged me to make rank so fast. I
didn’t want to be the person on the bottom anymore and that made me learn and
grow a lot because that just made me look at things that I want to do differently.
Before, I’d always seen myself as the person working for somebody else. Now I
try to see myself as the more manager type.

For Danielle, a successful result supported her in seeking more leadership positions. She
found a previously untapped talent that she could use to her benefit in the Navy. Danielle
also described support from mentors and close friends. Overall, these supports changed
Danielle’s understanding of who she could be and what her future could look like.

Lucy’s challenge involved taking a stand against a higher-ranking sailor who was
sexually harassing the women in Lucy’s workshop. She described how her involvement
with the issue began:

We had an issue on our – on my last command about sexual harassment. And
there was girls that were getting sexually harassed by the same person. They’d
come back, talked about it and how they didn’t feel comfortable about what was
going on, and they were like, “Well I wanna report it, but at the same time I don’t
wanna make a scandal. Or look down on or look like ‘Oh, this is a lying… blah,
blah, blah that made up a story.’” But the fact that started happening more than
just two – three girls, finally it ended up happening to me. The same person. I
didn’t handle it too well. I stopped him, called him out on it, and I told him to his face, “I’m gonna report you to Chief.” Went down and my chief didn’t really, like – it’s like he knew that he had been doing that. He was like, “So?” I was furious. I’m like, “The fuck? You’re supposed to be taking care of your junior seamens who you have me coming up to you telling you that this is going on, and you’re just like, ‘Eh.’” So I went to talk to the military police in our ship . . . . They took my report and started the investigation. It took almost a year, but they caught him. Along with another guy.

In the military services there are varying degrees of sexual harassment ranging from verbal comments to coerced sexual intercourse. Lucy apparently faced harassment on the more serious end of the spectrum because her response to the sailor harassing her was, “What the hell does it look like – a floating brothel? No. You can wait till we hit port.” Deciding to report the incident could have brought Lucy the same defamation the other women feared and which kept them silent. When her chief seemed not only indifferent to but also cognizant of the situation, he failed to fulfill his duty as an advocate for his sailors. However, due to just this sort of situation, the Navy – and the Department of Defense as a whole – has instituted a system for reporting sexual harassment or other types of discrimination and abuse. The system is not perfect and sometimes moves more slowly than it should to properly redress wrongs suffered by individuals, but it is easily accessible and available to any service member who needs it. Lucy knew her rights and trusted the larger administrative structure, filing a complaint with military police investigators. In her case, the Navy did support her in meeting this challenge and the offenders were caught and punished.
Other participants talked about standing up for themselves, taking on leadership roles, and accepting added responsibilities. These were challenges they met with help from supportive friends, mentors, and supervisors. They also received support from the military system itself, their training, and their internal characteristics such as drive, self-motivation, and initiative.

**Being forced.** One theme that was interwoven with several discussed above was the compulsory nature of military service. Abby used the term “being forced” several times in her interviews when she talked about how she learned to get along with others or approach problems from different perspectives. Other participants also used this term or variations of it when they talked about taking on new responsibilities or relating to people from diverse backgrounds.

When I asked Rusty about his expectations for college and relationships with other students, he responded, “I still see people blaming their parents instead of saying, ‘I’m a grownup in college. I need to do my own thing.’ . . . Because they haven’t been forced to grow up.” Rusty had, however, been forced to grow up in the Navy when he was selected to supervise his unit. He recounted how this had happened and how reluctant he had been to take on the added responsibility:

I didn’t like it at first. I wasn’t ready for it. I told them that when they told me that they wanted me to do that. It was like, “No. I’m not ready.” “Get ready.” [Laughter] They came up, slapped me on the back, said, “You got it.” “What do you mean?” [Laughter] So I had to. If not, I was the supervisor and I was going to get in trouble.
The supervisor of Rusty’s shop had been reassigned on short notice, which left a vacancy that had to be filled. Of all the available people, Rusty was the best choice in spite of the fact that he was only 20 years old and younger than some of the other members of his team. Mission requirements forced Rusty into this position; the position, in turn, forced Rusty to grow up.

Of all the participants, Abby used the term, “being forced,” most frequently. Unlike Rusty, she was not forced into a new position of responsibility. Instead, she found herself forced to live and work with people who were from different backgrounds and ethnicities than she was. She suggested that her open-mindedness toward people from diverse backgrounds was partly due to education through formal briefings, as mentioned above. However, Abby also believed being required to work in a diverse environment contributed to her growth. She elaborated:

It’s just you’re told you’re going to work with these people. This is who you got to work with. So you work with those people. So you can either be, you know, against it – I don’t want to work with these people – or just do it and you get to talking, you get along. So I think that’s where the open minded comes in. I hate to say it’s kind of forced because it kinda is, but it’s forced to the point where you accept it.

Another compulsory component of military training was boot camp. Once again, Abby talked about how she adjusted to military culture in terms of being forced to do so:

It was kind of forced. I mean I didn’t really have an option. It was just – I couldn’t leave. So you just had to accept it. . . . I think boot camp is very internal. It is very internal ‘cause you just accept, “I have to do this. Two months, I’ll be
done.” I mean, it’s very – I don’t know if I’m saying this right. There’s a lot of camaraderie. I’ll just say that. Like you have to work together to get through it or it’s not going to happen.

In her description, Abby linked the mandatory nature of boot camp to acceptance of diversity, camaraderie, and personal reflection. In the group interview, she talked more about that personal reflection, or soul-searching, and how it helped her begin to listen to her internal voice. Her observations on that point are described in more detail in the soul-searching section below.

Although being forced to get along with others or take on more significant responsibilities helped the participants, in some cases, to develop stronger internal foundations, in other cases they described negative aspects of the compulsory environment. Both Ranae and Joe expressed feelings of powerlessness and dissatisfaction about their jobs. When I asked Joe if he could think of a time he had to make a difficult choice between what he wanted to do and what others wanted him to do, he replied, “Not really, ‘cause it was always ‘You’re doing this.’ [I was] kinda volunteered.” Joe said he did not feel his voice was heard in the workplace until just before he separated. He worked in an area that was high in the overall Navy command structure and his low rank prevented him from having much say in what he did or how he accomplished it. Ranae chose the field of aviation electronics when she joined the Navy but was tasked to work as a mechanic instead. She described her frustration with that assignment:

When you first go into the shop you’re expected to learn how to be a plane captain. Which nothing about it is electronic, first off, and I was an aviation
electrician. If I wanted to learn... or do changing fluids, checking engine oil, fuel, stuff like that, I would’ve gone into a field where that was required of me. I hated that aspect of the job. Because that’s not what I was trained to do; that’s not what I wanted to do. That did not make me happy in any way, shape or form. Fortunately, Ranae was eventually transferred to an electronics shop where she thrived.

Bob described being forced to participate in community service. He used the same term Joe did, being “volun-told,” when he recounted that experience:

I was kinda forced to do some community service work in the Navy. My RCO was trying to break a record for having the most volunteer man hours on the boat, so he kinda volun-told us – everyone – to do work outside. So I worked at [a charity] for a week straight. I was basically their slave, I guess [laughter] you could say.

Although Bob seemed not to mind working at the charity, neither did he experience any lasting effects from his community service. He was glad to learn what the charity did for people in the community but he did not believe he grew or changed in any discernible way because of working there.

Learning to get along, make the best of a difficult situation, and grow into leadership positions were beneficial effects the participants associated with the compulsory nature of the military. However, loss of voice, performing undesirable jobs, and perfunctory community service were negative aspects of the same compulsory culture. This element of the military environment allowed for a certain amount of exploitation of service members, albeit in the name of getting the job done. Yet this
cultural element also can serve as the impetus for internal growth and development in those same service members.

Soul-searching. The final support for development and learning that I identified from the interviews is the occasion for soul-searching within the military environment. A question in the group interview protocol asked how much soul-searching the participants engaged in during boot camp or their military service. Unfortunately, only Abby and Danielle responded to this question because none of the other participants attended a group interview (see Chapter 3 for a detailed explanation of the circumstances surrounding the group interview). However, due to the depth and richness of their responses, the theme of soul-searching merits attention here.

Abby described how her original decision to join the Navy because of a bad relationship was supplanted by a genuine desire to pursue military service for her own good:

I went through a lot of soul-searching when I was in boot camp . . . and I just think that while I was in boot camp being away from all those people that were not good for me and all those friends and out of the environment, it was just really, like – I’d lay on my rack at night and I would just think. And it really just . . . it was eye-opening being out of the environment. . . . I am happy with my life now. I think I’m more comfortable with myself since before I went in and afterwards. I think I’m so much more comfortable with myself and self-assured. Definitely. I don’t even wanna know what I’d be doing if I hadn’t joined. It’d probably be bad.
Danielle agreed and noted that a romantic relationship was at the center of her decision to join the Navy:

I had a high school sweetheart. He joined the Navy. I joined because of him. . . .

Thought he was the greatest person ever. . . . So I’m supposed to leave for boot camp three weeks, next thing I know I’m finding out he has this whole secret relationship going on back in his A-school [where he trained for his rate] with this other girl that I didn’t know about. . . . So I went into boot camp with that mindset of being heartbroken of, “Oh my God, I just made the worst decision ever. I joined the Navy because of a guy.” And here I am. But while I was in boot camp I did realize I didn’t need him. And I did make the right decision; I was still doing the right thing with my life. Because all my friends – like you were saying – they were forming a bad environment for me. Being away from all that just made me really soul-search myself and be like, “You know, I did the right thing for myself. I did what I needed to do, I’m becoming a better person, and I’m gonna have good experiences.” And then my entire Navy career I just continued soul-searching.

Both women initially joined the Navy for someone else rather than for themselves. In the personal interviews neither mentioned how the first reason for joining was replaced by one that aligned more closely with their internal voices. Nor did they mention until the group interview the role that soul-searching had on this change.

When I asked whether the Navy was instrumental to their soul-searching or whether they thought soul-searching alone would have supported the same growth they
described, both Abby and Danielle insisted that the Navy was indeed crucial to their development. Abby explained:

I think they had to be together, because I feel like the Navy – I feel like if I was back home I wouldn’t have even done all that soul-searching, ‘cause I would’ve been caught up in the environment that I was in. But being in the Navy took me away from everything that I knew, so it forced me to really look at myself and what I wanna do and things like that.

Danielle concurred:

I completely agree with what Abby just said. It’s the same thing for me. The Navy really did help with my soul-searching. The environment I was in was all my friends partying, drinking, doing drugs. . . But, you know, being in the Navy took me away from all that, and then it put me outside the circle that I was in and [I was] like, “You know, I don’t need to do any of that stuff. That’s not what this is about. My career is about all the good. Look at all the good stuff.” I feel because of the Navy I’m so much more grounded.

Both Abby and Danielle felt the Navy had provided them with a space away from bad influences in their past that not only allowed but actually encouraged soul-searching. It is important to note that both Abby and Danielle also acknowledged that the Navy was not devoid of partying or bad influences. However, these influences were not connected to friends from their past; Abby and Danielle felt strong enough to choose new friends and associates with whom they could relax without slipping back into bad habits.

I closed this section of the group interview by asking what prompted periods of soul-searching. Danielle replied, “Any kind of hard situation.” Abby elaborated by
saying, “I feel like you never soul-search when you’re happy and at your highest point. It’s always when you’re down and something happens that you really have to look at yourself and the people you’re around.” The military environment, especially boot camp, was replete with hard situations. These women were able to use those situations to engage in soul-searching and begin listening to their internal voices.

Although the personal interviews did not directly address the concept of soul-searching, other participants described introspection and opportunities for reflection on the world or their relationships. The military environment provided the same structured space and distance from familiar surroundings for these participants as it did for Abby and Danielle. Bob mentioned that when he stood watch during the night he and his coworkers would talk about how the earth and stars came into being. Bob also thought a great deal about differences he had with other sailors with regard to beliefs and value systems and he resolved to respect their beliefs. Cash spent lengthy periods of time alone, sorting out his feelings about both his grandmother’s death and his wife’s request for a divorce. He also described how he listened to diverse points of view among his colleagues and “soaked up information” in order to construct his own belief system.

During boot camp, Ranae finally made meaning of her grandmother’s failure to intervene in the abuse perpetrated by Ranae’s father. And while in active service, Lucy worked through her feelings about being raped and whether the Navy was the best place for her. It is possible that the concept of soul-searching would resonate with these participants as it did with Abby and Danielle.
Sex and Gender Identity

During the second interview, I asked the participants whether they believed their sex (i.e., being male or female) or gender identity (i.e., expressions of masculine or feminine traits as defined by current American cultural norms) affected their ability to rely on their own judgment. Of all the men, only Cash believed that his being male sometimes affected his ability to relate to female subjects in his work as a military police officer. He explained:

I mean guys know how guys’ emotions work. Women know how women’s emotions work. So, especially when working with a female partner, I always felt that my judgment call would be a little bit better when dealing with male subjects.

If Cash was working with a female partner, he often asked for her insight regarding female subjects. Otherwise, the men generally responded as Joe did: “I don’t think it has any effect. I could be a woman and still have the same confidence that I would.” Rusty elaborated a bit more in this vein:

It doesn’t matter who you are. It’s you, who you want to be, like I don’t think it matters. I don’t think you’re predetermined to become a criminal or president. I think you make that for yourself. . . . I will stand up for myself pretty quick. I’ve seen some females that will do it instantly. [Snaps fingers] And like they’re that quick to react. So no, I think it’s your own person.

The men did not see their being male as an ingredient that either supported or hindered their ability to rely on their own judgment. They also asserted that sex and gender identity did not matter for women, that all people were the same except for individual differences. For the men, sex did not enter into their consideration of how valid their
judgments were; they also believed women would not think about this question any differently than they did.

The women, however, did consider sex and gender identity quite deliberately when making decisions. Abby was not sure whether she had more self-confidence than she would if she were a man, but when she was growing up she observed that it was the women in the family making most of the decisions. Danielle believed being female supported her ability to rely on her own judgment because she was constantly pushing herself to succeed in a male-dominated environment. Lucy similarly described relying on her own judgment as a function of being one of the few women in her work area. Finally, Ranae asserted that being female was a benefit when it came to making decisions because she felt the women in her family made wiser, more strategic decisions than the men.

There were subtle variations among the four women’s perspectives as well. Both Ranae and Lucy couched their answers to the question about relying on their own judgment within the framework of their identity as Hispanic women. Lucy responded:

Well, coming from a Hispanic background, you’ve always – it’s always been rely on men. You know? They’re the ones that support you; you don’t support them. I mean, you don’t support yourself. And that that did support themselves are like my aunts. Those are supporting themselves, they’re never gonna find a man, because they don’t – a man doesn’t want a independent woman. At least in our culture.

For these reasons, Lucy resolved to pursue a romantic relationship with a man outside of her own culture; she felt the cultural norms would prevent her from ever having an
interdependent relationship with a Hispanic man. She credited her mother and stepfather for helping her break out of those cultural norms:

I guess with my culture, [women] always expected men to do everything. If we wanted something done, like, we were only in charge of cleaning, cooking and taking care of babies. My mother, at a young age, she cut that shit with us, “You’re gonna do everything, you’re gonna clean, fix things.” My dad, he taught us how to do stuff. . . . We had to learn how to do it ourself – put more air in our soccer ball. Our tire from our bikes was busted or something, he taught us how to change a tire. Stuff like that.

Lucy was acutely aware of how she was perceived by members of her extended family and community, especially when she exercised independent behavior as a woman.

Ranae described similar cultural constraints in her family. And like Lucy, Ranae had a mother who intentionally taught her to take care of herself without help from a male relative:

Traditionally in a Mexican household the females are told what to do, how to do it, when to do it, why to do it, with whom to do it. Thankfully, my mom has instilled in me that just ‘cause you’re female doesn’t mean you’re weak, doesn’t mean you don’t know how to do it. And doesn’t mean you shouldn’t do it if that’s what you feel.

Having a strong female role model such as her mother showed Ranae that the way roles were assigned in the rest of the family did not have to hold true for her. She explained:

When I was younger, especially when we were around the family a lot, I always thought that the dad or the uncle or the grandpa made decisions and that was it.
And as I got older I realized that – especially as a female – you have to have a say on what’s going on around you. You can’t expect or want for somebody to make those decisions for you, because then you’re voiceless. And that’s just not okay. Ranae and her mother met resistance from members of their extended family just as Lucy did because, according to Ranae, “We are so boisterous in what we want. And they’re not comfortable with it.” Both Ranae and Lucy had taken deliberate action to resist cultural expectations long before they ever joined the Navy.

When I asked Lucy and Ranae about their jobs and experiences in the Navy, neither woman talked much about sexual discrimination or feeling they had to work harder to prove themselves because they were females in a masculine environment (Danish & Antonides, 2009; Herbert, 1998). It is possible that Ranae, having come up through junior ROTC, had already encountered prejudice and learned to address it. She had described her transition from high school to boot camp as smooth because she was used to following orders and being organized. Perhaps learning to work as a female in a masculine culture was another part of that experience. Lucy did mention one example of how she had to assert herself in her job, which was very physically demanding:

I had a labor job – hard labor work job. And just because I was a female, guys think I wouldn’t be capable of doing the job. So they’re like, “Hey, let me do it.” “No. I got this. Obviously I volunteered to do it, so let me do it.” “You’re gonna hurt yourself doing that. You’re gonna end up doing something wrong.” Like, it pisses me off, like double-standard. You know?

But Lucy also tailored her gender identity to fit situations as she desired. She recognized that most men she worked with thought she had a strong masculine side. When she wore
dresses or makeup, they said she did not seem like herself. I was intrigued by the intentionality of Lucy’s construction of gender, so I asked her whether she felt her internal voice was more masculine or more feminine. She replied:

I think it’s a 50-50 for me. To be honest. Like I told you, I don’t like asking for help until [I’m] neck deep. And that’s, like, the masculine part of me. It’s like, “Fuck it. I’m gonna try and do this myself. I can – I know I can do it.” And half the times, yes, I am successful and I get it done. Without asking anybody’s help. And then when I’m head deep, I’m like, “Oh, I’m gonna be the little helpless girl.” . . . I guess that just depends on certain situations I’m put at really. What’s gonna be more convenient for me to act – to just have it done for me, or me do it myself? . . . I’ve always felt like women that just go out and get it themselves instead of expecting and relying on other people has a little bit more masculinity. . . . It just – like I said, it just depends on the situation I get put on. I choose – but I choose whether I’m gonna be the feminine side or the masculine woman.

Lucy showed that she is aware of how she is perceived by her male counterparts, how she can adjust her projection of gender to suit her own needs, and that she consciously chooses which facets of gender to employ.

Neither Danielle nor Abby, both of whom are White women, framed their answers about sex and gender identity in terms of ethnicity or culture. However, both had much to say on the subject, both within the context of military service and also in family relationships. Danielle began mentioning how “being a girl” affected work relationships even before I asked any questions about the subject. She offered this summary of her overall experience:
When you’re in the military you get told so often that you’re just a girl. You can’t do this. You can’t do that. Especially in a male-dominated rate which is what I was in, they’re like, “You don’t deserve this, you don’t deserve this, blah, blah, blah.” Well, you really have to prove yourself that you deserve it, ‘cause a lot of times they’re like, “Oh, you only got that ‘cause you’re a female.” Everything I did when I was in I deserved and everything that my [female] first class did she deserved. Yes, there are some [women] that get by just because they are a girl – which that does happen sometimes – but then there are the few of us that actually do deserve to be there and do work to be there.

Danielle described standing up for herself again and again as she moved up in rank. She found her authority challenged by the men in her workshop and continually had to repeat orders before they finally complied. Had she been a man, Danielle asserted, she would not have met with so much resistance.

In the group interview, both Danielle and Abby expounded on this topic of women having to prove themselves beyond what was expected of the men. They agreed that by coming to work on time and doing the assigned job, men received good evaluations and promotions. However, women had to give “150 percent effort” to receive the same good evaluations; if women simply did what was assigned, they would not progress in their careers. A woman’s appearance also made a difference in how she was perceived by the men as a worker. If the woman was attractive, the men believed she would not want to perform physically demanding jobs or “get dirty.” Although three of the four women participating in this study described this attitude among the men, Danielle offered a detailed account of her own experiences:
If you don’t do the 150 percent, people think your evals are handed to you; people think that you’re getting everything ‘cause you’re a pretty girl. . . . I felt like for me, every single time we had a maintenance job, I was volunteering. I was a E-1 and I was like, “I wanna do it.” They’re like, “Are you sure? You haven’t —” I’m like, “I wanna learn.” That was just me. I was like, “I’ll do it. I volunteer.” They’re like, “You’re gonna be up for a couple days.” I’m like, “That’s fine. I just wanna learn.” And I was the first girl working my division that was that way. I shocked all of them. Especially according to all them, for me actually being somewhat attractive and stuff, to them they didn’t expect that from me, and when I came they thought I was gonna be one of the girls that just wanted to clean, listen to music, paint. A lot of the females, they come in, they’re okay with doing that stuff. And I wasn’t. And so for me I was trying to do 150 percent where the other girls were just trying to do the 80 like the guys, but they’re not standing out any. Because they’re just doing what the guys are doing. And those guys are getting better evals than them.

Abby continued with this theme and related her own experiences:

I feel like girls need to try two times – three times as hard just be equal to the guys. When I worked in the shop with the tires, I’d always be the dirtiest person, ‘cause I didn’t care – I don’t care getting dirty. You’re in coveralls, you know, wash it off at the end of the day. And we had a chief come in one time and go, “Oh, why is she the dirtiest? She’s the girl in here. She’s better than you guys.” You know what I mean? Everyone has this idea in their head that the girls can’t work as hard.
Abby, Danielle, and Lucy all encountered a double-standard in what was expected of women compared to men in the Navy. They also found that women had to work significantly harder, longer, and in dirtier jobs to get positive recognition. However, even recognition from superiors, as in the example above, often served to sharpen differences between men and women and, ultimately, to denigrate the achievements of women by using them to shame men into action.

In the women's group interview I asked how a person becomes successful in the military and what that looks like for men compared to women. Abby immediately replied, "I think you [as a woman] have to be more of a bitch. . . . those female chiefs, they are bitches. But you can't blame them." Danielle agreed and talked about how she had to change her leadership approach when she was promoted:

> They really have to be. . . . I have a first class female that I work with. She's totally awesome outside of work. When you're in work, she's a total bitch. . . . And then when I made E-5 I realized why she was like that. As a female, they didn't take her seriously. And I don't understand why just because we're female we're not getting taken seriously. But it really is a big issue when you're in the military. You would think that they would listen the same way they would to anybody else. But no. I think it's just 'cause they think we're softer. Like, my LPO that was a female, she started off trying to be nice to everybody. And I think that was a problem. I think you had to come in from day one as a bitch.

I asked Abby and Danielle what it was about the female superiors that caused them to be labeled in this way. Abby replied:
There’s sternness. Because my husband just made second and I’ve seen him in
his shop before. He’s cool as hell with them. And they all listen to him and all
respect him. And a woman, you have to be more stern and more serious and more
– can’t joke around as much, because then people will be like, “Well she’s really
nice. She’s laid back, she won’t care.”

The women were not necessarily threatening disciplinary action, nor were they using
particularly profane language or demeaning their workers. However, because they were
women “they were forced,” in Abby’s words, to put on a stern demeanor and cut off any
semblance of friendliness they might otherwise have desired to show.

This convention of sternness among female leaders was not simply observed or
experienced; recruits were taught in boot camp to expect it. Lucy told me that she did not
trust her female chiefs in the Navy because of what she had heard there. She elaborated:

I knew what they were up to. Like I remember our [drill instructor] telling us,

“There’s two kinds of women in the military – your whores and your bitches.
You choose which one you want to be.” And bitch is what you want to be, and

that’s gonna tell you how far you’re gonna get in the Navy.

Unlike Abby and Danielle, Lucy believed that women who held higher ranks had traded
sex for their success. It was unclear to me from her story whether that was the intended
meaning of the drill instructor. Nevertheless, Lucy asserted that she preferred to be – and
be thought of – as a bitch even if it meant she would not receive promotions. Danielle
insisted that women could, indeed, be successful in the Navy based on their own merit:

There’s no reason a female can’t do just as well as a male. It’s just they probably
are gonna have to try harder. That’s what we’re trying to get at. . . . Guys are
gonna laugh, say whatever they want. They think we sleep our way to get everywhere. That's just their view of it. They don't realize when — like, my first class I was just telling you that she worked her butt off to get where she is. She is the most qualified person. She just made first not too long ago, and she went up for board for chief. And everybody was like, "Oh, it's because she's sleeping with these people." No she wasn't. It's so much harder to feel successful when everybody's bringing you down trying to say that you're doing other things you're not doing to be successful.

Danielle also said she had defended herself against similar accusations because she had managed to reach the rank of E-5 in less than five years. Although some women did use their sex to get promoted or to avoid unpleasant or difficult tasks, many others achieved success through sheer determination and hard work.

The quotations in this section illustrate the ways the participants viewed sex and gender in relation to either self-reliance or the work environment. The men did not believe sex had any effect on a person's ability to rely on his or her own judgment. Further, they asserted that it should not matter. Instead, the men believed trusting one's own judgment was a function of an individual's personality or character. And with the exception of Cash, the men did not think being male either helped or hindered their ability to rely on their own judgment. Although the men did give examples of women they had seen assert themselves or show leadership in the Navy, none of the men mentioned the double-standard the women described nor did they talk about the prevailing assumption among male sailors of female sailors trading sex for success that occupied so much of the women's conversations.
By contrast, the women participants did consider how sex related to the decisions they made, both in their family life and in the workplace. All but one described a double-standard where women had to work harder in order to receive recognition for their accomplishments. There was some disagreement about whether high-ranking women in the Navy used sex to achieve that success and how prevalent that behavior was. But regardless of the answer, three of the four women described the prevalence of assumptions and insinuations of such behavior. The women also talked about gender identity and ways they tailored their masculine or feminine characteristics to suit their needs in a particular situation.

Conclusion

These 11 themes emerged through our discussions about significant experiences, decision-making processes, how serving in the Navy may have affected growth and development, and the types of approaches to learning the participants preferred. Other minor themes also emerged, but these 11 appeared most frequently and related most directly to the research questions about how self-authorship develops in a structured environment founded on external supports. Six of these themes are, in fact, grouped under the topical heading of *Military Supports for Development and Learning*. It is clear from these data that not only can military service members develop toward self-authorship but that certain aspects of military life may actually foster such development. Three of the themes related to *Learning Preferences* that these participants shared. The fact that hands-on learning and problem-solving figured so prominently in their interviews suggests that many student veterans could share this learning preference. The role of teachers as leaders is another important theme for college faculty to consider when
interacting with student veterans. The theme of *Community College as a Transitional Platform* sheds light on reasons the participants chose to enroll in community college and the special challenges they faced in their transition from the military to civilian life. Finally, the theme of *Sex and Gender Identity* shows how different the experience of military service can be for men compared to women.

College administrators and faculty need to be aware that the Navy - or any other branch of the services - is not as uniform as it appears from the outside. These participants experienced varying degrees of job satisfaction, professional success, acceptance or marginalization based on race or gender, and stress due to deployment or family separation. The experiences of these participants were also quite different from those of service members even ten years ago when Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom were in full force; for example, combat roles are diminishing and deployments require fewer personnel for the Navy’s mission. None of these Navy student veterans served in combat zones, although several did support combat operations from the decks of ships. Some participants described smooth transitions either into the military or from the military into college. For others, the stress of those transitions was significant and intense.

One trait that these participants held in common, however, was their development toward becoming self-authored at a young age compared to the population in general. This does not mean they always show maturity in behavior or wisdom in making decisions. They do, however, view the world in complex ways and are able to evaluate and integrate new knowledge into their worldviews without losing their sense of self. Rather, that very activity of incorporating diverse perspectives helps them understand
themselves better and feel more confident in their values and choices. These student veterans are constructing and relying on internal foundations before completing the type of education we have traditionally considered vital to such growth. In the next chapter, I posit a theory explaining how that has happened and to what extent the military environment may have served as a catalyst for that growth.
Chapter 6: Toward a Theory of Self-Authorship Development among Student Veterans in Community College

The idea for this study developed from my observation of strong traits of self-reliance, self-discipline, and self-motivation among student veterans with disabilities (Stone, 2013). I wanted to investigate whether veterans were developing internal foundations, or a self-authoring frame of mind, at younger ages than was typical of the general population in the United States (Baxter Magolda, 2001, 2009; Kegan, 1994) and, if so, how that development occurred within the rigid structure of the military environment. I also wanted to understand how student veterans who were nearing or entering self-authorship experienced learning in the community college environment. If they had developed ways of evaluating knowledge, understanding themselves, and relating to others in ways more complex than traditionally-aged college students, I was interested in knowing how that might impact their satisfaction with the learning environment.

Related to the first research question were two secondary questions. The first focused on the significant experiences in veterans’ lives that may have fostered their development. It was not clear to me that student veterans were developing toward a self-authored frame of mind because of their experiences in military service; for instance, there could have been patterns in the pre-military life experiences of these individuals. The second related question focused on how military education and training either helped
or hindered them on that journey. If their time in the military indeed played a role in student veterans' development toward self-authorship, I wanted to discover whether they held any experiences or particular training courses in common.

The conceptual framework I used contained three theoretical strands: the theory of self-evolution (Kegan, 1994), the theory of epistemological reflection (Baxter Magolda, 1992, 1999), and theories of adult learning including andragogy (Knowles, 1980), self-directed learning (Knowles, 1975), and perspective transformation (Mezirow, 1991). This framework informed my data collection as I developed the second personal interview protocol (see Appendix C) and the group interview protocol (see Appendix D); it also assisted my analysis of the interview transcripts. The theory of self-evolution addresses development of the individual in all facets of life, whether intrapersonal, interpersonal, or cognitive. Development occurs inside the classroom, to be sure, but the theory of self-evolution helped me recognize and evaluate my participants' meaning making with regard to power structures, authorities outside the classroom, relationships with friends and family, and how they viewed themselves. The theory of epistemological reflection also addresses development but specifically as it relates to learning. This theory entered into my analysis as I evaluated how my participants viewed knowledge and their own role in its construction. Finally, the adult learning theories supported my understanding of how adults prefer to learn. I used the group of adult learning theories to formulate interview questions and recognize the informal types of learning my participants were engaging in on the job or in personal relationships. I constructed this conceptual framework specifically for this study, but I believe it could be useful for other research endeavors examining learning and development in adults.
Discussion

The findings reported in the previous two chapters answer my research questions and support a substantive theory for the development of self-authorship among Navy veterans in community college. Eight of the nine participants I interviewed demonstrated greater reliance on internal rather than external foundations. Although several participants showed reliance on internal foundations in adolescence (e.g., by deciding to enlist), their military training and experiences during active service proved instrumental in helping them trust their inner voices and developing toward self-authorship. They also shared common characteristics, such as initiative and drive, had sought or been forced into roles of significant responsibility, and benefited from strong and supportive relationships. Although variation appeared in the ways some of the participants made meaning of their experiences, the depth of commonality in the themes they discussed and the characteristics they displayed suggests that this study has reached the point of crystallization (Richardson, 2000) or theoretical saturation leading to an “explanatory framework” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008, p. 264). As I discuss that framework in the next section, I will include some of my personal observations and experiences as a member of the military community. This will provide an additional lens for understanding the data and is an integral part of the interpretivist research paradigm I employed for this study (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

A theory of self-authorship development among student veterans. After completing my constant comparison analysis to identify emergent themes in the participants’ narratives, I conducted theoretical sampling to make connections among those themes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I found three theoretical elements that, when
taken together, explain how the participants in this study developed toward self-
authorship in the rigid environment of military regulations, procedures, and processes.
These three elements also led to a single theoretical statement that describes the
relationship and roles that military culture and individual characteristics have with one
another in forming a connected core wherein military members can develop and learn to
listen to their internal voices. Although my participants were all veterans of the Navy,
the two theoretical elements related to their Navy experiences were not unique to Navy
culture but rather permeate all branches of the U.S. military. Therefore, it may be
possible to expand the application of this theory to include all U.S. service members.

Theoretical element #1: The compulsory nature of military culture supports
development in three ways: it acts as a safety net for risk-taking; it provides an
environment that is separate and therefore insulated from past influences in service
members' lives; and it affords opportunities for soul-searching or personal reflection
that do not usually occur in situations where individuals may freely come and go.

Although joining the military service is voluntary, once individuals are inducted
they lose the freedom to make their own choices about many facets of their lives. This
appeared in the interviews when participants talked about being forced to work with
diverse others, being forced to accept supervisory positions, or being forced to participate
in community service. I once asked my husband, who served as an Air Force physician
for 25 years, whether he really had to leave our family for temporary duty in a distant
location. He replied, "No, I don't have to go, but if I don't they'll put me in jail."
Although he framed his reply to inject humor into the otherwise stressful conversation, he
was only half-joking. Orders are orders.
In the military services, orders govern work schedules, dress, behavior, permanent relocations, temporary duty, deployments, and combat operations. Military members lose some of their rights as citizens, such as the right to free speech, because they are prohibited from openly criticizing either elected or appointed government officials. They cannot assemble at certain events while in uniform – and sometimes even while in civilian dress, depending on the nature of the event. As long as an order is lawful, service members are bound to obey it. Noncompliance meets with disciplinary action ranging from verbal reprimands to formal courts martial, which could result in serving jail time, as my husband indicated, or even expulsion from the military altogether.

However, the compulsory nature of military service also provides some benefits. On the one hand, service members cannot quit their jobs; on the other hand, as Danielle commented, "you know there is no way you’re going to lose that [secure environment] unless you . . . go out and do something intentionally to screw it up." Lucy and other participants also talked about how they or those they supervised were allowed to attempt the same task multiple times until they achieved the desired result. Although the guidance and feedback from supervisors was not always constructive, the result was the creation of a safety net for taking risks. Bob was willing to speak up when his superiors mistakenly followed outdated procedures; he knew that even if he received a reprimand, he would not be fired. And, in his case, he received positive evaluations for his action which served to reinforce his behavior and willingness to take risks. This positive feedback showed respect for Bob’s knowledge and validated his experience, which is similar to the tenets of andragogy in teaching and learning (Knowles, 1980, 1984). His confidence in his ability to rely on his internal voice increased, supporting development
in the cognitive and intrapersonal domains as well as learning in the areas of research, communication, and argument formation.

Military culture operates as a closed system in the sense that those within it are separated from their extended families and the larger civilian culture. This occurs in varying degrees depending on the location of the duty station and the nature of the service member’s job. Sometimes the mission requirements prevent service members from communicating with family and friends. And during periods of training, such as in boot camp, both movement and communication is severely curtailed. This is done, as Ranae noted, to break down the recruits in order to build them back up into members of a cohesive unit, a theme also supported in the literature relevant to this study (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009). As psychologically difficult as this restrictive environment may be, it also serves to insulate recruits from the influences of their past lives. Rusty, Bob, Cash, Abby, and Danielle all mentioned how different they had become due to this insulation from their high school friends and also how they felt they had “grown up” while their friends had made no discernible progress toward more mature ways of living their lives. Those same five participants also believed they would not have matured to the degree they had without going through boot camp and serving in the military. Abby went further and suggested she would be “doing bad things” had she not left her home environment. This development in the interpersonal domain was due, in large part, to the separation and insulation provided by serving in the military.

The third support to development provided by military culture is the occasion for soul-searching at a level of intensity that is rarely experienced by people who can freely travel or communicate with their friends. This was especially evident in Abby’s and
Danielle’s stories about boot camp; however, other occasions such as deployments could afford similar opportunities for self-reflection. This type of reflection was the case for Cash, who received news of two significant losses while stationed at a remote overseas outpost. Although he talked about throwing himself into his work to cope with the emotional pain, he also spent many hours alone thinking about how to move forward without those relationships. Such reflection, if intentional and thorough, also contributes to transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991). People who engage in it trade prior assumptions for a new framework or understanding of reality and themselves within that reality (Mezirow, 1991).

Abby said that people do not engage in soul-searching when life events are good; instead, an individual is usually struggling in some way. The military way of life has no lack of challenging circumstances; the fact that service members often cannot remove themselves from those challenges means that they must find ways to meet them. Both Abby and Danielle developed complex ways of understanding themselves (i.e., in the intrapersonal domain) because of their time in boot camp; more importantly, they both recognized that growth and what had facilitated it.

Unfortunately, soul-searching is not always the chosen means to that end. Stress sometimes manifests itself in military families in the form of domestic violence, as Ranae experienced when she was a child, as well as through substance abuse, as Lucy engaged in following her rape. However, service members also may choose more positive responses such as entering counseling, campaigning for better living conditions, engaging in meaningful community service, and – as Abby, Cash, and Danielle did – soul-searching.
The participants in this study also experienced increased open-mindedness toward
diversity as a result of both of the compulsory nature of their service and the personal
reflection in which they engaged. Cash described how his views about gay marriage and
gays serving in the military changed after reflecting on why such restrictions existed,
given that his work relationships with gay service members were no different from those
with heterosexual service members. Like the other participants, Cash did not choose his
coworkers; had he been allowed to choose them, he might never have confronted his
own biases toward those who were not like him in this particular way. Abby suggested
that her open-mindedness was directly linked to the compulsory nature of military
service. She had lived her whole life within a few miles of a major urban center but had
never realized its level of diversity because of the insular quality of her suburban
lifestyle. Once she joined the Navy, she was required to work with — and learned to value
and appreciate — people from other ethnic groups. Had these participants not been forced
into work relationships with people from diverse backgrounds or orientations, they might
not have experienced accelerated development in the interpersonal domain.

Theoretical element #2: The operational focus of the military provides support
for development in two ways: it offers service members unusual opportunities to be
responsible for people, equipment, and mission outcomes; and it teaches service
members to develop critical thinking skills by evaluating prescribed actions, such as
those based on regulations, against overall mission objectives or core values.

Rusty, Cash, and Danielle served as exemplars of young service members
assuming responsibility far beyond what is normally expected of people under the age of
20 years old. Danielle received the designation of Early Promote on all of her
evaluations, allowing her to reach the rank of E-5 in less than five years. By the time she was 20 years old, Danielle had begun supervising the people in her workshop and coordinating its activities with other units. Before he was 20 years old, Cash had been selected for the dog handling unit of the Navy security forces; in addition to regular law enforcement activities that required him to make life-and-death decisions, Cash also assumed responsibility for explosives detection as foreign vendors and contractors entered the overseas Navy base. Rusty described in detail how he was selected for leadership at the age of 20 even though he felt he was not ready; he knew he was “still a kid” but realized there was no one else to fill the position. He supervised nine other sailors who were older than he and was the subject matter expert for heavy equipment, such as cranes and tractors, for the whole ship.

Those stories, however, are not unique in the military. During my time living on military bases, I was often struck by how young many of the leaders were, in both officer and enlisted ranks. In order to receive retirement benefits from the VA, military members must serve for 20 years. If an individual enlists at the age of 18 he or she will be eligible for retirement at the age of 38. It is common for individuals in their mid-thirties to hold senior positions where they lead groups of people ranging in size from a few dozen to several hundred or even several thousand. They also develop operational procedures, advise on policy issues, and manage budgets ranging from tens of thousands to tens of millions of dollars. As those in senior positions retire, others must fill their place, which means that junior positions also become vacant. This pattern causes exactly the sort of dilemma for service members that Rusty faced: either accept the responsibility and perform to the best of one’s ability, or fail to meet performance standards and receive
the consequences (i.e., disciplinary action). Many, if not most, of those who accept such significant responsibilities adapt to them and accomplish their mission.

Additionally, learning to make decisions as these participants were trained to do involved developing critical-thinking skills. This process of learning to think critically illustrates how some training practices in the Navy followed principles of adult learning and epistemological reflection. The lessons were relevant to the task at hand (Knowles, 1975, 1980, 1984), the learners recognized the value of the lesson and their need for it (Knowles 1975, 1980, 1984), and instructors trusted the skills and competencies of those being trained (Baxter Magolda, 1992, 1999; Knowles 1980, 1984). The participants all described how they were taught to define the problem, consider multiple approaches, and, should the standard procedures seem inadequate or inappropriate, balance regulations against the larger principles of adhering to core values while accomplishing the mission. The various branches of the military have stated core values that differ slightly from one another; however, the Navy values of honor, courage, and commitment (U.S. Navy, 2013), which Ranae also referenced in her interview, provide a sense of the types of values all the services espouse.

The operational focus of the military is couched in the cultural values of honor, courage, and commitment. This means that, although primacy of the mission – or, “getting the job done” – is also valued, the way the mission is accomplished must cohere with the other values. In other words, military members cannot bring dishonor on either their branch of service or on the United States. Within the confines of that restriction there is a great deal of latitude for implementation. One example I observed personally was how my husband, an Air Force physician, responded to requests for manning
assistance from a nearby Navy command. In 2010, a devastating earthquake struck the nation of Haiti and the U.S. Navy was tasked to assist with provision of medical and other humanitarian aid. The medical group my husband commanded had not received similar orders, but the Navy commander called him to request additional nursing and support personnel. There were procedures in place for making and responding to such requests, especially between service branches; however, in that time of crisis, one commander simply telephoned another and made the request informally based on their prior working relationship. Within the hour, Air Force nurses were ready to augment the naval medical teams bound for Haiti. Of course, my husband notified his own command and justified his decision: the earthquake had had catastrophic effects on a civilian population, other U.S. assets had already been committed, diverting personnel from the Air Force hospital would not adversely impact its mission, and, as my husband said, “It was just the right thing to do.” His superiors agreed with his decision.

Figure F shows the two theoretical elements related to military service as planks that overlap one another.
As the participants in this study demonstrated, learning to make decisions that took into consideration multiple approaches, the strategic aims of the military, and the long-term needs of the people involved accelerated their development in the cognitive, intrapersonal, and interpersonal domains. Finding themselves in positions of significant responsibility that included equipment, money, and people’s welfare also contributed to these participants’ development. In the environment of creative problem-solving the mission is not only accomplished but the people involved learn how to judge between regulations and principles; they also learn how to follow their internal voices amidst an abundance of external foundations.

However, these skills and circumstances within military culture cannot fully explain how these service members were able to develop toward self-authorship in the rigid structure of the military environment. There are some individuals in the military who hesitate to deviate from prescribed processes; when those individuals become supervisors or commanders, the atmosphere of the entire unit or group becomes stifling. Joe and Lucy both described how their supervisors did not encourage creative thinking and the resulting frustration each experienced in their jobs. Other participants talked about fellow sailors, including some in leadership positions, who exerted minimal effort toward accomplishing the unit’s goals. More than an environment of responsibility and obligation, then, must be present in order for individuals to develop toward self-authorship. A third element completes this explanatory framework.

Theoretical element #3: Student veterans who have developed toward self-authorship at a young age have demonstrated traits of drive and initiative while receiving support from peers and mentors regarding their choices and decisions.
The first research question in this study asked how service members have progressed toward self-authorship and, secondarily, whether their military training and education contributed to that journey in any way. The first two theoretical elements indicate that there are indeed strong supports for development of one’s internal voice provided by both military culture and its operational focus. However, my constant comparison analysis also found that student characteristics were not only important but quite similar across the narratives of all the participants. In particular, the traits of personal initiative and drive (i.e., sustained self-motivation) were demonstrated by all the participants and with greater frequency than any other traits such as a desire to help people, maturity, or pride. The participants also talked about receiving support from mentors, family, friends, and coworkers within the context of making decisions or when they had to stand up for themselves or what they believed was right.

Across the interviews, whether in discussions about leadership, work ethic, or personal achievements, the participants distinguished between sailors who excelled and those who performed only the minimum requirements of the job. Rusty and Danielle described how they volunteered for extra duties from their very first days in the Navy, regardless of how menial or unpleasant those duties were. They did this in order to distinguish themselves but also to learn as much about their jobs as possible. They also suggested that doing more than was required showed greater commitment to the Navy as a whole. These traits, although not unique to the participants in this study, were also not universally demonstrated among their coworkers or supervisors. The participants included stories about fellow sailors who shirked responsibility, preferring, as Danielle said, “to paint and listen to music.” And because doing more than the minimum was not
necessarily a requirement for promotion, several participants served under superiors who, in their estimation, were not fit for leadership because they lacked the commitment the participants felt they themselves had demonstrated.

In addition to the internal traits of initiative and drive, the participants talked extensively about consulting family, friends, and mentors for advice in decision-making. They also received support from these trusted others when they encountered challenging circumstances. However, we know that this support took the form of Good Company (Baxter Magolda, 2009) rather than an external foundation. In other words, the participants included support from others as part of their decision-making framework rather than as a canon by which they measured their actions. Had they relied solely on the opinions of these trusted others, the participants would not have shown the levels of development toward self-authorship that they all demonstrated. When individuals journey toward self-authorship, they usually progress with guidance (i.e., Good Company) but incorporate that guidance with what they hear from their internal voices. That was evident in the narratives of all the participants in this study. These participants were able to cross bridges of support in order to meet challenges in their lives, principles found in both epistemological reflection and the theory of self-evolution (Baxter Magolda, 1992, 1999; Kegan, 1994).

In my discussions with the female participants, the issue of gender and authority proved to be a significant challenge in relation to their jobs. Not only did they carry the same responsibility as their male counterparts but they also had to take on an uncharacteristically stern demeanor to receive cooperation from their male subordinates. Danielle in particular found support from her husband and a female mentor. Lucy
showed strength of conviction when she stood up for herself in the face of sexual harassment. In her case, it was the support of friends and family rather than coworkers that helped her meet that challenge. In both cases, the women involved faced challenges that likely never would be encountered by the male participants in this study. Nevertheless, both men and women benefited from a strong network of supportive relationships as they navigated the difficulties of their jobs.

Figure G shows the third element of personal traits as a plank that overlaps the elements contributed by the military environment.

Figure G. Contribution of individual traits to self-authorship development.

In the environment of military culture, those individuals with the traits exhibited by this study's participants may also grow and develop toward more complex ways of relating to the world and evaluating knowledge. Individuals without these traits may not benefit in the same way or to the same degree as this study's participants. This leads to
the formulation of a substantive theory for self-authorship development among military service members.

**Substantive theory:** *The operational focus and compulsory nature of the military, along with individual drive and initiative in the presence of Good Company, form a nexus within which development toward self-authorship is likely to occur.*

The explanatory framework includes all three theoretical elements and is shown in graphic form in Figure H below.

![Diagram](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

*Figure H. Nexus for self-authorship development in military service members.*

A nexus carries with it the ideas of connections or a network but also the suggestion of a core, as in cell biology. In this sense, the nexus provides a locus wherein the various parts of the cell communicate with one another in order to function properly. In Figure H above, the three theoretical elements are shown as planks that cross one
another and the hexagonal area where they overlap represents the place those elements interact to stimulate development. In the context of this theory, the nexus of military culture, the operational focus of military service, and individuals’ traits with support from trusted others is both the intersection of these three elements as well as a cloistered space that promotes listening to and cultivating one’s internal voice. Self-motivated individuals, who engage in reflection, seek out responsibility, submit to the compulsory nature of the military, and receive support when facing decisions or challenges are more likely than not to develop complex ways of relating to the world, their own beliefs and values, and the people in their lives.

Each of the three theoretical elements, in whole and in its various parts, relates to the other elements. The nexus can be thought of as a hub where those parts connect or as a beaker wherein the elements interact. For example, one of the connections illustrated in Figure H is between the compulsory nature of military culture and being forced into positions of responsibility. Outside of the military environment, the same individual could encounter an opportunity to accept a responsible position but decline it; in the military, that individual would have no choice but to accept.

Another example of the relationship between two elements may best be described as an interaction rather than as a connection. This interaction, illustrated by the stories of this study’s participants, is how being responsible for people and resources often leads to seeking advice and mentoring (i.e., Good Company) from more seasoned service members. This relates to the concept of challenge and support (Sanford, 1966) and requires the presence of both elements; without support the service member might not be able to develop the tools necessary to meet the challenge and, conversely, mentorship
unrelated to specific challenges only frustrates the service members. That, in fact, was the complaint several participants in this study articulated about the formal mentoring programs in the Navy. Although this interaction applies to military members in this study, it could also occur in other environments because it does not rely on the presence of either military structure or operational focus.

Another interaction occurred when individual traits of drive and initiative led participants to seek or accept positions of responsibility, which they viewed as opportunities for growth. They acted preemptively rather than simply waiting to be chosen for such opportunities. This relationship, as the one between responsibility and mentoring, also could occur in non-military environments.

The safety net provided by the compulsory nature of military culture is connected to decision-making responsibilities. Service members receive specialized training in problem-solving and have the unique opportunity to exercise those skills. If they miscalculate they will certainly face repercussions; but unless the result of a miscalculation is catastrophic, those repercussions are not likely to end their careers. A third connector here is the presence of mentors and supportive peers (i.e., Good Company) whose advice can help military members make difficult decisions wisely. Although mentoring exists in other arenas, the compulsory nature of military culture seems unique and may not be easily replicated in another environment. Therefore the confidence and personal growth that occurred for the participants in this study, at least with regard to making difficult decisions, may not be possible outside of the military environment.
The operational focus of the military connects with opportunities for reflection. When service members are required to put the mission first they also gain the ability to compartmentalize their lives. This may occur on a small scale as Rusty described when he and his coworker wrestled on the flight deck after duty hours. But the habit of performing such mental separation between work life and leisure may easily extend to holding the external foundations of military structure as Object and personal goals, beliefs, and desires as Subject (Kegan, 1994). This complex view of military structure supports development in the cognitive domain. It also could occur in other settings where group members learn to separate requirements of their jobs from their personal goals and ambitions.

The final connection in this model is between the compulsory nature of military culture and Good Company as evidenced in camaraderie among peers. The bonds that develop between service members are based on shared experience; that experience need not be as traumatic as being involved in combat. Abby, Lucy, Bob, and Danielle had never seen combat but each described a special quality of friendships with other veterans. The underlying quality of such shared experiences was the condition of being forced to be in a certain place with a particular group of people for a prescribed amount of time.

The theory answers my first research question and its secondary parts. Service members have learned to rely on internal foundations within a rigid military structure by exercising responsibility, approaching problems from multiple perspectives, reflecting on their beliefs and goals in relation to job requirements, and seeking the advice of trusted others in interdependent patterns of relationship. Although the experiences that fostered this development varied among participants to include deciding to pursue a college
degree, enlisting in the Navy, breakups with significant others, and the deaths of close friends or family members, the common thread for all the participants was the support the Navy provided in their development.

**Learning in the community college environment.** During the interviews, I asked the participants questions about their expectations concerning college. Some had received accurate information about what to expect from family members or friends who had also attended college. However, most had ideas shaped by movies they had seen where a college campus was marked by stately buildings and mature shade trees lining a central lawn. They also expected the classrooms to reflect those archetypes where professors lectured in large halls to students newly graduated from high school. Those who had envisioned college in this way were pleasantly surprised by the smaller class sizes and wide range of ages represented in the student body.

The issue of maturity among younger classmates emerged frequently in the participants' narratives. Their feelings ranged from mild exasperation to disdain for the younger students' immature behavior and failure to take responsibility for their own decisions and choices. All of the participants felt they related better to older students. They also preferred instructors whose teaching approaches validated the students as adult learners. This did not mean they universally preferred self-directed over teacher-directed instruction, a characteristic of adult learners noted by Knowles (1975). Ranae, Joe, and Abby all commented that some class content was more suited to teacher-directed approaches – especially if the material was particularly challenging for the participant. However, the themes of mutual respect, constructive criticism, and engaging discussion appeared in relation to every type of teaching approach. Above all, the participants did
not like being “treated like kids,” as Rusty said, or the feeling that Ranae described as being “in a nursery.” These participants learned best in classrooms where the principles of andragogy held sway among the students as well as with the instructor.

The learning styles most preferred by the participants were hands-on learning and problem-solving. This was true for them even in high school. It is possible that the participants believed they would not succeed in a four-year university directly after high school because of their perceptions that classes in college were mostly lecture-based, a style that did not favor their strengths. In the Navy, they continued to learn through on-the-job training, problem-solving, and hands-on learning. Once again, it is possible that they chose to begin their college experiences in the community college environment because they perceived it as a place where learners like them had been successful. If so, this has strong implications for how the community colleges in areas of highly concentrated military populations should market themselves to appeal to those potential students.

Finally, related to this point, these student veterans chose community college as a place to safely embark on a new period in their lives, which was fraught with challenges such as acclimating anew to civilian life, finding employment, and building new supportive networks with people outside of the Navy. Most of the participants expressed the intention to continue their studies at a four-year institution once they had taken one or two years’ worth of general education courses. Several used phrases like, “get my feet wet,” or “ease into things,” when explaining why they had decided to attend community college. Whether accurate or not, their perceptions were that community college was friendlier, easier, and more accessible to them than a four-year college would be.
immediately after separation from the military. They also felt attendance there would increase their chances of success in the long run.

My second research question asked what impact self-authorship may have on how student veterans experience learning in the community college environment. The answer emerged through the interviews as preferred learning styles and teaching approaches, common views about teachers as leaders, and the perception of the community college as a support for transition. These preferences and perceptions describe how student veterans who are near or entering self-authorship expect to experience college, which has implications for institutions, faculty, and government agencies; these are discussed in detail below.

Implications for Practice

The practical implications of this study are two-pronged: one focuses primarily on learning and the other on development. First, the findings related to student learning preferences may help community college leaders and teaching faculty better understand how student veterans experience learning in the college classroom and what they expect of their instructors. Second, the theoretical framework describing how military culture supports development in individuals with specific traits may help the armed forces become more intentional in fostering such development and more cognizant of the contributions and leadership qualities of self-authoring service members.

Considerations for students. Military service members who are considering separating in order to attend college should be prepared for the change from a very active life style to a more sedate academic setting. Several of the participants in this study noted that they found it difficult at first to sit for long periods of time, whether in class or
to do homework. Cash addressed this in his own life by setting a regular routine that included classes, work, and study time. With that said, student veterans should also consider what kind of impact either having or not having a job may have on their academic success. Cash found it comforting to have his routine and said it reminded him of Navy life. Lucy, however, found that balancing the demands of a full-time job and a full class schedule was too difficult for her. At the time of her interviews she had cut back her work schedule severely and set her academic goals as her first priority.

Newly-separated veterans or those nearing the end of their commitment should also be proactive in investigating their educational options. Abby expressed dissatisfaction with the amount of information she received from the Navy and the VA during her transition class. This is also supported in other research (Leporte, 2013) and seems for now to be the norm. Therefore, veterans need to make the most of their support networks for gathering educational information, especially among other veterans who are in college or have attended college recently. This will help them understand the types of schools they can select (e.g., for-profit, vocational or technical, community colleges, and four-year institutions) and how they want to disburse their GI Bill educational funds. They may choose to pay for their own tuition at a less expensive college, as Danielle was doing, in order to save their benefits for more expensive institutions that are out-of-state or private.

Further, veterans should apply the same approach toward problem-solving that they learned in the military to the decisions surrounding postsecondary education. All of the participants in this study talked about how they were taught to look at a problem from multiple perspectives, gather information before acting, and consider long-term
consequences of their decisions for others as well as themselves. These tools will help newly-separated veterans keep an open mind throughout their investigation of educational options, enabling them to make the best decision for their personal and professional goals.

Finally, new student veterans need to remember that it is common to feel a sense of loss or displacement when they first begin their transition back to civilian life (Black et al., 2007). Both Ranae and Danielle noted a loss of identity as military members and had a considerable amount of difficulty adjusting to life outside of the Navy. They were able to make that adjustment through personal reflection and involvement in academics. Other research has shown that reintegration with civilian life requires intentionally seeking common bonds with civilian students, neighbors, and coworkers (Stone, 2013). Failure to accomplish this reintegration may adversely affect academic outcomes and persistence in college (Bonar & Domenici, 2011). It is possible, however, for veterans to construct a positive outlook for their post-military lives just as Cash did in this study. He valued his Navy service and had no regrets about separating; rather, he considered that he was simply ending one chapter in his life and beginning the next. Circumstances surrounding separation from the military certainly differ from one individual to the next, but having a positive outlook will help veterans make their adjustment smoother and more successful.

Considerations for faculty. Student veterans have been engaged in active learning and problem solving for several years before entering college. This may have been their preferred learning style even before enlisting; however, even if that is not so they have come to expect that practical application of classroom content is apparent and
logical. When they do not see that application, or are not given the opportunity to look for it, they may express frustration with the instructor or with the institution as a whole. The participants in this study also described times of personal reflection or soul-searching that assisted their development. Research shows that incorporating personal reflection in the learning process is instrumental for helping students make connections across learning contexts (Barber, Bohon, Everson, Stone, & Feltman, 2014). Therefore, student veterans should be encouraged to reflect on their learning as a regular part of their college course work but faculty should also be careful to explain its value and practical benefits.

Those student veterans who are nearing or entering self-authorship have more confidence in their own views and understand the value of their contributions to the construction of knowledge. They interact with instructors in ways that are more characteristic of adult learners than the traditionally-aged college students. This is true even if they are only two or three years older than most entering freshmen. Their expectation to be included in the construction of knowledge supports the findings of other researchers (Pizzolato et al., 2009).

Many student veterans will initiate contact with faculty only as a means of furthering their career goals rather than to gain a sense of belonging at the institution. Some of this behavior relates to the power structure the students have become accustomed to in the military, equating the role of professors with military supervisors or officers (Stone, 2013). In this study, Danielle expressed the same idea but from a slightly different perspective:
The teachers [in college] don’t really seem like an authoritative figure. Maybe that’s just because I came out of the Navy where . . . if it’s somebody of authority you don’t talk to them or you only go to them if you need to.

Danielle's professors were approachable and therefore did not seem authoritative in the same way she had come to understand authority in the Navy. If faculty members intentionally draw out their students with military experience, the students are more likely to become engaged with the course material. The caveat for faculty members is to ensure all their comments are framed constructively so that they bear no similarity to the negative attention military members learned to avoid at all costs in boot camp and their years of service. Participant comments in this study indicated that intentional efforts toward beginning mentoring relationships with students would provide support for student veterans in their transition to the college environment.

Finally, faculty members should recognize that student veterans have expectations for leadership from their professors that are formed by their military training and experiences. The concept of command and respect resonated with several participants in this study; those who mentioned it did so without a prompt from the interviewer or hearing the phrase in a question. That suggests the concept is widely discussed and experienced by military service members. Lucy said that a teacher who could command the classroom had more credibility as a content expert; Rusty explained the nuances between “command respect,” which did little to establish rapport between leader and followers, and “command and respect,” which offered him the dignity of a reciprocal relationship based on mutual respect. Both participants noted, however, that they felt unable to trust the expertise of a teacher who exhibited traits of a “pushover.”
Considerations for educational leaders. The data gleaned from participant interviews in this study confirmed much of what has already been reported in the literature about student veterans and the effect military culture has on their psychological makeup (Barry et al., 2012; Black et al., 2007; DiRamio et al., 2008; DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Herbert, 1998). Military members acquired time management skills, understanding of systems and processes, and expectations for leadership from those with positional authority during their service. Much of this does govern their behavior in the college environment and college administrators and student affairs professionals should be aware of this. However, they should also be aware that student veterans need specialized assistance to successfully transition from a rigid military structure to a more relaxed academic culture.

In this study, the Center for Military and Veteran Education (CMVE) at Tidewater Community College provided coordinated advising, enrollment, and VA benefits counseling. The impact of such an organization cannot be underestimated for creating a climate of acceptance for veterans as well as easing them through transitional issues and into the college classroom. However, a program on the scale of the CMVE requires a large base of student veterans to justify and, therefore, fund its operations. In the case of this particular community college, military students — including veterans, active duty, or retirees — comprised approximately 16 percent of the student population. Yet smaller-scale centers can also achieve similar goals at institutions with fewer military students. Coordinated services as well as staff members who are familiar with military educational benefits are the two aspects of the CMVE that students appreciate the most.
These can be replicated on a smaller scale without compromising quality of service delivery.

Educational leaders would also help veterans in their transition and acclimation to college by facilitating faculty/student or staff/student mentoring programs. Peer mentoring is another option that could provide an avenue for veterans to connect with other veterans who have learned how the systems of the particular college operate. Encouraging a climate of mentoring among students, faculty, and staff could greatly enhance the initial campus experiences of student veterans and contribute to both their persistence and academic success.

Veterans in this study chose to attend community college in large part because they perceived it as more accessible, affordable, and relevant to their professional goals—again confirming what has been reported in the literature (Cohen et al., 2014). That social aspect of community colleges as equalizing forces for upward mobility and career progression appealed to these participants. The importance the flexibility offered by the community colleges also was apparent in the students' strategic swirling behaviors where they enrolled in online classes, attended classes on more than one campus, and planned to combine community college credits with those at a four-year university in order to complete their degrees in an efficient and timely fashion.

One of Ranae's suggestions with regard to her study skills course was that the college create a section for only veterans. She found the immaturity of younger students and their inability to regulate themselves or direct their learning both irritating and frustrating. Other researchers have also found that veteran-only sections of English classes allow for veterans to write about combat experiences in the company of peers.
who both understand and respect their perspectives (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). Creating
sections of study skills or general education courses exclusively for veterans can help
veterans feel welcome in college; however, institutions should make enrollment in
veteran-only sections optional because some veterans may prefer to attend integrated
classes. Segregating veterans from the larger student body could send the negative, albeit
unintended, message that the college does not accept veterans as full members in the
campus community. Another alternative would be to create study skills classes with a
minimum age limit (e.g., 21 years and older) rather than separation by veteran status or
academic achievement scores; this would allow for integration with students who may
not have military experience but are more mature with regard to life experience.

The learning preferences of the participants in this study should inform the
recruiting strategies of community colleges, especially in areas with a high concentration
of military students. The overwhelming preference among my participants for active
learning, coupled with the andragogical tenet that adults appreciate practical application
of knowledge, suggest that community colleges should encourage those teaching
approaches among their faculty in every discipline or professional field. Andragogical
approaches and active learning can be incorporated in both liberal and vocational
education; infusing the entire curriculum with those styles of teaching and learning would
strengthen the position of community colleges as a transitional platform for military and
civilian students alike. The participants in this study chose community college because
they perceived it as less threatening than a four-year university but also as more typical of
college experience and learning than they would find at a purely vocational school, such
as a for-profit institution.
Finally, the Career Decision-Making Survey – Military Edition (CDMS-ME) served as a strong predictor of meaning-making levels among those who completed it. Although more testing is needed, its power as a screening tool shows promise for identifying students who are nearing or entering the stage of self-authorship. The prompts for written responses should continue to be incorporated with the Likert scales in order to provide administrators, faculty, and educational researchers the fullest picture of a student's level of meaning making. This survey could be distributed once among student veterans during their college orientation process to obtain a snapshot of the entering class; it could also be used as originally intended to document growth and development over time by administering it at the beginning and end of a semester or academic year. In this way, educational leaders would have valuable information to help them meet the varied needs of veterans transitioning to college.

Considerations for the Departments of Defense and Veterans Affairs. This study found that many current practices within military culture and training support the development of self-authorship among individuals with certain personal characteristics. These practices should be continued with the goal, not only of helping service members rely on their internal voices, but also of developing leaders who are able to critically evaluate standard procedures against core values in order to pursue the best course of action. For example, all the participants described how they were taught to consider multiple perspectives in solving problems. This type of training should continue because it fosters flexibility of mind and benefits both the military services as well as the individual service members. Second, each of the participants cited the military’s emphasis on time management and organizational skills as helpful and some even
credited it as instrumental to their success in college. Finally, the discipline of putting the job ahead of all other considerations helped service members learn to compartmentalize their work and personal lives, which in turn seemed to aid in their ability to hold the job as Object and their own goals and desires as Subject (Kegan, 1994). Again, this practice should continue in order to help service members develop more complex ways of relating to the world. This would benefit not only the service members as individuals, but also the U.S. military as a whole as it continues to become more diverse in its internal makeup and with regard to the different worldviews it encounters through its global reach.

Some practices that the military services could improve include the ways junior members are mentored. Rather than forced pairing of mentors and mentees, the military services should encourage a culture of mentorship beyond any formal program currently in place. Making sure that younger service members are socialized into military culture and taken care of in the event of personal difficulties is important; however, the participants in this study said they connected best with mentors of their own choosing. Although this study found that the compulsory nature of the military supported development in surprising ways, there were no connections to growth from having compulsory relationships with mentors. Instead, when service members voluntarily sought advice from more seasoned sailors, they exercised their capacity for forming interdependent relationships, which in turn supported their development in the form of Good Company.

Although the female participants in this study all served in the Navy, their experiences with sexual harassment and sex-based inequalities may also be common to women service members in the other branches of the military. The military services
should be aware that little has changed for enlisted women in the past 10 to 15 years with regard to the treatment they receive from both male and female superiors (see Herbert, 1998). This lack of equality persists in spite of sensitivity training and an extensive system for reporting incidents of sexual harassment and sexual assault. What is needed is a cultural shift within the services that addresses how military core values are violated each time female service members are denigrated or demeaned and, most importantly, assaulted. This shift cannot be mandated but it can be encouraged, modeled, and rewarded. Women who enlist in the military deserve the assurance that the safety net the military offers for risk-taking in making decisions on the job will also support them in the face of discrimination and harassment.

Both the Department of Defense (DoD) and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) should spend more time and effort briefing separating service members on their educational benefits, a recommendation offered in other recent studies (Leporte, 2013). Abby’s example of 20 minutes dedicated to the GI Bill out of four days’ worth of briefings suggests that educational success after military service is not as highly valued by either department as their rhetoric implies. Beyond the bureaucratic processes, which are certainly important to delineate, the DoD and VA should also provide detailed information about types of colleges (e.g., for-profit, two-year, four-year, public, private, etc.), transferring credits, cultural transition issues (i.e., from military to college), and so forth. The more that service members know about available educational opportunities, the more likely they will choose the best options for themselves and ultimately attain the degree they desire.
Areas of Future Research

A natural course of action resulting from this study would be to follow up with these participants in one year to administer the Wabash Nation Study (WNS) second-year protocol. The purpose of such an investigation would be to determine how the students have continued their journeys in the area of self-authorship. I would also include interview questions that ask more specifically about the interactions between the compulsory nature of military culture, the operational focus of the military, and their own personal traits and supportive relationships. I would ask them to compare the ways those elements impacted their development compared to the environments they have lived in during the intervening year. In this way, I could test the applicability of the theory that their prior participation helped define.

Additionally, I would like to build database documenting the experiences of military members transitioning from active service to college by conducting a wider distribution of the Career Decision-Making Survey – Military Edition (CDMS-ME) to include all branches of the military. I would continue to limit participant eligibility by age and number of college credits completed so that any impact military service might have on development would be as isolated as possible. The high ratio of students taking the survey who qualified for an interview invitation (73.9%) and the high percentage of those interviewed who met the criterion for location on the self-authorship continuum (88.8%) suggest that many service members could be developing internal foundations while in the military. However, this study was limited to Navy veterans; a wider distribution that included all branches of the services could allow some comparison of
rates of development among branches. That, in turn, could have implications for differences in training or branch-specific culture if any exist.

Eventually, I would like to expand the CDMS-ME distribution even further to include active duty service members. The fact that the participants in this study all had chosen to separate from the Navy, and that their decisions in most cases were related to developing their internal voices, begs the question of whether service members who develop internal foundations also find remaining in the military to be incompatible with that development. However, it is also possible that comparable numbers of service members who have learned to listen to their internal voices also choose to continue with their service. Such an investigation could begin to answer those questions.

A line of inquiry that could establish the importance of the context provided by community college would be to examine the development of self-authorship in student veterans who enroll in four-year institutions directly after separating from the military. How are their experiences similar to or different from those of student veterans at community colleges? The community college environment was an intentional choice made by the participants in this study in order to increase their chances for academic success. If student veterans who choose four-year colleges or universities also believe their choice improves their chances for academic success, what other factors are at work in the educational decisions veterans make? Some possible factors could be socioeconomic status before entering the military, differences among service branches, availability of information, or even location of the veteran at the time of separation.

As I coded the interview transcripts for self-authorship development, I found that the women seemed to be integrating two or more domains in a single example or
utterance. This also seemed to occur more among those participants, both male and female, who were located closer to self-authorship compared to those who had just entered the Crossroad. Such an investigation did not help answer either of the research questions in this study so I did not pursue that line of inquiry. However, it could illuminate some characteristics of how women make meaning across the domains compared to men. It could also show whether individuals become more integrated within themselves as they develop more complex ways of meaning making.

A related study could be an in-depth exploration of the development of self-authorship among women student veterans. How do sex and gender identity issues as noted in this study impact their ability to listen to their internal voices? Do the barriers and challenges they encounter in the masculine military environment accelerate or hinder their development? It would also be enlightening to discover the strategies, if any, women service members utilize to increase their success in the military and how those strategies are related to cultivating their internal voices, if at all.

Finally, an exploration of how culture affects the development of self-authorship among student veterans should be conducted. Only three participants in this study identified with ethnic groups other than White. A new study could include only men and women from non-White or multiracial groups and examine how cultural expectations, racial barriers, and identity development may affect their development of self-authorship before or during military service.

Conclusion

The literature has shown that student veterans arrive in college with unique characteristics and also face unique challenges (Black et al., 2007; Bonar & Domenici,
College faculty members and administrators have tried to help student veterans meet those challenges so that their transition to postsecondary education from military service is smooth and leads to academic success. However, in spite of the establishment of new services for veterans on college campuses and a sincere interest among college faculty in helping student veterans attain their degrees, educational leaders are still trying to understand the precise nature of the differences manifested by students with military experience compared to civilian students. Those differences cannot be fully explained by levels of maturity, readiness—or lack thereof—for college, or demonstration of common characteristics of adult learners. Not only do these traits vary greatly among student veterans, they also appear in civilian students of comparable ages. One explanation may lie in the interaction of military experience with the psychological development of service members.

Within that context, the traits many veterans exhibit upon entering college reflect greater development toward self-authorship than is typically found in individuals of comparable ages in the general population. The fact that military members must learn how to operate in a highly structured, externally-focused environment in order to be successful sailors, soldiers, airmen, marines, or coastguardsmen belies the traditional understanding of how self-authorship replaces reliance on external foundations. If service members are indeed developing a self-authored frame of mind, how does that occur in the military environment? Does the military environment support or hinder such development? What impact does this accelerated development have on learning for these veterans? In this study, I sought to answer those questions by examining the ways
student veterans learned to listen to their internal voices and construct internal foundations within the rigid structure of the military environment.

The findings of the study showed that the compulsory nature of military culture supported development toward self-authorship in three ways: as a safety net for risk-taking, as insulation from past influences in service members' lives, and as both a space and catalyst for soul-searching. Secondly, the operational focus of the military supported development toward self-authorship by providing unusual opportunities for significant responsibilities and by teaching critical thinking skills. Finally, individuals with the personal characteristics of drive and initiative as well as supportive, interdependent relationships showed development toward self-authorship as a consequence of their military experiences. These findings led to the development of a substantive theory that may be applied to service members in all branches of the U.S. armed forces to the extent that each branch's military culture matches that experienced by these Navy veterans.

This theory illuminates what was previously unknown about whether service members are able to cultivate and listen to their internal voices even while serving in an environment that is replete with regulations. It also asserts that such internal growth is likely when all three of the theoretical parameters have been met. This is important because popular culture paints a very different picture of how military training affects the individual psyche and how those who have served in the military view the world, themselves, and those around them. In reality, student veterans may very well have developed complex ways of making meaning of history, power structures, and expert opinions. Their expectations for college learning include being treated as adults and respected for their contributions to the construction of knowledge. Faculty members and
college administrators and staff should recognize that student veterans may be different from civilian students, not solely due to their military experiences, but also due to the development they underwent because they were forced to confront new perspectives and had the internal fortitude to embrace them.
2013-2014
Career Decision-Making Survey
Military Edition

Adapted from:

2006-2007
Career Decision-Making Survey
Women in Information Technology
Created by
Elizabeth G. Creamer, Marcia Baxter Magolda, and Jessica Yue
Originally funded by the National Science Foundation
Title of Project: *Examining the Development of Self-Authorship in Student Veterans*

**Principal Investigator**
Sharon L. M. Stone  
The College of William and Mary  
Williamsburg, VA 23185  
slstone01@email.wm.edu  
Phone: 618-541-7840

1. **Purpose of the Study:** The purpose of this study is to identify the characteristics of the career decision-making processes of student veterans.

2. **Procedures to be followed:** You are being asked to complete a paper and pencil questionnaire about career decision making. In order to place your name in a drawing for one of the $25 awards, after you complete the questionnaire, fill out the form at the end of the questionnaire with your name, student number, email address, and local address and phone number. You will be contacted by email if you were selected in a drawing to be one of the cash recipients. Some students may also be contacted for personal interviews related to this study. By completing this questionnaire, you agree to be contacted; however, you may decline to be interviewed with no penalty of any kind.

3. **Discomforts and Risks:** There are no risks in participating in this research beyond those experienced in everyday life. Many of the questions involve personal opinion.

4. **Benefits:** The benefits of this project include that you might have a better idea about how you go about making difficult decisions. Information will help counselors and advisors to better understand factors that military students consider when choosing a major or career.

5. **Duration:** It will take about 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire.

6. **Statement of Confidentiality:** This questionnaire is confidential. Although your questionnaire will be numbered for research purposes, none of your identifying information will be shared.

7. **Right to Ask Questions:** You may ask questions about this research by contacting the investigator listed at the top of this form. In addition, you may contact Dr. Tom Ward at 757-221-2358 (EDIRC.L@wm.edu) at the School of Education at The College of William and Mary for questions about your rights as a research participant.

8. **Compensation:** If you complete the form at the end of the questionnaire, your name will be placed in a drawing for one of the $25 awards. If your name is selected during the drawing, you will be contacted by email and a check will be sent to the local address you supply.

9. **Voluntary Participation:** Your decision to participate in this research is voluntary. You can stop at any time. You may skip questions you do not want to answer.

- You must be 18 years or older to take part in this research study.
- Completion and return of the questionnaire implies that you have read the information on this form and consent to take part in the research.
- To be considered for 1 of the $25 CASH AWARDS, be sure to fill out the form at the end of the questionnaire.
**SECTION 1: MILITARY ENLISTMENT AND COLLEGE CHOICE**

**DIRECTIONS**  
Please respond to questions based on how you decided to enlist in the military and, subsequently, to enroll in your current college. Next, please respond to questions about the career you are preparing for or hope to have once you leave college.

While in the high school(s) you attended, did you receive recruiting information from one or more of the military services? ______ No ______ Yes

1-2. In which branch of the military did you serve? ____________________________________

1-3. What was your ASVAB? ______ 1-4. What was your MOS? _________________________

**1-5. REASONS FOR JOINING THE MILITARY**

The following questions are about the reasons you enlisted in the military. Circle 1 for yes and 2 for no.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did you enlist in the military for any of the following reasons?</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I felt a personal connection to the events of 9/11 and wanted to help fight terrorism.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. A close friend enlisted in the military.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. One or more members of my family are or were in the military.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I wanted to get out of a bad situation in my home or neighborhood.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I thought military training would be good for me (e.g., help me focus, stay healthy, etc.)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I wanted to see other countries and cultures.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I intended to use the educational benefits either during or after my service.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I needed the financial security.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Other reason(s): (Please write response.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**1-4. REASONS FOR ENROLLING IN COLLEGE**

The following questions are about the reasons you enrolled in college. Circle 1 for yes and 2 for no.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Did you enroll in college for any of the following reasons?</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9. I always wanted to go to college.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I think a college degree is necessary for a good job.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. It means a lot to a family member for me to get a college degree.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. A friend is going to college and encouraged me to as well.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. The money from the VA has made college possible and I don't want to waste that.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. I want to be a good example to family members or friends.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Military training did not equip me for today's work force.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. An injury I received during my service prevents me from doing the</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>job(s) I used to do.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Other reason(s):</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Please write response.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SECTION 2: GENERAL CAREER QUESTIONS

2-1. YOUR CAREER INTERESTS

Please list the three jobs that you are most interested in. (Write in your replies)

1.  
2.  
3.  

What are the reasons these jobs interest you? (Write in your reply)

2-2. IMPORTANT FACTORS IN CAREER CHOICE

The following questions are about factors that influence career choice. Circle the number that shows how important each item is in your choice of a career.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How important are the following factors in your choice of a career?</th>
<th>Completely Unimportant</th>
<th>A Little Important</th>
<th>Somewhat Important</th>
<th>Very Important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Opportunity to help people</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Good salary</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Ability to balance work and family</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Opportunity to interact with others</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Job security</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. High status or prestige</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Opportunity to solve interesting problems</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Opportunity to use creative skills</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Pleasant working environment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Flexible hours</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2-3. Of the following factors that influence career choice, which is the single most important one to you? (Mark only one).

_____ 1. Challenging work
_____ 2. Good salary
_____ 3. Ability to balance work and family
_____ 4. High status or prestige
_____ 5. Interest/fun
_____ 6. Quality of work life and environment
_____ 7. Opportunity to make a difference in society
_____ 8. Job security
### 2-4. YOUR PARENTS' OPINIONS OR VIEWS

The following questions are about parents' or guardians' attitudes. Circle the number that indicates how much you disagree or agree with the following items. Circle NA if the item does not apply to you.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>NA</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. It is important to my mother/female guardian that I have a career</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. It is important to my father/male guardian that I have a career</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. My mother/female guardian has a clear idea about careers that would suit me.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. My father/male guardian has a clear idea about careers that would suit me.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. My parents/guardians encourage me to make my own decisions about my future career.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I would like my parents to approve of my choice of career.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. My parents have encouraged me to talk to others about career options.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. My parents have encouraged me to explore a variety of career options.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. When we disagree, my parents will listen to my point of view.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2-5. SOURCES OF CAREER INFORMATION

The following questions concern sources of career information. Circle the number that shows how often you have discussed career options with the following groups of people.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How often have you discussed your career options or plans with others?</th>
<th>Never</th>
<th>Once or twice</th>
<th>Several Times</th>
<th>Many Times</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Mother/female guardian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Father/male guardian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Teacher or professor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Military supervisor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Counselor or advisor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Other family members</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Male friends</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Female friends</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Spouse or significant other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Employer or boss</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2-6. CREDIBILITY OF INFORMATION SOURCES

The following questions are about how you judge the credibility of advice you receive. Circle the number that shows how likely you are to consider advice about careers offered by different people.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How likely are you to consider career advice when it is offered by these people?</th>
<th>Very Unlikely</th>
<th>Unlikely</th>
<th>Likely</th>
<th>Very Likely</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Mother/female guardian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Father/male guardian</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Other family members</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Military supervisor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Teacher or professor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Counselor or advisor</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Male friends</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Female friends</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Spouse or significant other</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Employer or boss</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2-7. RESPONSE TO INPUT

The following questions are about reaction to advice or the influences of others. Circle the number that shows how much you disagree or agree with each of the following statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The following questions are about reaction to advice or the influences of others. Circle the number that shows how much you disagree or agree with each of the following statements.</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I find it helpful to listen to the input of others before I make an important decision.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. When I make an important decision, I often seek the input of members of my family.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. When I make an important decision, I often seek the input of my friends.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I like to have my parents input before I make a big decision.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Even when the advice is contradictory, I try to consider the information people give me before I make a big decision.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 2-8. MAKING DECISIONS AND SETTING PRIORITIES

The following questions are about setting priorities and making decisions. Circle the number that shows how much you disagree or agree with each of the following statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I am confident about my ability to set my own priorities about schoolwork.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I am confident about my ability to set my own priorities about my personal life.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I am confident about my ability to choose a career.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I am unsure about my ability to make my own decisions about a future job.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I am unsure about my ability to make my own decisions about my personal life.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. If my parents disagree with a decision I have made, I am likely to change my decision.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. If my close friends disagree with a decision I have made, I am likely to change my decision.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I am most likely to trust the advice of people who know me best.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. There are times when even authorities are uncertain about the truth.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. When it comes to choice of a career, my parents know what is best for me so I am inclined to go with what they suggest.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I have given a good deal of thought to choosing a career that is compatible with my values, interests, and abilities.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I have a plan for what I would like to do as a career.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 2-9. DIVERSE VIEWPOINTS AND DECISION MAKING

The following questions are about your viewpoints toward diverse situations. Circle the number that shows how much you disagree or agree with each of the following statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. My primary role in making an educational decision, like the choice of a major or career, is to</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-1 acquire as much information as possible</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 seek direction from informed experts</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-3 make a decision considering all the available information and my own views</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-4 consider my own views</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. If a teacher or advisor recommended a career in a field that I have never considered before,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2-1. I would listen, but I probably wouldn't seriously consider it because I have already made a decision.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-2. I would try to understand their point of view and figure out an option that would best fit my needs and interests.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3. I would give it some thought because they</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>probably know better than I do about what</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>might suit me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2-4. I would try to explain my point of view.
The following questions are about your viewpoints toward diverse situations. Circle the number that shows how much you disagree or agree with each of the following statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. To make a good career choice good choice about a career, I think that</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-1. facts are the strongest basis for a good decision.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-2. it is largely a matter of personal opinion.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-3. experts are in the best position to advise me about a good choice.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4. it is not a matter of facts or expert judgment, but a match between my values, interests, and skills and those of the job.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. In my opinion, the most important role of an effective career counselor or advisor is to</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-1. be an expert on a variety of career options.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-2. provide guidance about a choice that is appropriate for me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-3. help students to think through multiple options.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-4. direct students to information that will help them to make a decision on their own</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. When I am in the process of making an important decision and people give me conflicting advice,</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-1. I get confused.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-2. I don’t listen.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-3. I try to listen and consider all of their advice carefully.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-4. I try to make a judgment if they are someone I should listen to.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. When people have different interpretations of a book, I think that</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-1. the author has done a poor job of communicating the true meaning.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-2. some books are just that way. It is possible for all interpretations to be correct.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-3. only the expert(s) can really say which interpretation is correct.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-4. multiple interpretations are possible, but some are closer to the truth than others.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Experts are divided on some scientific issues, such as the causes of global warming. In a situation like this,</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-1. I rely on the experts to tell me.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-2. I would have to look at the evidence and come to my own conclusions.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-3. I think it is best to accept the uncertainty and try to understand the principal</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
arguments behind the different points of view.

7-4. I try not to judge as long as different scientists have different opinions on these kinds of issues.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
2-10. HANDLING FEEDBACK DURING DECISION-MAKING

Please write your answers to the following questions.

When you were considering returning to school, what kind of feedback did you receive from those you consulted for advice?

How did you handle that feedback?

Who gave you the best advice? What was the advice and why was it the best in your opinion?

Who gave you advice you chose not to take? Why didn’t you take it?
## SECTION 3: GENERAL INFORMATION

1. What is your gender?
   1. Female
   2. Male

2. What is your date of birth?
   
   (Fill in date of birth)

3. Where are you currently enrolled as a student?
   (Circle one number)
   1. College, part-time
   2. College, full-time

4. How much college have you completed?
   (Circle one number)
   1. 12 or fewer credit hours
   2. 13-24 credit hours
   3. 25-36 credit hours
   4. 37+ credit hours

5. What disabilities, if any, do you have? (Circle all that apply):
   1. I do not have a disability
   2. PTSD or other mental health concern
   3. Health impairments (e.g., diabetes, colitis, etc.)
   4. Learning disabilities or dyslexia
   5. Hearing loss
   6. Attention deficit or ADHD
   7. Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)
   8. Blindness/loss of vision
   9. Orthopedic or mobility difficulty

6. What is your current academic major or what do you expect your college major to be?
   
   (Fill in the name of your major)

7. What is the highest level of education completed by your father?
   1. Less than high school
   2. High school or equivalent
   3. Associates/community college degree
   4. Bachelor’s degree
   5. Masters, doctorate, or professional degree like medical doctor, veterinarian, or lawyer
   6. Other

8. What is the highest level of education completed by your mother?
   1. Less than high school
   2. High school or equivalent
   3. Associates/community college degree
   4. Bachelor’s degree
   5. Masters, doctorate, or professional degree like medical doctor, veterinarian, or lawyer
   6. Other

9. What is your race/ethnicity?
   1. African American
   2. Asian American
   3. Caucasian
   4. Hispanic American
   5. Multiracial
   6. Native American
   7. Other __________ (Please fill in)

10. Which of the following best describes where you currently live?
    1. Off-campus residence
    2. With parent(s)
    3. With other family member
    4. On-campus residence hall or dormitory
    5. Other __________ (Please fill in)

11. How many years were you on active duty?
    
    (Please fill in)

12. Are you employed?
    1. YES
    2. NO

   If yes, how many hours a week do you normally work?
   
   (Fill in the hours per week you generally work)

13. What prior degrees do you hold, if any?
    1. Associate’s
    2. Other

14. What professional certifications do you hold, if any?
THANK YOU FOR COMPLETING THIS QUESTIONNAIRE!

If you want your name to be placed in a DRAWING for one of the $25 CASH AWARDS, please fill in the information requested below and return this booklet to the person distributing the questionnaire.

You will be contacted via E-MAIL if your name is selected in the drawing and a pre-paid debit card will be sent to you within six weeks at your local address. One $25 award will be made for each 25 people completing the questionnaire.

You may also be contacted later to schedule an interview related to this study. Thanks again for your help!

NAME: __________________________________

STUDENT ID #: ______________________

LOCAL ADDRESS:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________
## Introduction to the Interview

Greet student as he/she arrives, ask his/her name, thank him/her for coming, put at ease and begin completion of consent form.

Provide student a written description of the study and provide a copy of a consent form that you sign; collect the one that student signed.

"I will reintroduce the study to you but before we begin there is a consent form that I would like to review with you and, if you are willing to participate, I need you to sign."

Review the consent form and ensure he/she consents to both the participation and audio recording.

**Highlight:**
- your role as the interviewer
- voluntary participation, they can refuse to answer or end interview at any time
- confidentiality
- 90 minute time commitment (confirm interview end time)
- opportunity for questions at the end
- how interview will be used and by whom
- confirm the process of payment

Reintroduce the study verbally and why they have been chosen as a participant.

E.g., "Our purpose in meeting today is to learn about you & your experiences in college so that we can better understand how students approach and gain from educational experiences. Because every student is different and brings a unique perspective and set of experiences we believe it is important to hear about your experiences from your point of view."

E.g., "You have randomly selected from a list of students..."

Provide an overview of the organization of the questions.

E.g., "Specifically we will ask you to talk about your experiences, I will provide the structure but I will let you steer the conversation. I will begin by asking a little bit about you and your background, your expectations coming to college and of [INSTITUTION] in particular. I'd like to hear about your specific experiences since coming to college. Overall I will want to hear how you make sense of all you are experiencing and learning..."

**NOTE:** We want to acknowledge here that
the student is in transition to college. Thus, an appropriate comment might be, "I know that you are in a transition to college. I want to hear about your experiences since coming to college, but I also want to hear about the most significant experiences you've had over the past year even if they are prior to coming here. I'll ask you to be the judge of what is most important as we move through the conversation."

| Turn on recorder: State "This is [interviewer name], today's date, interviewing at [institution]." Do NOT state the students' name. |  |
### Introduction Continued & Expectations Segment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Foundation: To access meaning making at college entrance and build rapport</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Means to Access Foundation:</strong> Expectations and degree to which they matched reality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Multiple Ways to Approach:</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It would help me to know a little about you. Tell me about your background and what brought you to [institution].</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible Probes:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Tell me about your high school experience - what was it like?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Tell me about your family.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Tell me about your friends.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What did you tell people here to introduce yourself when you arrived?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How did you decide to come to [institution]? [what were the other options, advantages/disadvantages of options, how did this one win out]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Tell me about any goals you have for this year [try to draw out both academic and personal goals].</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Let’s talk about your expectations coming to college in general and to [institution] in particular. What did you expect it to be like to be a college student here? |
| Possible Probes: |
| • What did you expect [or hope] the learning environment to be like? |
| • What did you expect would go well for you and what would be challenging in your courses? |
| • What kind of relationships did you expect [or hope] to build with other students? With faculty? |
| • How did you expect [or hope] you would grow or change coming to college? |
| • In what ways did you expect [or hope] to get involved in campus activities? |

| I’m interested in your perspective on how the reality of college compares with your expectations. Let’s talk about areas in which your experience matches your expectations and areas in which it does not. |
| Possible Probes: |
| • Using what the interviewee offered re expectations, return to each one asking to what degree experience matches [i.e., you said you expected classes to be pretty hard - what is your sense of that so far?] Draw out why the person sees it this way and what it means to her/him. |
| • What has been your experience as a
I'm interested in how you experienced the transition to college. What did you gain in high school [or prior experience if not coming directly from high school] that helped you as you began college?

Possible Probes:
- How have your prior experiences influenced your transition to college?
- How did your life prior to college affect your transition to college?

NOTE: It may be helpful when appropriate to use our basic Framework for drawing out meaning:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Framework for drawing out meaning:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Describe the experience</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Why was it important?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How did you make sense of it?</td>
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<tr>
<td>- How did it affect you?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In-Depth Interview: Liberal Arts Education Study  
Making Sense of Educational Experiences Segment

<p>| Basic Foundation: 3 dimensions by 7 outcomes chart |
| Means to Access: meaningful experiences and how students made meaning of them |
| Multiple Ways to Approach: |
| Our conversation so far has given me some context to understand you, your prior experiences and your initial expectations of college. Let’s talk more about important experiences. How would you describe your college life so far? |
| NOTE: while we want to talk about college, we have to recognize that participants have been in college only a few weeks. So this segment may need to include high school experiences as well. |
| Let’s focus in specifically on the experiences you’ve had that you think have affected you most. What has been your most significant experience so far? |
| Framework for drawing out the dimensions and outcomes: |
| • Describe the experience |
| • Why was it important? |
| • How did you make sense of it? |
| • How did it affect you? |
| Tell me about your best experience; worst experience |
| Framework |
| Tell me about some of the challenges you’ve encountered |
| Framework; also inquire about challenges in other dimensions if response is uni-dimensional |
| Who/what are your support systems? Tell me about them. |
| Probes: |
| • When you need support, where do you find it? |
| • Who do you go to for help? |
| • Who do you trust to help when something important is on your mind? |
| Usually college is a place where you encounter people who differ from you because of different backgrounds, beliefs, preferences, values, personalities, etc. Have you had interactions with people who you perceive as different from you? If so, tell me about them. |
| What have these interactions been like? How have you made sense of them? What ideas have you gathered from these interactions? |
| Have you had to face any difficult |
| Framework: also inquire about decisions |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>decisions?</th>
<th>in other dimensions (i.e., cognitive, intrapersonal, interpersonal) if response is uni-dimensional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Often college students report feeling pressure from multiple directions - pressure to study and succeed academically, pressure to belong socially, pressure re: family or work obligations, pressure to participate in campus activities, pressure to figure out career directions. Have you encountered any of these pressures?</td>
<td>If so, describe; how did you handle it, why, how did it affect you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has there been any time that what you wanted and what others wanted from you conflicted?</td>
<td>If so, what was that like? How did you handle it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have you been in a situation where you struggled with doing the right thing?</td>
<td>If so, describe, how did you handle it, why, how did it affect you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How do you think coming to college, to [institution] has affected you?</td>
<td>What do you think prompted this? How do you feel about it? Draw out possible challenges to beliefs, sense of self, relationships.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### In-Depth Interview: Liberal Arts Education Study
#### Integration of Learning Segment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Basic Foundation:</th>
<th>access Integration of Learning outcome and synthesize the student’s experience as shared in the interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Means to Access:</td>
<td>how your collective experiences are influencing your thinking about what to believe, yourself, and relations with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple Ways to Approach</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Synthesis</td>
<td>You’ve talked about some of your important experiences [such as x, y, z] and what they’ve meant to you. How did the experiences you’ve shared influence your transition to college?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>As you have reflected on your experiences, has anything come up that you expect you’ll want to explore further?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| | How has this past year experience helped you think about how you want to approach this year! | Possible Probes:  
  • How has it shaped your goals?  
  • How has it shaped your view of yourself?  
  • How has it shaped how you learn? |
| Integration of Learning/Summary | We have about [x] minutes left and I’d like to be sure I have the key points you think are important. Thinking about your overall experience, what is the most important thing you gained from this past year? | Possible Probes:  
  • Where did this come from?  
  • What prompted this? |
| | How has this past year influenced your everyday decisions and actions? | Possible Probes:  
  • How do these experiences influence your thinking about college? Your goals here?  
  • How do these experiences influence your relations with others?  
  • How do these experiences influence how you see yourself? |
| | Tell me about any connections or themes you see among your experiences. | Draw out description and meaning. |
| | How are you evaluating new ideas you’ve encountered thus far? Do any of the ideas you’ve encountered thus far conflict? If so, how are you thinking about that? |  |
| | Are there any other observations you would like to share? | Draw out description and meaning. |
Appendix C: Second Interview Protocol

Self-Authorship in Student Veterans: Supports for Growth and Development

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Questions and follow-up questions</th>
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</table>
| Introduction  
[Read before starting the audio recorder.] | The first interview asked questions about how you think about the world, yourself, and your relationships with others. In this interview, I'd like to find out what situations, experiences, and people have supported your personal growth and development. Some of the contexts in which this support may have occurred are:  
  - prior to enlisting,  
  - during military training experiences,  
  - during active service but not in formal training environments, or  
  - somewhere in the transition from military to civilian life.  
So, although it may seem like questions are being asked over and over, what I'm trying to find out is in which particular context you feel you've grown the most — if there is in fact any difference among them. |
| Learning experiences |  
This topic area asks about learning experiences you may have had in different contexts. They may have occurred in a formal setting, such as a classroom, or an informal setting, such as on the job or even on a vacation or other personal activity.  
- Think about some of the most significant learning experiences you had as a teenager before enlisting and the people and places involved. Would you describe one or two of those? What makes this experience memorable? What was the outcome?  
- Think about one or two of the most significant learning experiences you had in boot camp or other military training.  
  o What were the circumstances surrounding that experience and what do you think you learned?  
  o How did you learn what you needed to know?  
  o What, if anything, would you have liked to have been different about that experience?  
  o How, if at all, do you think that difference would have affected your ability to learn?  
  o What other learning experience, if you can think of one, might illustrate this type of |


<table>
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<tr>
<th>Good Company</th>
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<td>One of the elements contributing to the development of an internal voice is “Good Company.” This refers to the person or people in your life who supported you at time when you were struggling with whether to follow your own voice or make decisions based on what others</td>
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<th>different outcome?</th>
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<tr>
<td>• As you think about your growth and development as a person, what part did your role as a military service member play? In other words, how would you describe the kind of influence your military service has had on your growth? How does that relate to your learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How did the structure and regimented nature of military life affect your growth and development as a person? How does that apply to your learning in both the military and civilian environments?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Thinking about the learning experiences you’ve had in high school and in the military, how, if at all, do you see those affecting your learning in college? What are the similarities or differences?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• What kinds of connections do find yourself making between knowledge you may have gained outside the classroom to what is being taught in your college classes?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• How important is applying your experiences to what you’re learning now in college? What kinds of experiences from your past have you found to be most supportive of your learning?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• What kinds of community service or volunteer work have you done since graduating from high school? What impact do you think this service has had on your learning and development?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• What impact, if any, did mentors or models have on your learning and development in your military service?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Who has been a good support to your growth and learning either in the military or your personal life?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How have you had to renegotiate the boundaries and responsibilities in your relationships as you have grown and developed?</td>
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wanted or told you to do.

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<tr>
<th>Leadership roles</th>
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| The next topic area focuses on leadership, both formal positions of authority and informal leadership among peers. | • How did your military training teach you to make decisions when faced with a dilemma?  
  o What were some examples of hypothetical dilemmas?  
  o What kinds of dilemmas, if any, did you personally face?  
  o How did you process your thinking in that situation?  
  o How did your decision affect your growth and development, if at all?  
• Describe a time, if you can think of one, when you stood up for yourself instead of going along with what others were expecting of you. What impact do you think this had on your growth and development?  
• Describe a time, if you can think of one, when you stood up for what you believed was right, even in the face of adverse consequences. What impact do you think this had on you? What about any impact for others?  
• How much say do you feel you’ve had in your career progression? How has this level of autonomy – or lack of it – affected your growth as a person?  
• In your opinion, does the military make leaders or does it simply attract them? |

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<th>Challenge and support</th>
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| The research shows that students learn best when they are appropriately challenged and supported. The also holds true for individuals developing more complex ways of seeing the world. | • When thinking about the dilemmas you’ve already mentioned – or perhaps others you haven’t mentioned – what aspects of those experiences did you find most challenging?  
• What kinds of supports do you find most helpful to overcoming those challenges? |
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Self-directed vs. teacher-directed learning</th>
<th>Self-authorship</th>
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<tr>
<td>Adults tend to learn best when they have some control over their own learning. One technique for this is called &quot;self-direction.&quot; It means that adults take the initiative to learn something as well as how to go about internalizing the content. However, it is also true that adults will sometimes give the teacher the option to direct their learning, depending on the situation.</td>
<td>Self-authorship is a developmental stage where individuals begin trusting their internal voice to guide them in decision-making, relationships, and the ways they view themselves in the world.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- What are your learning preferences? Is it direct instruction, problem-based learning, traditional classes, on-the-job training, or some other approach entirely?
- As an adolescent, how did you learn and grow the most? What about as an adult? Do you find your preferences changing?
- How does the teacher as an authority figure fit into your learning framework? How or what do you learn without such an authority figure?

- Describe a time, if you can think of one, when you made a decision or took some action based on your own internal values.
- How, if at all, does your racial or ethnic identity support your ability to rely on your own judgment?
- What part, if any, does faith or spirituality play in your ability to rely on your own judgment?
- How, if at all, does your gender identity affect your ability to rely on your own judgment?
- What impact did or does your work or personal relationships have on your ability to rely on your own judgment?
- How much did or does your training or other education support your ability to rely on your own judgment?
- What is usually the nature of the interplay for you between external rules and your ability to rely on your own judgment?
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Wrap-up</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Has the experience of participating in these</td>
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<tr>
<td>interviews had an impact on your thinking? If so,</td>
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<tr>
<td>how?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Those are all the questions I have for you. Is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>there anything you would like to add?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D: Group Interview Protocol

Self-authored reasoning versus self-authored behavior:
How is it possible to grow and develop your internal voice in an environment of following orders?
What kinds of constraints, if any, prevent you from acting according to your internal voice?
   How do you justify this behavior to yourself?
   What implications might this have for future relationships and actions?

Role of personal reflection:
How much soul-searching, if any, would you say you engaged in during boot camp and your military assignments?
What kinds of things did you find yourself thinking about during these periods of soul-searching?
What impact, if any, did your soul-searching have on your personal relationships, job, or growth as a person?
Who or what led you to begin a period of soul-searching?

Ways of learning:
How does your level of self-authorship affect your learning in the community college environment?
If you had not been in the military, how do you think you’d be approaching college now?
Are there differences in the ways you learn from positive compared to adverse experiences?
What does being an adult have to do with being a learner? (from Hiemstra and Sisco, p. 4 of journal)

Military culture:
Do you think about things differently because you’ve been in the military?
How did the military culture support or hinder your growth and development?
In your opinion, what does an individual need to do to be successful in the military?
   What does that look like for women?
   What does that look like for men?
What misconceptions do you believe your professors and/or classmates have about student veterans?
What would you like them to know that is different?
Appendix E: Informed Consent Form

The College of William and Mary
Interview Consent Form

My name is Sharon Stone. I am a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at the College of William and Mary, and I am interested in learning about your experiences as a military service member transitioning to college. This project is part of my dissertation study entitled Examining the Development of Self-Authorship in Student Veterans. The purpose of this study is to discover how student veterans make decisions and what experiences or learning has occurred in their lives leading up to their current decision-making processes.

Your consent to participate in this project indicates that you will agree to participate in two personal in-depth interviews and a focus group with me, and give permission for the conversations to be audio recorded. Each personal interview will take approximately 60-90 minutes; the focus group will take slightly longer and will involve you as well as several other participants in this study.

As in all research, there may be unforeseen risks to the participant. You understand that the only anticipated risks involve the inconvenience of responding to my questions, and the time taken to participate in the conversation. If at any time you feel uncomfortable answering a question, you may decline to respond without any adverse consequences.

One way in which you may benefit from this activity is having the opportunity to contribute to research and practice that may help veterans, military family members, college administrators, and faculty members better understand the background of students with active military experience and the ways that experience impacts their learning and adjustment in college.

You understand that all of the information collected is confidential. That means that your name will not appear on material associated with this project. You may select a pseudonym to represent yourself if you wish; if you do not, one will be created for you. I will destroy the audio recordings at the conclusion of this study. Transcripts of the recordings will be retained for analysis and scholarly publication; again, your identity will be protected to the fullest extent possible.

You understand that you may refuse to participate in this research study without prejudice or penalty. During our conversations, you may also refuse to answer any question if you so choose. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you may contact me (slstone01@email.wm.edu) or my committee chairman, Dr. James P. Barber, jbarber@wm.edu. If you have additional questions or concerns regarding your rights as a study participant, or are dissatisfied at any time with any aspect of this study, you may contact, anonymously if you wish, Dr. Tom Ward at 757-221-2358 (EDIRC-
L@wm.edu) or Dr. Lee Kirkpatrick at 757-221-3997 (PHSC-L@wm.edu), chairs of the
two William & Mary committees that supervise the treatment of study participants.

By signing below, you acknowledge understanding the purpose and requirements of the
study, and that you agree to participate and grant permission to audio record our
conversations.

Participant _______________________________ Date ____________

Pseudonym ________________________________

Researcher ________________________________ Date ____________
References


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mental health professionals (pp. 3-20). Alexandria, VA: American Counseling Association.


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