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Letter From the Editor

Welcome to the *Journal of Military and Government Counseling (JMGC)*. *JMGC* is the official journal of the Military and Government Counseling Association (MGCA; formerly the Association for Counselors and Educators in Government). This journal is designed to present current research on military, Veteran, the military family, and government topics. MGCA was established to encourage and deliver meaningful guidance, counseling, and educational programs to all members of the Armed Services, to include Veterans, their dependents, and Armed Services civilian employees – this mission was later expanded to include all governmental counselors and educators.

I have decided the journal will start following the capitalization used by the Department of Veteran Affairs and the Department of Defense for the following terms: Veteran, Soldier, Sailor, Marine, and Airmen. I contacted the APA style folks about making this change and was basically told it was my call as Editor. The capitalization of these terms will only apply when the word is related to personnel. So, should you article relate to working with members of the Army the use of Soldier would be appropriate; however, if it is a simple “soldier on,” lower case would be appropriate. Likewise, Veteran would refer to former members of the military, while “veteran police officers” would remain lower case.

This issue is an eclectic collection of articles in practice, theory, and research. The lead reviews focuses on support for the military child in civilian schools. The next two articles concern the transition from military status to civilian. The fourth article presents social support concerns of military wives post-deployment. The final article examines the military to Veteran transition within the context of group fusion and social intensity theories.

I have seen an increase in submissions for the JMCG – but could always use more. I could use more reviewers. The MGCA Board wants reviewers to be members of MGCA. If you have an interest in research – send me your CV.

Benjamin V. Noah, PhD
JMGC Founding Editor

Barriers to Supporting Military-Connected Children within Civilian Schools: A Mixed Methods Study

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Abstract

In recent years, the policy, programs, and partnerships that support military-connected children attending civilian schools have become more visible. However, little research has examined school-based providers' efforts to support these youth. In this mixed-methods study, an exploratory sequential design was used to explore multiple providers' perspectives regarding supportive services for military-connected children in civilian school settings. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with military-affiliated (n = 6) and civilian-school-based (n = 8) providers who worked with military-connected children. Themes identified during these interviews guided the development of a survey that was administered to civilian school social workers (n = 105) working within civilian schools. Results indicate that four primary themes emerged from the interviews with military-affiliated and civilian-school-based providers as barriers to providing services to military-connected children attending civilian schools: (a) the need for better systems to identify military-connected children within civilian schools, (b) competing demands, (c) the need for improved cultural competence with military-connected children, and (d) bi-directional communication between providers. Survey results were used to explore the degree to which civilian school social workers acknowledge themes identified by both groups of providers. Continued dissemination of multiple providers' perspectives helps facilitate partnership, communication, and the improvement of services that support military-connected children.

KEYWORDS: *children, military, providers, schools*

While schools offer a reliable and potentially important source of support, little is known about the challenges that providers can face in their efforts to provide support for military-connected children who attend civilian schools in the United States (Fletcher, 2012). *Military-connected children*—children who are connected to today's smaller, all-volunteer force by way of parents, siblings, and/or other loved ones who “serve, too”—may live, experience, and navigate the challenges and rewards associated with military life (Savitsky, Illingworth, &

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DuLaney, 2009). Especially before, during, or after deployment, these children experience adjustments and transitions (e.g., moving, changing schools, leaving friends) and fear of loss (e.g., worrying about a loved one's safety) or actual loss, such as coping with injury and/or even death of a parent (Brendel, Maynard, Albright, & Bellomo, 2013; Fletcher, 2013; Morray, 2010). School may or may not be viewed as a supportive environment where children feel safe enough to address stressors and transitions as they occur (Astor, De Pedro, Gilreath, Esqueda, & Benbishty, 2013). The communities where schools are geographically situated can vary in the degree to which a military presence is "visible" or "invisible" (Fletcher, 2012). Over time, military-connected children can be impacted to varying degrees in an immediate and/or more long-term sense (Wolpow, Johnson, Hertel, & Kindcaid, 2009) by their environmental surroundings.

Of today's 1,381,584 military-connected children who are of school age (ages 4 to 18 years old), an estimated 80% —1,105,267—attend U.S. public schools (Military Childhood Education Coalition [MCEC], 2015). Although "every school district in this country has military-connected children" (MCEC, 2015, para. 2), a wide range exists in terms of how many of these youth attend school in a given district. Of 13,588 U.S. civilian school districts (U.S. Department of Education, 2013), 214 have been identified as *military-connected districts* where military-connected children make up a somewhat sizeable proportion (10% or greater than 400) of the overall district enrollment (Kitmitto et al., 2011). In contrast, the majority of military-connected children attend school in one of 13,374 non-military-connected districts (Kitmitto et al., 2011), and in 10 states—Delaware, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, New Hampshire, Oregon, Vermont, West Virginia, and Wisconsin—where there are no military-connected school districts in that state (Kitmitto et al., 2011). Within many civilian schools and school districts, a military-connected student might be known as the only one or one of few military children. It can be difficult for school-based providers who do not know them as military-connected children (Fletcher, 2012).

In recent years, barriers and facilitators for military-connected children have become increasingly visible (Brendel et al., 2013). *Barriers* can hinder or impede providers in supporting others, while *facilitators* can improve treatment outcomes or assist them in their role (Teasley, Gourdine, & Canfield, 2010). In light of this examining the inverse relationship between barriers and facilitators is important (Teasley et al., 2010).

One example that addresses the barrier of identifying military-connected children, facilitating stability and minimizing disruption is the Interstate Compact on Educational Opportunity for Military Children (ICEOMC). Adopted in 50 states since 2008, the ICEOMC monitors enrollment, placement/attendance, and eligibility as children move into new school districts (Astor et al., 2013). A second example is Impact Aid, which addresses financial barriers and facilitates subsidized tax bases in school districts where military-connected children attend schools on military bases (e.g., federal land that does not pay taxes; Atuel, Esqueda, & Jacobson, 2011). A third example addresses a training barrier that promotes military cultural competency and facilitates support—the Military Childhood Education Coalition, which offers an array of resources, training, and support for parents, students, and professionals (MCEC, 2015). A fourth example that addresses the isolation barrier and facilitates support within specified public school districts is the educational partnership by the Department of Defense

Education Activity (DoDEA), which aims to “strengthen family, school, and community engagement and enhance learning opportunities for military dependent students” (Department of Defense Education Activity [DoDEA], 2013, para. 4).

To develop a more in-depth understanding of providers’ perspectives regarding barriers to supporting military-connected children within civilian school settings, further research is warranted. This statewide needs assessment represents an effort to learn more about geographically specific challenges within a statewide context. An *exploratory sequential design* was employed to learn more where barriers are that challenge providers in their efforts to support military-connected children, first by qualitative data collection and analysis of interviews, then the development of a survey, which was followed with a third quantitative phase of surveying civilian school social workers (Creswell, 2015, p. 39). The purpose of this study was to explore barriers that impact providers’ ability to support military-connected children who attend school in civilian settings.

Literature Review

Military-Connected Children

Over the past 50 years, research pertaining to military-connected children has begun to emerge. Vietnam War era research (February 28, 1961–May 7, 1975; Torreon, 2011) focused upon the impacts of parental deployment with regard to factors such as academic performance (e.g., Carlsmith, 1964), coping mechanisms (e.g., Curran, 1981), behaviors (e.g., Yeatman, 1981), or psychopathology (e.g., Pedersen, 1966). Specific variables that factor into these impacts include gender (e.g., Carlsmith, 1964), maternal presence (e.g., Nice, 1978) or absence (e.g., Applewhite & Mays, 1996), attachment security (e.g., Medway, Davis, Cafferty, Chappell, & O’Hearn, 1995), and duration and frequency of deployments (e.g., Yeatman, 1981). During the era of the Persian Gulf War (August 2, 1990–April 6, 1991; Torreon, 2011) researchers began collecting data before, during, and after parental deployment, which expanded in scope to examine various psychological symptoms children experienced (e.g., Rosen, Teitelbaum, & Westhuis, 1993), parental perceptions of their children’s behavior (e.g., Kelley, Herzog-Simmer, & Harris, 1994), and adjustments children made during the deployment cycle (e.g., Pierce, 1998).

In efforts to better identify and respond to children’s needs (e.g., Military Family Research Institute, 2008), post-9/11 research has begun to examine parental capacity to appraise children’s fears (e.g., Smith & Moyer-Guse, 2008), levels of internal distress, or externally observed behaviors (e.g., Schonfield & Gurwitch, 2008); children’s direct experiences and descriptions of how they perceive deployment-related injuries, seen and unseen (e.g., Morray, 2010); deployment separation (e.g., Houston et al., 2009); and deployment support (e.g., Edwin, 2008). Overall inconsistencies regarding the extent to which parental deployment and military lifestyle impact military-connected children are present in the literature; and yet, research literature supports that these youth “experience multiple stressors that, in addition to other familial and age-related stressors, are likely to have some impact on their psychosocial health and well-being” (Brendel et al., 2013, p. 2).

Three waves of research have emerged since 9/11 (Wadsworth, 2013). The first wave characterizes studies that assess the degree to which children and parents experience difficulties associated with deployment. The second wave uses larger, more rigorous designs; of note, some have addressed the cause(s) of symptoms/distress. The third wave (now underway) is focusing on explanation/ insights, lessons learned, and highlighted “within-group diversity” (Wadsworth, 2013).

Support for Military-Connected Children within Schools

A small body of barrier-related research literature focuses upon military-connected children who attend schools (e.g., Fletcher, 2012). To date, existing research has most often examined the experience of military-connected children who attend schools in communities where a military presence is visible either on bases or in military-connected school districts within civilian settings (e.g., Fletcher, 2012). The degree to which existing literature considers barriers with regard to the broad categories of identification, cultural competence, and communication will now be reviewed.

Identification. While the challenges of identifying military-connected children who attend schools has been both articulated within informal literature, aggregate data, and policy, it is less often the focus of research. For the most part, studies have often captured one aspect of identification, such as the types of interventions (Atuel et al., 2011) and/or services provided to military-connected children who attend civilian schools (e.g., Fletcher, 2012; Keim, 2009). One study conducted by Keim (2009) moved further into the role of identification. In the study, school counselors from several groups were surveyed—those who worked with military-connected children attending North Carolina public schools during deployment, who either worked in schools adjacent to major active duty installations ($n = 63$) or were located further away from installations ($n = 54$). Participants were asked how they identified military-connected children, what resources were used, and what counseling services were provided to this population. Findings revealed that school counselors who lived and/or worked closer to active-duty military installations were more often able to identify military-connected children than those who lived and/or worked further away (Keim, 2009).

Cultural competence. Cultural competence has emerged within research as a concern both among and in relation to providers who work with military-connected populations within community settings (e.g., Tanielian et al., 2014). Also, it has been highlighted specifically in relation to children (e.g., Garner, Arnold, & Nunnery, 2014). One recent study conducted by Garner and colleagues (2014) explored various aspects of working with military-connected students. Educators—including principals ($n = 7$), school counselors ($n = 8$), teachers ($n = 55$), and instructional support staff ($n = 4$) who taught in military-connected public schools ($n = 8$)—participated via focus groups and surveys. Findings related to cultural competence in the study revealed that educators might not be aware of deployments or homecomings, might lack basic knowledge of the military or its culture, and might not be aware of the needs of or feel prepared to meet the needs of military-connected children (Garner et al., 2014).

The role of school climate in relation to military-connected children who attend public schools in military-connected school districts has been highlighted in recent research (e.g., Astor

et al., 2013; De Pedro, 2012). In one study, De Pedro (2012) examined California Healthy Kids Survey data ($n = 14,943$) from 7th, 9th, and 11th graders. School climate was examined in terms of perception, differences by military connection, mental health, and in relation to victimization in military-connected schools (De Pedro, 2012). Publicly available school-level demographic and school achievement data from the California Department of Education was also incorporated. Findings indicated that school climate was associated with factors such as mental health and victimization. Salient recommendations included increased “awareness and strategies for accommodating the needs and challenges of military students” (De Pedro, 2012, p. 41), “increased flexibility in providing meaningful participation opportunities” (p. 41), and increased focus on the enhancement of school climate vis-à-vis theories, policies, and future interventions.

Communication. To date, the role of communication in supporting military-connected children who attend civilian schools has been less often highlighted in research literature than in non-research literature, aggregate data, and policy initiatives. Similar to research that has highlighted the importance of identifying military-connected children, the few research studies that have examined communication on behalf of military-connected children who attend civilian schools have most often captured one aspect of communication, such as how referrals for interventions were made (e.g., Fletcher, 2012; Keim, 2009) and/or services provided to military-connected children who attend civilian schools (e.g., Fletcher, 2012; Keim, 2009). A small but growing literature base has begun to highlight communication through the lens of partnerships that support military-connected children within school settings (Astor et al., 2013; Atuel et al., 2014). Most recently, studies have focused upon those partnerships developed with either schools located on bases or schools located within military-connected school districts, such as partnering with organizations like the University of Southern California (Astor et al., 2013).

Methods

Our research employed a *mixed methods* design where both qualitative (open-ended) and quantitative (closed-ended) data were gathered. The design combined the strengths of both sets of data in efforts to better understand the research problem (Creswell, 2015). The assessment represented an effort to learn more about geographically specific barriers and facilitators inherent to supporting military-connected children within a statewide context. We used an *exploratory sequential design*, which used qualitative data collection and analysis to look at both barriers and facilitators for providers trying to provide support to military-connected youth who attend civilian schools. Next, we developed a survey instrument based on these findings, and then we followed up with a third quantitative phase of research (Creswell, 2015; see Figure 1).

In recent years, mixed-methods research design has been used to conduct multi-phase research. One prominent example that pertains to promoting support among military-connected children is the *Educational Options and Performance of Military-Connected School Districts Research Study—Final Report* conducted for the Department of Defense Education Activity (DoDEA; Kitmitto et al., 2011). This study connected three types of data.

First, existing quantitative data from public school districts ($n = 214$) were compiled in order to compare achievement between military-connected and non-military-connected school districts. Second, existing quantitative data from an array of sources (e.g., state-level and school-

district-level data) were collected to examine educational options offered between military-connected and non-military-connected school districts. Third, qualitative interviews with school liaison officers ($n = 8$) were conducted in efforts to better understand providers' perspectives regarding challenges faced by military families (Kitmitto et al., 2011).

A total of 119 providers were recruited to participate in this study. Data were derived from three sources: (a) qualitative interviews with military-affiliated providers ($n = 6$), (b) qualitative interviews with civilian school-based providers ($n = 8$), and (c) survey responses from civilian school social workers ($n = 105$). The research was approved by the Human Subject Review Board. Recruitment, data collection, and analysis for qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys took place from June 2011 through May 2012. (See the diagram of procedures in Figure 1.)

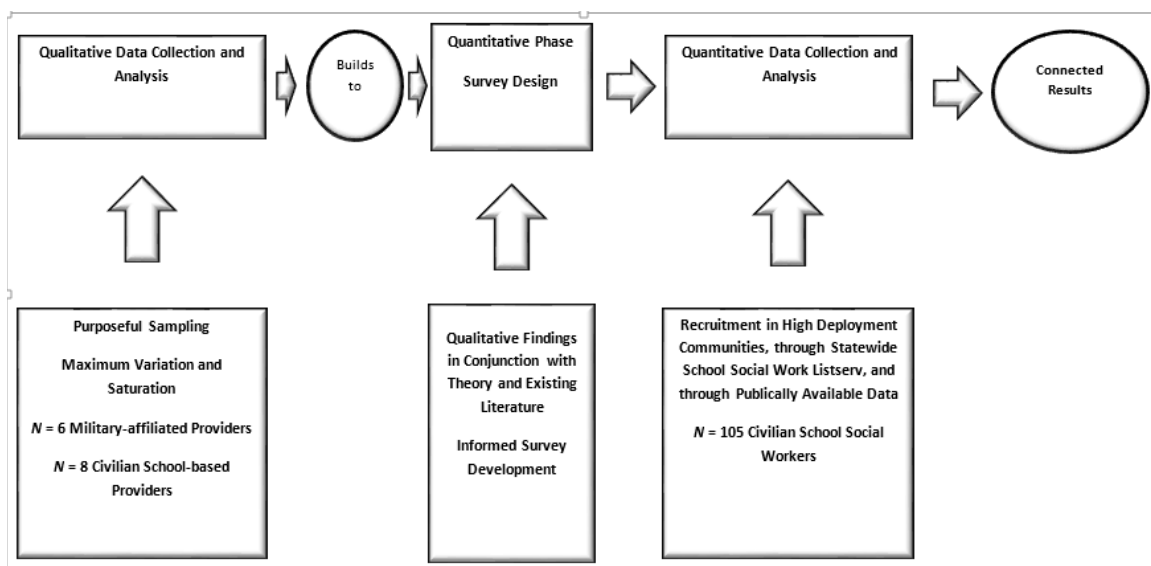


Figure 1. *Exploratory Sequential Design Used in This Mixed Method Research*

Data Collection

To determine the gaps that exist between military-affiliated providers and civilian-school-based providers (including civilian school social workers), we collected data from three sources. Our data sources included in-person interviews and a survey administered online. The setting for this statewide needs assessment study was a Midwestern state with a large National Guard population. The state had no military-connected school districts. Providers who possessed a wide range of breadth and depth of experience working with military-connected children were recruited to participate in this study.

Phase one: qualitative interviews. During phase one, a semi-structured interview guide was developed based upon knowledge of the previous research literature, professional experience, personal experience, and analytic process. The guide included questions on providers' work roles, professional experiences with military-connected children, as well as their

views regarding existing supports, plus ways to address barriers to providing support to military-connected children who attend civilian schools.

The purpose of this first phase of the study was to both capture the voice of providers who work with school-age, military-connected youth and to develop a more in-depth understanding regarding these providers' views of barriers to supporting these youth within civilian school settings. For these interviews, a *purposeful sampling strategy* was employed where providers were "intentionally selected to help explore the problem" (Creswell, 2015, p. 80) and to capture an array of perspectives by those who worked directly or indirectly with military-connected children who attended civilian schools. These providers were either military-affiliated (42.9%, $n = 6$) or civilian-school-based educators (57.1%, $n = 8$).

A *snowball sampling* technique was also used to locate this sample and to reach a saturation point with 14 participants (e.g., Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Military-affiliated providers were identified and asked to participate in this study based on each one's specific job role, ranging from direct advocacy to parent- and family-based support, resource and referral support, administrative support, and program development. Locating military-affiliated providers was a rather straightforward process given that they were visible on websites, few in number, and amenable to being interviewed as part of their job (Fletcher, 2012, p. 29). Civilian-school-based providers who had done substantive work with military-connected children were harder to locate. Civilian school-based providers were identified and asked to participate based on their work with military-connected children who attended kindergarten through 12th grade (K-12) as school social workers, counselors, principals, or teachers within public, civilian school settings.

Interview sample. Military-affiliated providers ($n = 6$) interviewed for this study supported military-connected children who attended civilian schools in a variety of ways, such as direct work with children in school settings or with parents and families; indirect family resource/referral/outreach support/program development; or work for military service members, Veterans, and their families. Military-affiliated providers supported military-connected children of all ages. Their roles were not geographically specific. In an effort to protect the identities of military-connected providers, who are relative few in number and somewhat identifiable if specific information is offered, no further demographics were collected.

Civilian-school-based providers (100%; $n = 8$) interviewed included school social workers (37.5%, $n = 3$), school counselors (25%, $n = 2$), principals (25%, $n = 2$), and teachers (12.5%, $n = 1$). These providers worked in elementary (K-5) (75%, $n = 6$), middle (12.5%, $n = 1$), and high school (12.5%, $n = 1$) settings. Half worked in or around the main metro area of the state (50%, $n = 4$), while others worked in west central (25%, $n = 2$), southwest (12.5%, $n = 1$), and southeast (12.5%, $n = 1$) regions of the state. They worked in suburban (50%, $n = 4$), urban (37.5%, $n = 3$), and rural (22.5%, $n = 1$) settings. Half worked with 500–749 children (50%, $n = 5$), while about one-third worked with 750 or more (37.5%, $n = 3$), only one worked with fewer than 500 (12.5%, $n = 1$) children. Some worked in communities with visible military presence (37.5%, $n = 3$) versus less-visible civilian school settings (62.5%, $n = 5$). All school-based providers interviewed had worked with military-connected children (100%, $n = 8$). The overall range of children they had worked with ranged from "a few" to "hundreds."

Phase two: quantitative survey. During phase two of data collection, survey data was collected from civilian school social workers ($n = 105$). The aim of obtaining quantitative data was to better determine how the problem—barriers to providing support to military-connected children who attend civilian schools—was understood within a larger, more randomized, albeit slightly different, sample of providers (Creswell, 2015). Similar to qualitative interviews, respondents in this survey were asked about their work roles, professional experiences in working with military-connected children, what needs for support they thought went unmet, and how these needs could be better met. In light of data that emerged from qualitative interviews, additional questions, as well as new language that specifically asked about barriers, were added to this second phase of data collection. These barrier-specific questions were incorporated into the survey based on preliminary analysis of the data:

- Have you or are you currently working with [military-connected] children of deployed service members during the last 10 years?
- When needs for support among [military-connected] children are unmet, do you feel any of the following may be contributing factors? (yes/no to multiple barriers identified during interviews and in the literature)
- Would additional resources, such as money or time, impact the services or support you could provide to help meet the needs for support [among military-connected children]? (yes/no)
- Specifically, would money or time make your school better able to address the following needs for support [among military-connected children]? (yes/no to multiple resources and supports identified during interviews and in the literature)

School social workers who worked within public civilian school settings with children in grades K-12 were recruited to participate in this study. In light of the limited publicly available school-level data pertaining to military-connected children (Fletcher, 2012), it was challenging to develop and recruit for this study.

In the absence of a publicly available way to develop a representative sample, the study sample was obtained using multiple recruitment techniques. Recruitment methods were varied in order to obtain a sample of school-based providers who had a diverse level of knowledge and experience with military-connected youth. For survey participants, school-based providers were recruited in three ways: (a) the researcher identified communities within the state where there was a high proportion of families experiencing deployment and contacted school social workers in those districts; (b) the researcher contacted participants through a statewide school social work listserv; and (c) the researcher developed a contact list of school phone numbers listed by school on publicly available, school-district specific websites.

Civilian school social workers who completed surveys during phase two of this study ($n = 105$) worked in elementary (59%, $n = 62$), middle (11%, $n = 12$), high school (15%, $n = 16$), and “other” (e.g., combined) settings (14%, $n = 15$). Roughly half worked in or around the surrounding primary metro area (49%, $n = 51$), while others worked in northwest (8%, $n = 8$), northeast (6%, $n = 6$), west central (14%, $n = 15$), east central (3%, $n = 3$), southwest (11%, $n = 12$), and southeast (11%, $n = 12$) regions of the state. Geographically, roughly one-third worked in each setting—suburban (36%, $n = 38$), rural (33%, $n = 35$), and urban (30%, $n = 32$) settings. Roughly one-quarter worked with fewer than 250 students (25%, $n = 26$), 250-499 students

(21%, $n = 22$), 500-749 students (27%, $n = 28$), and 750 or more (27%, $n = 29$) students. The overwhelming majority of respondents indicated that they had worked with military-connected children during deployment (79%, $n = 80$). One-fifth of respondents (21%; $n = 21$) had not worked with military-connected children.

Data Analysis

Phase one: qualitative. During the first phase of data analysis, qualitative interviews were audiotaped, transcribed, and analyzed for themes using a content analysis data reduction approach (Monette, Sullivan, & DeJong, 2011). With the exception of one interview that was conducted by phone, all qualitative interview data were collected in person. Prior to beginning interviews, all participants granted permission to be interviewed. They were informed that there were no direct benefits to participation in the study and were given the option to end the interview at any time.

Interviews were transcribed by either a trained master's level research assistant or the primary investigator of this project. Data analysis during phase one was conducted in several phases: (a) data was read through and memos were written, (b) data was coded, (c) data was further described and summarized using *open coding* where categories were found, (d) themes were developed using *axial coding* to find links/themes, and (e) interrelated themes were further consolidated using *selective coding*, where categories and their relationships were combined to better describe what happened during interviews (Creswell, 2015). Trustworthiness of the qualitative analysis was ensured vis-à-vis external audit, peer audit, and the triangulation and expansion of survey data collection in phase two (Creswell, 2015).

Phase two: quantitative. For phase two, quantitative survey data was collected and analyzed participants' completed surveys online. These survey contained 174 questions—152 were quantitative; 22 allowed for qualitative responses. Survey responses were collected in Qualtrics (n.d.), an online data collection tool that was used in order to distribute and collect survey responses. Data was imported into Excel. From there, nominal and ordinal level data was analyzed. Descriptive statistics are presented in the results section of this study.

Results

Four primary themes—two connected and two divergent themes—emerged from the interviews with military-affiliated and civilian-school-based providers as a barrier to providing services to military-connected children attending civilian schools. The four themes were: (a) the need for better systems to identify military-connected children within civilian schools; (b) competing demands; (c) cultural competence; and (d) bi-directional communication between providers. Survey results were used to explore the degree to which civilian school social workers acknowledge themes identified by both groups of providers. (See Table 1 for a summary of sample responses.) In accordance with an exploratory sequential mixed method research design, this section presents the connected results of our study in three sections: (a) phase one's qualitative interviews, (b) survey development, and (c) phase two's quantitative surveys (Creswell, 2015; Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2011).

Table 1. *Barriers to Supporting Military-Connected Children within Civilian Schools: Sample Provider Responses*

Themes	Providers		
	Military	Civilian	School social workers
	Military-affiliated (n = 6)	School based (n = 8)	(n = 105)
Identification (connected)	"I've met with a couple of different schools and districts, and it's always that realization of 'no, we can't give you names that—I don't even have names to give you...."	"... not every family wants everybody to know that they have someone who's deployed or even in the service.... I respect that, but it does make it hard to know which kids need the support, and maybe they have a deployed caregiver...."	"I have worked with children from military families but am unsure whether service-member parents were part of the National Guard (42%) or deployed" (4%; n = 4).
"When needs for support among [military-connected] children are unmet, do you feel any of the following may be contributing factors?"			
Competing demands (connected)	"I don't want to say that I ran into anybody that did not want to support military kids.... It was like, 'We don't have that many kids, and we've got this many pulls on our time.... How do we prioritize?'"	"Schools are in a very unique position where we're expected to know a whole bunch of stuff ... and yet we're also expected to be exemplary educators."	Time (n = 47; 72.3%) Finances (n = 44; 69.9%) Schedule conflicts (n = 43; 67.2%) Transportation (n = 41; 64.1%) Childcare barriers (n = 39; 60%) Competing priorities (n = 13; 24.1%)
Cultural competence (divergent)	"A lot of ... social workers ... don't have that military knowledge or background. You might have an opinion about the war that, as a professional, you have to be very careful that you are not putting that on a child or a family or whatever, that you are being neutral."	"... I think that as you don't use that, then you get rusty again. And so that's why I think those trainings are so important. Even though I've heard it before, because I'm not living it every day, the reminders are wonderful."	Lack of training for school-based providers (n = 39; 60.9%)
Bi-directional Communication (divergent)	"We get requests in and we get questions, but typically it's a one-time communication and then it's ... over. So, I don't know somebody that's done ongoing, ongoing support."	"There's a key person here in town ... a Vietnam vet ... [who] has taken it upon himself to be ... [our] liaison [name of school and town]. He's just been a great benefactor for the group.... He gives me the line on upcoming community activities...."	Lack of coordination between schools and military organizations (n = 51; 76.1%); Referral process (n = 37; 56.1%) Stigma associated with receiving help (n = 33; 50%)

Note. This table reflects military-connected, school-based, and school social worker providers' responses. Phase 1 responses are from qualitative interviews. Phase 2 answers are from survey responses to several yes/no questions. Survey respondents answered yes on more than one question, resulting in higher rates for some questions and an overall range in number of responses (n = 54–67).

Phase One: Qualitative Interviews

Barrier one: identification. The first theme that both military-affiliated (n = 6, 100%) and civilian-school-based providers (n = 7, 87.5%) noted as a barrier to providing services to military-connected children attending civilian schools was the need for better systems to identify military-connected children within civilian schools.

Military-affiliated providers. All military-affiliated providers (n = 6; 100%) broached identification as a barrier to supporting military-connected children in civilian school settings. During interviews, providers emphasized that it was up to children and/or families to self-

identify as military-connected ($n = 2, 33.3\%$)—that as military-connected providers, they were not at liberty to pass along what information they had ($n = 2, 33.3\%$). They noted that schools might have “no idea” how to identify military-connected children ($n = 1, 16.7\%$) and noted potential consequences if knowledge of a child’s military connection was not factored into educator assessment or interaction with children ($n = 2, 33.3\%$).

Military-affiliated providers admitted that identification of military-connected children posed challenges for them, even in their work as military-affiliated providers. One provider noted that locating military children within civilian schools was a challenge ($n = 1, 16.7\%$). Others noted ($n = 2, 33.3\%$) that while they did not know names of military-connected children, they could help educate school-based providers:

I’ve met with a couple of different schools and districts, and it’s always that realization of, no, we can’t give you names that – I don’t even have names to give you, but you could put it on your registration form at the beginning of the year and then you’ll have it if the families want to be identified; that’s their way to do it.... And so just helping them see that there are ways that they can get there; they just have to do it themselves to get there.

Civilian school-based providers. In their interviews, civilian-school-based providers ($n = 7, 87.5\%$) identified the need for better systems to identify military-connected children. Although school-based providers ($n = 4, 50\%$) agreed they could offer relationally significant, ongoing support to children of deployment, those working in more isolated, less militarily visible schools conceded that lack of identification made support more challenging. As one school counselor summarized, quite simply, “We need to know who they are.” One school social worker noted, “I’ve always been lucky to have really proactive parents.... That’s really helped, just to even know, otherwise ... potentially there could be an instance when I don’t even know there’s been a parent deployed.” Another school counselor thought military-connected families could choose to remain anonymous or not be identified as military in schools or communities:

[It was] explained to me ... not every family wants everybody to know that they have someone who’s deployed or even in the service.... I respect that, but it does make it hard to know which kids need the support and maybe they have a deployed caregiver, but they are doing great and don’t need support, so that’s where it does get tricky—or I feel like it is.

Civilian school-based providers ($n = 3, 37.5\%$) discussed that identification looked different to those who worked in civilian schools where military-connected children were a visible part of the school community, compared to those who worked where military-connected children were less visible. One school counselor who works in a school with a visible military-connected population identified children primarily through announcements, word of mouth, other teachers, a display in the hallway, and the publicity of the ongoing deployment support group. In contrast, those working where children were less visible in schools tried, with less success, to identify such children. Although school-based counselors made efforts to communicate with staff, send outreach letters to all parents at the beginning of the year, and make military deployments visible in school, these school-based providers were less able to connect with many military-connected children who have a deployed parent than school-based providers living in more visibly military-connected communities. Providers attributed the lack of response, in part,

to families moving out of the district to other schools. Providers also reported there were simply no deployments in their schools.

Barrier two: competing demands. The second theme among military-affiliated ($n = 5$, 83.3%) and civilian-school-based providers ($n = 8$, 100%) identified competing demands as a barrier to providing services to military-connected children attending civilian schools.

Military-affiliated providers. During their interviews, the majority of military-affiliated providers ($n = 5$, 83.3%) identified competing demands as a barrier to providing services to military-connected children attending civilian schools. One provider noted that military children and their families were busy and that participation in military support was seen as a choice ($n = 1$, 16.7%). Another provider noted that families could have more pressing concerns, such as education and finances ($n = 1$, 16.7%).

Within schools, competing demands were also noted. One provider ($n = 1$, 16.7%) noted that competing interests among educators made it hard for her to train or give out information within schools, noting, “It’s hard to get into the schools and talk to all the teachers.” Another provider ($n = 1$, 16.7%) pointed out there were other prioritizes that can influence the end to which schools can offer support, stating:

I don’t want to say that I ran into anybody that didn’t want to support military kids.... It isn’t that they didn’t want to help; it was like. “We don’t have that many kids, and we’ve got this many pulls on our time.” ... How do we prioritize?

Finally, providers ($n = 2$, 33.3%) noted restrictions within their own job roles that hampered their ability to connect military-connected providers within school settings. Those roles might be delegated to providers, or the scope of their work might be limited (e.g., to resources and referral).

Civilian school-based providers. In their interviews, civilian school-based providers ($n = 8$, 100%) broached the reality of their competing demands as educators who might impact their capacity to fully support military-connected children in the school environment. Job roles, realities of school settings, and competing interests were noted.

Several school-based providers ($n = 5$, 62.5%) found their job limited their ability to support military-connected children. Half cited specific factors such as working with a large student population, being part-time, working in more than one building, and being in more than one role. One also described challenges either with role delegation or clarification. Another described challenges supporting military-connected children when she was newer to the community and during a time when she was less familiar with resources.

A majority of school-based providers ($n = 5$, 62.5%) reflected on the realities of their job roles, competing tensions in their job, as well as various constraints and limitations upon their school’s resources—challenges to children’s needs getting met at school. One described the demands of her role in this way: “We have ... 400 minutes in our day, and they have accounted for 400 minutes of our day.” This same provider went on to say that when military families were struggling for needed supports, the “school ... shoulders ... the burden of a lot of those ...

needs” and tries its best to provide resources for these families. One school social worker spoke to the range of demands placed upon all educators and how “schools are in a very unique position, where we’re expected to know a whole bunch of stuff ... and yet we’re also expected to be exemplary educators.” Another school-based provider noted the need for support inside and outside school:

Individual and small group support during the school year is critically important. However, children also need support outside of the school day and for those families with more intense issues and needs; the school cannot be expected to meet all of those mental health needs and keep the primary focus on education.

Finally, civilian-school-based providers weighed in with creative ways to support military-connected children in light of competing demands ($n = 5$, 62.5%). One provider ($n = 1$, 12.5%) noted the necessity of this approach, given that military-connected students constituted a smaller part of the student population, where more students were dealing with the impacts of divorce and/or grief and loss. Others ($n = 3$, 37.5%) described how use could be made of existing general resources available to other children. One provider weighed pros and cons of using in-school versus after-school time so everyone can participate:

If you have an after-school program or before-school program, it limits a certain type of kid that can come, not all the kids ... but if you have it during the day, if you can find the time to do it during the day, you get nearly 100% participation.

Others discussed ($n = 3$, 37.5%) working with children in the context of existing, more general support groups, such as friendship groups and transition groups.

Barrier three: cultural competence. The third theme between military-affiliated and school-based providers pertained to cultural competence. Military-affiliated providers focused on a lack of military cultural competence among civilian school providers ($n = 6$, 100%). In contrast, fewer civilian-school-based providers discussed military cultural competence ($n = 3$, 37.5%). Rather, they focused more on facilitators of military cultural competence or their cultural competence as educators.

Military-affiliated providers. Results indicate that military-affiliated providers were concerned that civilian-school-based providers lacked the degree of military cultural competency necessary to support military-connected children within civilian schools. In fact, the majority of military-affiliated providers ($n = 6$, 100%) expressed concern regarding whether school-based providers possessed military competence or a level of familiarity with military culture and education specific to deployment needs. These providers defined *military competence* as becoming conversant in military language and culture, possessing an ability to identify concerns or reach out to children whose parents can be deployed, and knowing what resources exist in schools and communities. One military-affiliated provider articulated that “from the educators at the top, down to the teachers and the teacher’s aide, [to] have more education regarding our military kids and what they may ... be facing.”

Several military-affiliated providers ($n = 5$, 83.3%) were concerned about the degree to which insensitivity/sensitivity or educator attitude could hinder civilian-school-based providers in their capacity to support military-connected children. One provider expressed strong concerns:

A lot of ... social workers/school counselors—they don't have that military knowledge or background. You might have an opinion about the war that, as a professional, you have to be very careful that you're not putting that on a child, or a family, or whatever, that you're being neutral.

Others felt that if school-based providers maintained an awareness of the effect of their words, particularly things children might construe as anti-military or anti-war sentiments, that this might demonstrate support toward military-connected children's present situations. Another provider ($n = 1, 16.7\%$) thought providers might not think about it or be aware initially but might start to see once it is pointed out:

I wouldn't say all—a lot of the schools just tell us they don't have a need or they don't see the need, but then once you talk to them, they start to go, oh yeah, or they can apply what we have to other cases, you know, to other students, too.

Civilian-school-based providers. In contrast to military-affiliated providers, fewer civilian-school-based providers discussed military cultural competence ($n = 3, 37.5\%$). Rather, they focused more on facilitators of military cultural competence or their cultural competence as educators. Among school-based providers, experience working with military-connected children varied widely. Those who identified as working in communities with a visible presence ($n = 3, 37.5\%$) spoke about their knowledge of the military and experience working with military-connected children and use of resources based upon personal experience and/or professional experience.

Civilian-school-based educators working in less visible communities ($n = 5, 62.5\%$) described a more self-taught military cultural competency process. One indicated that she necessarily knows the difference between National Guard, Reserve, and active-duty members but had worked with several children, attended numerous trainings, and expressed familiarity with military resources. Another sought out ongoing training to stay apprised of education and resources:

... I think that as you don't use that, then you get rusty again. And so that's why I think those trainings are so important. Even though I've heard it before, because I'm not living it every day, the reminders are wonderful.

Yet another took the approach that more training was helpful for all:

All of our teachers in the district need to have a training.... They probably know more than they think they know, but just having somebody say, you know how to work with these kids; this is right; this is the right thing to do, to support all of our teaching staff.... And I still don't feel that I know enough, but I feel like I know enough to at least provide something.... More is better than nothing ... and the resources that I have are great....

Of note during civilian-school-based provider interviews ($n = 8, 100\%$), cultural competence as educators was highlighted or discussed either directly or indirectly. Overall, these educators expressed that they understood how to support children in relation to their developmental needs, within the context of their direct work with the child, and within the context of the school/school system.

Barrier four: bi-directional communication. The fourth theme between military-affiliated and school-based providers pertained to bi-directional communication. In general,

military-affiliated providers often lacked ongoing, bi-directional relationships with military-connected children or school-based providers within the context of civilian school settings ($n = 6, 100\%$). In contrast, this theme was not found among civilian-school-based educators.

Military-affiliated providers. To some extent, military-affiliated providers lacked ongoing, bi-directional relationships with military-connected children or school-based providers within the context of civilian school settings. All providers ($n = 6, 100\%$) talked about the way in which either they perceived their work roles, which were specific, brief, and assistance oriented more so than relationship oriented. They described their roles as ones that address emergent concerns (e.g., “firefighter” that addresses immediate concern, then triages to an expert), such as resource and referral, connect (e.g., acts as a “conduit of information”), synchronize (e.g., helps put prevention/resources into place for schools/communities to follow up), and/or partner with others. One military-affiliated provider noted the limitations of his role, crediting more ongoing work to social workers/counselors. Of note, one provider was a military-connected father who had ongoing relationships with school-based providers (past and present) within the context of his child’s education.

Military-affiliated providers viewed schools as viable or desirable venues where they could support and connect with military children, yet they said that limited ongoing relationships with civilian-school-based providers and civilian schools were barriers to service provision. In fact, few military-connected providers directly worked with military-connected children or school-based providers in civilian school settings. One military-affiliated provider stated that, despite working routinely in the schools, she did not have ongoing relationships with educators: “We get requests in and we get questions, and but typically it’s just a one-time communication and then it’s ... over. So, I don’t know somebody that’s done ongoing, ongoing support.”

Another military-based provider expressed frustration at her lack of direct access to schools:

Getting information into the schools ... is tricky.... Anything that was going out to the schools ... needed to be coordinated through, at the state level.... It has to go into the school board; it has to be approved.... [I] can’t bring something to school ... [but] if somebody comes in and says I need help with this or this, then I can provide those resources from here.

Yet another military-affiliated provider said, “We want to go beyond what [is being done] ... currently ... continue getting into the local schools ... [and] do a better job of finding a way that we can reach in the school at a local [level].” This same provider indicated that developing more lasting connections with civilian schools entailed extending current outreach attempts to connect with educators, which currently occurs primarily through conferences and phone calls:

[Military-affiliated providers getting out there and] literally pounding the pavement ... getting out there into the schools and communities ... face-to-face, not only with the superintendent, but the assistant principal and the educators and talking to them. That’s where we’re seeing the success.

Military-affiliated providers expressed their desire to establish a more systematic approach to supporting military-connected children in civilian school settings. One military-affiliated provider spoke to why the coordination of services in school-based settings may be an

ongoing process: "... it's [still] not synchronized.... Part of our problem is where we've got all these silos, but ... they're over there ... doing what they do."

Civilian-school-based providers. This theme was not found among civilian-school-based educators. Several described the influence and ongoing support they cultivated with parents who were Veterans, service members, and/or working in military-affiliated roles ($n = 5$, 62.5%) and a Veteran volunteer (non-parent) who helped support military-connected children at school ($n = 2$, 12.5%). Educators who worked in schools located in communities with a visible military presence also benefitted from ongoing relationships with connected military-affiliated providers and/or programs within their communities ($n = 3$, 37.5%). Of note, all civilian military-affiliated providers ongoing support for the children whom they supported ($n = 8$, 100%), and generally some degree of relationship with military parents.

Development of the Survey (Instrument)

Based on the themes that emerged from phase one of the study, exploratory data results were used develop a survey to be tested with a larger sample in phase two (Creswell, 2015). Questionnaire content was informed by and corresponded with themes derived from preliminary data reduction of key informant interviews. Qualitative questions helped inform the questionnaire's development. The quantitative methods were employed to determine whether results were applicable to civilian school social workers, as well. The questionnaire was developed after conducting preliminary analysis of qualitative interviews with military-affiliated providers and civilian-school providers. Qualitative analyses helped establish a priori expectation that providers could face challenges that warrant consideration or were relevant to their work with military-connected children who attend civilian schools.

As with interviews, surveys again explored provider perspectives regarding military-connected children's needs for support. Several categories of questions were replicated from phase 1 to phase 2—phase 1 asked open-ended questions to a purposeful and strategic sample of providers, while phase 2 survey questions presented a combination of nominal (yes/no), ordinal (e.g., 1-5), and open-ended questions to a larger group of providers who were school social workers. In addition, new barrier-specific questions were incorporated into the survey based on preliminary analysis of the data:

- Have you or are you currently working with [military-connected] children of deployed service members during the last 10 years?
- When needs for support among [military-connected] children are unmet, do you feel any of the following may be contributing factors? (yes/no to multiple barriers identified during interviews and in the literature)
- Would additional resources, such as money or time, impact the services or support you could provide to help meet the needs for support [among military-connected children]? (yes/no)
- Specifically, would money or time make your school better able to address the following needs for support [among military-connected children]? (yes/no to multiple resources and supports identified during interviews and in the literature)

Phase Two: Quantitative Surveys with Civilian Social Workers

Survey results were used to explore the degree to which civilian-school social workers acknowledge themes identified during qualitative interviews: identification, military cultural competence, communication, and competing demands.

Barrier one: identification. In one survey question that highlighted identification, civilian-school social workers were asked, “Have you or are you currently working with [military-connected] children of deployed service members during the last 10 years?” In their responses, just over 40% identified that they had worked specifically with children of National Guard service members who had been deployed ($n = 42\%$, 42%). Just over one-third indicated that they had worked with military-connected children who had experienced deployment but were not sure of a specific military affiliation ($n = 34$, 34%). A small portion of respondents indicated that while they had worked with military-connected children, they were unsure whether these children had experienced deployment ($n = 4$, 4%).

Barrier two: competing demands. Within the question, “When needs for support among [military-connected] children are unmet, do you feel any of the following may be contributing factors?” several yes/no sub-questions asked civilian social workers about competing demands. Shortage of time (as providers) ($n = 47$, 72.3%), financial costs ($n = 44$, 69.9%), schedule conflicts (when services are offered) ($n = 43$, 67.2%), transportation ($n = 41$, 64.1%);), childcare barriers ($n = 39$, 60%), and competing priorities ($n = 13$, 24.1%) were noted as potential barriers by civilian-school social workers.

Respondents were given the opportunity to write in specific comments for two sub-questions: priorities and other barriers. Seven of 13 respondents added responses for *priorities*: limited time and funds, having too little time to get everything done, homework, academic[s] and confidentiality, schedules, survival mode of adults in [the] family, and competing needs and participating in extra-curricular activities with peers and participating in deployment support programs. Seven of nine respondents added responses for *priorities*: shortage of time among families, time! Time to do it all! Outreach and identification, personnel to coordinate, financial constraints and lack of two parents to manage schedules/family needs, very few affected in our community, and we are not identifying these children currently.

Barrier three: cultural competence. Within the question, “When needs for support among [military-connected] children are unmet, do you feel any of the following may be contributing factors?” one yes/no sub-question asked civilian social workers about cultural competence. Lack of training for school-based providers ($n = 39$; 60.9%) was noted as a potential barrier by civilian school social workers.

Barrier four: bi-directional communication. Within the question, “When needs for support among [military-connected] children are unmet, do you feel any of the following may be contributing factors?” three yes/no sub-questions asked civilian social workers about bi-directional communication. Lack of coordination between schools and military organizations ($n = 51$, 76.1%), the referral process ($n = 37$, 56.1%), and stigma associated with receiving help (n

= 33, 50%) were noted as potential barriers related to bi-directional communication by civilian school social workers.

Discussion

Barrier One: Identification

Preliminary analysis of this theme is (somewhat) supported within existing research literature. Keim's (2009) dissertation study, which surveyed school counselors working near or far away from major active-duty installation, found counselors' ability to identify military-connected children increased the closer they worked to active duty installations. While geographically different from our study, this speaks to the difference between "visibility" (e.g., increased presence) and "invisibility" (e.g., decreased presence). Again, this study differs from Keim's in that it took place in a state where there are no active duty bases or military-connected school districts.

Barrier Two: Competing Demands

The theme of competing demands diverges from the existing research literature. Although research literature might allude to competing demands or tensions within the context of its larger study (e.g., Garner et al., 2014), to our knowledge, little—if any—research examined competing demands among providers who work with military-connected children who attend civilian schools (Fletcher, 2012). In states or geographic regions situated outside of military-connected school districts, further analysis of barriers and facilitators that address competing demands is of particular importance.

Barrier Three: Cultural Competence

The theme of cultural competence is both supported and divergent from the research literature. Military cultural competence has begun to be examined within research taking place within civilian school settings (e.g., Garner, Arnold, & Nunnery, 2014). More specifically, school climate research (e.g., Astor et al., 2013; De Pedro, 2012) has made recommendations specific to military cultural competency, as well. This research, which takes place outside of military-connected schools in a state with less visibility of its military population, both adds qualitatively to this research and considers educator knowledge as a valuable form of cultural competence.

Barrier Four: Bi-directional Communication

In addition, the theme of bi-directional communication is both supported and divergent from the research literature. Research analyzing the outcome of partnerships between organizations, such as University of Southern California and military-connected school districts, has begun to emerge. Existing research has also begun to measure who makes referrals, what services are provided, and who is involved. Barrier-related data from this study adds to the existing research base by sharing multiple providers' perspectives regarding barriers specific to bi-directional communication, especially among military-affiliated providers.

Limitations of the Study

One limitation of this research grew out of the use of specific military jargon. While we used language that aligned with the research literature and helped facilitate communication with military-connected providers, it may have been problematic in our communication with those who worked in civilian-school settings. Since during interviews, some difficulty delineating between types of military affiliations, familial connections, and/or current circumstances in relation to the military were noted, care was taken to add additional questions regarding these distinctions to phase two of data collection (the survey). Despite analyzing data from phase one interviews prior to developing the phase two survey, we did not fully anticipate the degree to which the use of non-military language and/or the further clarification of terms used might have been helpful in the diffusion or the further generalization of military jargon. In retrospect, while phase one interviews with providers seemed to go well in terms of being able to communicate, communication styles during military and civilian-school-based providers varied widely. Military-connected providers often coined terms to describe their jobs, used metaphors to describe situations or illustrate their points, and both used jargon and military-specific acronyms.

As the results show, interpretation and meaning of their experiences differ greatly by respondents' experience and affiliation to their schools, communities, or local military organizations. For this reason, it could be difficult to assume standardized definitions or comparisons among respondent interpretations. For these reasons, future research will benefit from both continuing to use general language that has emerged in recent years (e.g., military-connected children, military-connected school districts) and devise additional strategies to best determine how to talk about military culture in a way that connects—rather than potentially disconnects—with civilian populations.

Implications for Research

This study highlights the importance of incorporating perspectives from an array of providers who support military-connected children within civilian school settings. Specifically, findings offer perspectives regarding *why* further examination of barriers offers promise with regard to better understanding how to supporting military-connected children. Study regarding facilitators for military-connected children within civilian school settings is a more examined angle within research literature.

Findings from this study highlight differences between schools with less visible military-connected populations. Providers who work in settings where there are fewer military-connected children could face additional challenges in identifying, tracking, and supporting military-connected children who might have few peers or access to support from other military-connected children in their situation. While initiatives are more visible in military-connected school districts, establishing ways to promote and advance research on behalf military-connected children who attend civilian schools in less visible military-connected civilian school settings remains an important area of recent area research. Broader military-specific research—such as that connected by the Institute of Medicine and RAND—continues to examine how to support military-connected children and their families, both within school and community settings (e.g., Institute of Medicine, 2013; Tanielian et al., 2014).

Implications for Practice

As the substantial knowledge base needed to support military-connected youth who attend civilian schools continues to shift, finding ways to improve capacity to support these youth is important. This study has highlighted identification, competing demands, cultural competence, and bi-directional communication as four potential barriers that can challenge providers in their capacity to support military-connected children who attend school in civilian settings. Similar to quantitative findings from this study where respondents indicated that barriers would be easier to address with additional resources, implications for practice in this section will focus on ways to facilitate additional support through use of accessible resources.

Findings from this study suggest that disconnect is evident between current support structures available to military-connected children and potential capacity to support these youth vis-à-vis clinical practice interventions. Although providers could benefit from additional resources, such as ongoing specialized training, education, and supervision opportunities, existing constraints like those highlighted in this study could still remain barriers that challenge providers in their ability to provide clinical support to military-connected children within civilian-school settings. Given the reality of barriers, increased collaboration with military-connected and/or community partnerships could offer one viable way to address cultural and organizational disconnect experienced by supportive providers.

Conclusion

These findings offer rich perspectives regarding barriers that providers face that can challenge them in their capacity to support military-connected children within civilian school settings, yet further research is needed in order to further address these challenges. Greater empirical understanding of barriers can benefit all stakeholders in the pursuit of supporting these youth better.

This study addressed a key gap in the literature on military-connected children who attend civilian schools and provided cursory empirical data regarding barriers to supporting children who receive their education outside of military-supported settings. An ongoing and in-depth examination into factors that hinder or impede providers is of great importance. Continued dissemination of multiple providers' perspectives helps facilitate partnership, communication, and the improvement of services that support military-connected children.

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Active Duty to Civilian: Family Transition to Veteran Status

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Abstract

Not only do service members embrace a unique culture but their families do as well. As military members serve their country, their spouses and children assist in the service members' efforts as they must acclimate to the military lifestyle. When the service member separates from the military, the family also experiences disintegration from the lifestyle. This manuscript is intended to highlight military cultural implications for the service members as well as their family from active duty to becoming labeled a civilian. Additionally, effective strategies for counselors to utilize to support the entire family through the transition will be explored.

KEYWORDS: *military, military family, transition*

When a service member has a family, each member in the family not only experiences the military culture but also the various transitions due to the lifestyle in a context which is in accordance to their role. The military lifestyle not only affects the service member, but the whole family transitions as well. In the same way, when a service member separates from the military and transitions to civilian or Veteran status, the whole family experiences adjustments. The purpose of this manuscript is to explore

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implications of military culture, the process to civilian/Veteran status, and some effective strategies counselors may utilize to support the family with their transition.

The 2013 demographics: Profile of the military community report by the Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense: Military Community and Family Policy indicated there are: (a) fewer DoD Active Duty members (1,370,329) than their associated family members (1,878,092), (b) more than one-third of the members (37.8%) of the Active Duty force are married with children and 5.0 percent are single parents, (c) the largest group of children is between birth through 5 years old (495,156), (d) the next largest groups are between the ages of 6 and 11 years old (368,661), between 12 and 18 years old (262,550), and between 19 and 22 years old (51,605), and (e) there are 10,776 adult dependents ages 23 and older among the families of Active Duty members. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2015), there are 19.3 million Veterans, but this number does not reflect the number of family members.

Military Culture

Military culture is distinctive when compared to that of the civilian realm. Military culture has its own values, virtues, beliefs, customs, language, and laws (Exum, Coll, & Weiss, 2011; Gooddale, Abb, & Moyer, 2012). Service members are held to high standards in this culture comprised of discipline, order, loyalty and self-sacrifice for the mission, historic traditions, and group cohesion (Gooddale et al., 2012; Pryce, Pryce, & Shackelford, 2012); their families have similar guidelines of behavior as their conduct directly reflects on the service member (Gooddale et al., 2012).

Stages of Military Culture

While the United States Armed Forces encompasses all military culture, there are specific and unique subcultures to the different branches: Army (with the addition of the Army Reserve and Army National Guard), Navy (with the addition of the Navy Reserve), Marine Corps (with the addition of Marine Corps Reserve), Air Force (with the addition of the Air Force Reserve), and Coast Guard (Exum et al., 2011; Military.com, 2016b; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2014). Each of these branches has its own mission, core values, language, job titles, rank rules, and joining qualifications (Military. com, 2016g). However, prior to becoming a member, all branches require individuals to take the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB); scores permit individuals to enlist or become commissioned in the Armed Forces as well as provide information on qualification for military occupational specialties (Welsh, Kucinkas, & Curran, 1990). Upon successful completion of the ASVAB, service members have been subjected to several varying stages of military culture from boot camp (initial training) and/or a specialized officer training to retirement. These stages have impacted service members as well as their spouse and other family members, such as children.

Basic training. Each branch of the military has its own basic training, most commonly referred to as boot camp. Additional training at the completion of basic training is dependent upon the service member's Military Occupational Specialty (MOS; Military1.com, 2013). Each branch has different training requirements dependent upon whether the service member is joining as enlisted or commissioned as an officer. During this time, the service member attends training

while their families are still living at a place they call home without them. The training service members have little ability to contact their families in comparison to the freedom of contact when at their home (Military.com, 2016e).

Army. The following is in accordance with information found throughout the Army's recruiting website (U.S. Army, 2016b). For enlisted members of the Army, persons must be between the ages of 17 to 35 to join (U.S. Army, 2016g); initially, all recruits attend Basic Combat Training (BCT) at one of four locations in the United States; Fort Jackson in Columbia, South Carolina, Fort Benning in Columbus, Georgia, Fort Leonard Wood in St. Robert, Missouri, and Fort Sill in Lawton, Oklahoma (U.S. Army, 2016a). Fort Jackson is the main location training 50 percent of the Army's BCT load and 60 percent of women entering the Army each year (U.S. Army, 2016a). Army BCT is a 10 week, three phase course where recruits learn Army Heritage and the Seven Army Core Values, tactical training, Basic Rifle Marksmanship, and U.S. Weapons training while also undergoing field training exercises, obstacle courses, and physical fitness tests (U.S. Army, 2016i). Upon completion of BCT, recruits graduate to Soldiers and move on to Advanced Individual Training (AIT) where they learn the skills they need for their specific job in the Army (U.S. Army, 2016h).

The Army offers four paths for becoming an Officer. Army Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) allows students enrolled in colleges and universities to earn their degree and become commissioned officers (U.S. Army, 2016c). Through Direct Commission, professionals in fields like law, medicine, and religion can complete an officer training program and then become commissioned officers (U.S. Army, 2016d). Enlisted soldiers or civilians who already hold a four year degree can attend the 12 week Officer Candidate School at Fort Benning, Georgia, and upon completion, become Commissioned Officers (U.S. Army, 2016e). Finally, United States Military Academy at West Point allows students to earn their undergraduate degree and become commissioned officers (U.S. Army, 2016f).

Navy. The following is in accordance with information located throughout the Navy's recruiting website (Navy Recruiting Command, 2015a). For enlisted members of the Navy, persons must be between the ages of 17 and 34 to join (Navy Recruiting Command, 2016c). Recruit Training takes place at Recruit Training Command (RTC) in Great Lakes, Illinois (Navy Recruiting Command, 2016b). Recruit Training is a seven to nine week course that includes physical training, physical readiness tests, classroom instruction on military bearing, protocol, customs and courtesies, as well as Chemical, Biological, and Radiological (CBRD) Exercises, Basic Shipboard Firefighting, a swim test, and recitation of specific customs and traditions including the "Sailor's Creed" and the 11 General Orders of a Sentry (Navy Recruit Command, 2016b). After completion of Recruit Training, Sailors move on to A School for specialized training in their occupation (Navy Recruiting Command, 2016b). Some rating specialties also include C School training which is advanced training for one area within one's assigned job (i.e., if a sailor had a job as a mechanical engineer, it may be followed with C school to teach the sailor how to work on a specific complicated part within the engine on a specific submarine room; Navy Recruiting Command, 2016b).

In the Navy, there are three paths to becoming an Officer. If the individual already has a college degree, but has not served in any form of the military, he/she can attend Officer

Candidate School (OCS), a 12-week program at Naval Station Newport in Rhode Island that trains them to become a Commissioned Officer (Navy Recruiting Command, 2016f). The Naval Academy, located in Annapolis, Maryland, offers students the opportunity to earn their Bachelor's degree and train to become commissioned Officers at graduation (Navy Recruiting Command, 2016d). Additionally, Navy ROTC helps to pay for individual's degrees at a college or university with the commitment to enter the Navy as a commissioned Officer upon graduation (Navy Recruiting Command, 2016e).

Air Force. The following is in accordance with information located throughout the Air Force recruiting website (U.S. Air Force, 2016h). For enlisted members of the Air Force, persons must be between the ages of 17 and 39 to join (U.S. Air Force, 2016c), Basic Military Training (BMT) is held at Joint Base San Antonio Lackland in San Antonio, Texas (U.S. Air Force, 2016i). BMT consists of a seven and a half week program plus an additional week referred to as "Airman's Week" (U.S. Air Force, 2016b). BMT involves learning Air Force history, rank insignia, and weapons identification, antiterrorism training, defensive fighting positions and tactical movements, and participating in field exercises and physical training evaluations (U.S. Air Force, 2016a). Upon completion of BMT, Airmen attend technical school to train for their Air Force career (U.S. Air Force, 2016g).

In the Air Force, there are four different paths to becoming an Officer (U.S. Air Force, 2016e). If the individual already has a college degree, they begin Officer Training School, a nine and half week program located at Maxwell Air Force Base in Montgomery, Alabama (U.S. Air Force, 2016f). Potential Officers may also become an officer through being nominated to attend the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colorado where they earn their degree before becoming a commissioned officer (U.S. Air Force Academy, 2016). Enrolling in an Air Force ROTC program in a college or university allows students to prepare to become an Officer while earning their college degree and offers tuition assistance (U.S. Air Force, 2016e). Finally, enlisted Air Force members may transition to officer, but must meet specific requirements which include having at minimum a bachelor's degree and having their unit's commander recommendation and approval (U.S. Air Force, 2016d).

Marine Corps. The following is information was found throughout the Marine Corps recruiting website (U.S. Marine Corps, 2016i). Enlisted members of the Marine Corps must be between the ages of 17 and 29 to join (U.S. Marine Corps, 2016g), attend 12-week Recruit Training at either Marine Corps Recruit Depot Parris Island, South Carolina or Marine Corps Recruit Depot San Diego, California (U.S. Marine Corps, 2016f). All female recruits train at Parris Island (U.S. Marine Corps, 2016f). The 12 week program includes learning the Uniform Code of Military Justice, bayonet training, Marine Corps Martial Arts, rappelling training, marksmanship, obstacle courses, tactical scenario training, and the 54 hour long challenge of The Crucible (U.S. Marine Corps, 2016f). After graduation, Marines in an Infantry MOS attend Infantry Training Battalion and non-infantry attends the Combat Training Battalion (U.S. Marine Corps, 2016h).

Becoming a commissioned Officer in the Marine Corps has many paths. Platoon Leaders allow students enrolled in college to attend two 6-week or one 10-week training session(s) to become commissioned officers after college graduation (U.S. Marine Corps, 2016d). The Officer

Candidate Course (OCS) is a 10 week course in Quantico, Virginia, designed for college graduates who then become commissioned officers (U.S. Marine Corps, 2016c). Individuals can also attend a Marine Officer ROTC program while in a college or University to become a commissioned Officer upon graduation (U.S. Marine Corps, 2016b). There is also the option of becoming a commissioned officer by receiving nomination to attend the Naval Academy (U.S. Marine Corps, 2016e). Finally, the Enlisted Commissioning Program allows qualified Enlisted Marines with four year degrees to apply to Officer Candidate School where they can become a commissioned Officer (U.S. Marine Corps, 2016a).

Coast Guard. The following is information found throughout the Coast Guard's recruiting website (United States Coast Guard, 2015c). For enlisted members of the Coast Guard, who must be between the ages of 17 and 27 to join (United States Coast Guard, 2015d), recruits attend an eight week program at Sexton Hall in Cape May, New Jersey (United States Coast Guard, 2015a). During basic training, recruits learn military justice, customs, ethics, Coast Guard history, small arms training, seamanship, firefighting and damage control, and team-building training exercises as well as being challenged with physical training drills (United States Coast Guard, 2015a). After graduation from basic training, Aviation rates attend an A school program for additional training (United States Coast Guard, 2015a).

Prospective Officers in the Coast Guard can attend the 17 week Officer Candidate School in New London, Connecticut, then become a commissioned officer (United States Coast Guard, 2015b). Direct commission officer programs are available for individuals with specialized education in fields such as engineering, law, and aviation that involve completing three, four, or five week programs before becoming a commissioned officer (United States Coast Guard, 2015b).

National Guard. The following information is in accordance with the United States Army National Guard's official website (United States Army National Guards, 2016a). Enlisted members of the National Guard must be between the ages of 17 and 35 to join (United States Army National Guard, 2016d) and attend a 10 week program that is separated into the training phases: Red, White, and Blue (United States Army National Guard, 2016b). In the Red Phase the recruit learns the Army's history, traditions and teamwork, focuses on physical training, and learns about skills for having weaponry (United States Army National Guard, 2016b). In the White Phase they focus on combat skills, have more rigorous physical and weaponry training, and continue to learn Army values (United States Army National Guard, 2016b). In the Blue Phase leadership, self-discipline, and teamwork is emphasized (United States Army National Guard, 2016b). This phase also requires a variety of challenges and tests that the recruit must pass; graduation follows the passing of these. From there, recruits usually go on to Advanced Individual Training (AIT; United States Army National Guard, 2016b).

Prospective Officers have options for how they want to complete training: State Officer Candidate School (OCS; Traditional) which is weekends only for 16-18 months and location varies; National Guard Bureau Accelerated OCS which is eight weeks straight (seven days a week) in either a winter or summer session and location varies; or Federal OCS which is in Fort Benning, Georgia, for 14 weeks, offered several times a year (United States Army National Guard, 2016c).

Training implications for the military family. As the service member is away at initial training, they are away from their loved ones. The family experiences role transitions as the service member is unable to fulfill the responsibilities they once held while home (Exum et al., 2011; Martin & Sherman, 2012). At this point, the service member and family are new to the military life and may not know what to expect (Military.com, 2016c). During basic training, enlisted members have to earn the privilege to call home, therefore, there are gaps of time where families cannot stay in touch (Military.com, 2016e); many family members may be unprepared and upset by this realization. A significant amount of training is necessary for a career in the military, and this will not be the first time the service member must leave their family, and lose time and communication with them (Department of Defense, 2012; Martin & Sherman, 2012). When a family receives word of deployment, they begin the pre-deployment period which consists of additional training that often entails more time away from their family (Martin & Sherman, 2012; Pincus et al., 2001).

The military as a career choice affects time away from family. Service members are needed for a mission that is perceived as more important than the family; therefore, roles and routines constantly shift to account for the service member's whereabouts (e.g., changed work hours, periods of time away from home for training purposes, military social functions, etc.; Martin & Sherman, 2012). Just like deployments, training for deployments can require extended time away from home and the family unit creating estrangement (Department of Defense, 2012; Pincus et al., 2001); however, advancements in technology have made time away much easier to cope with as service members can continue to be involved through technology in their family's lives (e.g., video, phone, etc.; Martin & Sherman, 2012).

Training continuation post-basic training. Initially, there is a great deal of basic training in order to begin a career in any of the military branches. Service member training never fully ceases; culturally, training is considered ongoing and daily. There is always a mission in mind, and service members, regardless of their chosen branch, are training and staying prepared for that mission. For service members who strive for promotions and rank advancements in the military, additional specialty training is required (Military.com, 2016b). In the military the majority of personnel are enlisted, some are noncommissioned officers, and some are commissioned officers; these ranks are determined by additional training and education (Pryce et al., 2012). Both enlisted and officers have a commitment time (i.e., contract) to serve and make the decision to either be discharged (separate) or reenlist every couple of years (2016d).

While Serving: Military Culture Language

Military culture has its own language of phrases, acronyms, and slang, some of which are specific to each branch (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2014). Phrases that are often used include: *boots on the ground* which means that a service member is in a physical location (e.g., we have boots on the ground in the Middle East) and *tour of duty* which means the service members working hours (e.g., a soldier has a tour of duty from 7AM-7PM; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2014). Some acronyms that are commonly seen today are *DOD* (Department of Defense), *CO* (Commanding Officer), and *MOS* (Military Occupation Specialty, otherwise known as job title; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2014). An example of slang used in the military is the phrase *that is above my pay grade* which indicates that someone higher in the

chain of command would have the answer, or responsibility, for what is being discussed (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2014). Another slang term is *quarters*, which means home and or housing (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2014). The military base is referred to as the *installation*, which ranges from housing to facilitating military operations (Military.com, 2016a).

The military also uses the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) phonetic alphabet which consists of 26 code words assigned to the 26 letters in the English alphabet in alphabetical order. For example, when spelling out the word navy, a service member would say *November-Alfa-Victor-Yankee* (International Civil Aviation Organization [ICAO], 2001). A complete list, including pronunciation, is located in the ICAO's International Standards and Recommended Practices and Procedures for Air Navigation Services, Annex 10, Volume 2, Chapter 5 (2001). This current version was modified from previous versions ICAO and began implementation in 1956 by many international and national organizations (Pelsser, 2015). The purpose of this phonetic alphabet is to ensure that critical combinations of letters can be pronounced and understood by all that transmit and receive voice messages by radio or telephone, regardless of native language (Pelsser, 2015).

The specific culture impacts the service member as well as their family. The culture's unique language and values need to be understood by all to understand how their family system is operating and where their family service member is or is going.

Air Force. Members in the Air Force are referred to as *Airmen* (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2014). The Air Force's core values are Integrity First, Service Before Self, and Excellence in All We Do, their motto is Aim High...Fly-Fight-Win , and their mission is defend air, space, and cyberspace (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2014).

Army. Members in the Army are referred to as *Soldiers* (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2014). According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (2014), the Army has particular core values, motto, and mission. The Army's core values are Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless Service, Honor, Integrity, and Personal Courage. Their motto is This We'll Defend. The Army's mission is to defend freedom of land.

Marine Corps. Members of the Marine Corps are referred to as *Marines* (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2014).The Marine Corps' core values are the same as the Navy's: Honor, Courage, Commitment. Their motto is Always Faithful and their mission is to provide support to naval forces as well as help make advancements in tactics and equipment used by the armed forces, in addition to tasks appointed by the President (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2014).

Navy. Members of the Navy are referred to as *Sailors* (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2014). The Navy's core values are Honor, Courage, Commitment (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2014). Their motto is Always Courageous and their mission is to have naval forces who are combat ready to defend freedom of the seas (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2014).

Coast Guard. Members in the Coast Guard are referred to as *Coast Guardsmen* (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2014). The Coast Guard's core values are Honor, Respect, and Devotion to Duty (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2014). Their motto is Always Ready, and their mission is defending citizen's safety and national security (U.S. Department of Homeland Security, 2014).

National Guard. Members in the National Guard are referred to as *Guardsmen* (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2014). The National Guard's core values are Loyalty, Duty, Respect, Selfless-Service, Honor, Integrity, Personal Courage (Military. com, 2016f). Their motto is Always Ready, Always There (Military. com, 2016f). The National Guardsmen's mission is diverse to include helping with Home Land Security, Law Enforcement, and national disaster responses (Military. com, 2016f).

Military Culture Family Implications

Military families are very much a part of military culture. They are treated as an extension to the service member (Pryce et al., 2012) and are therefore held to high rules and standards (U.S. Army War College, 2011). It is important that the service member and military family work together to understand the hierarchy that exists in the military. Service members have a strict chain of command that authorizes important life matters (e.g., the service member's daily schedule, work duties, mandatory social functions, residing location). A service member's daily life is strategized, placing the mission first, while keeping military unit in mind (Exum et al., 2011; Weiss, Coll, & Metal, 2011).

Service members and their families must both put the mission before all other aspects in their life which leaves the family unit vulnerable to face a variety of difficult status quo (Pincus et al., 2001; Pryce et al., 2012). Military families move to where the service member is needed, and sacrifice time with them to non-traditional work and training schedules (Pryce et al., 2012). When the service member comes and goes, the spouse that is left behind may experience challenges maintaining child-care and keeping routines (DeVoe & Ross, 2012). In addition to moving and leaving their once-called home, military families lose their social support system and must work to rebuild them again with each move, which can make child-care especially overwhelming for the stay-behind spouse (DeVoe & Ross, 2012).

Deployments require extended time away from home and therefore cause frequent separations, reunions, and adjustments for both the service member and their family (Laser & Stephens, 2011; Lester & Flake, 2013; Pryce et al., 2012). Deployments can take place stateside for training missions or overseas for military operations. When a deployment is in order, a military family undergoes emotional stages; these stages coincide with the deployment cycle and are: pre-deployment, deployment, sustainment, re-deployment, and post-deployment (Pincus et al., 2001). Deployment is a different experience for each individual family member within the whole family system (Clever & Segal, 2013). Typically, relationships are challenged.

Service member. Service members have ultimately chosen a selfless career; some typical reasons they join the military are because of family tradition, military benefits, warrior identity, and for an escape (Hall, 2008). The service member will quickly feel a strong sense of pride in

their positions and likely identify themselves by their military occupational specialty (MOS) (Meyer, 2013). These specialties may require dual roles, for example, a Flight Surgeon is both an officer and medical doctor.

The military lifestyle is not easy, and it is even harder when additional people become involved in the service member's life. Military lifestyle may provide difficulties for a single service member to form and maintain relationships due to the unpredictability of their work schedule and moving requirements (Clever & Segal, 2013). Service members with significant others must make difficult decisions regarding breaking up or staying together, moving together, or doing long distance (Clever & Segal, 2013). The demands of the military and the impacts it has on a marriage indicate service members and their significant others should be aware of and understand the marriage lifestyle they will have when deciding to get married (Military One Source, 2016c). For service members who have spouses and children, they may often be caught between the needs of their units and the needs of their families, knowing the negative costs of how military service affects their children and spouses (Lester & Flake, 2013). Regularly, the service member is balancing their unpredictable career with their roles in the home. They may repeatedly miss family functions and milestones. When returning from deployments, the service members may have difficulties readjusting to their life and their family (Graf, Miller, Feist, & Freeman, 2011).

Service members experience a variety of behavior and emotional changes throughout their various transitions (Graf et al., 2011; Pincus et al., 2001; Pryce et al., 2012; Sayers, Farrow, Ross, & Oslin, 2009). Mental health issues are of concern as Graf et al. (2011) describes that most combat service members have symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), when returning home. Symptoms may lead to a variety of negative changes in the Veteran's feelings, thoughts, and behavior, and therefore impact marriages and parenting abilities (Graf et al., 2011). In counseling settings, combat Veterans experience a variety of issues surrounding control, integrity, ambiguity, and personal accountability when they reflect on their time in the service (Exum et al., 2011). Adversely, deployments may also reflect positively on the service member giving them a sense of accomplishment and patriotism. When service members reunite with their family they assimilate back into the family system with both their positive and negative service experiences; the service members' reintegration ability due to those experiences requires role transition for all family members.

Spouse. Military spouses are forced into the same serving commitment as their service member. Etiquette books have been created for spouses which address appropriate attire, behavior, and manners for themselves and their children, in order to help them acclimate into the military culture (U.S. Army War College, 2011). Once living the military lifestyle, spouses find themselves concerned with employment, parenting, child care, family and friendships, while also being faced with the demands of the military that require relocating, being separated from their service member spouse for extended periods of time, and fitting into the culture (Drummet, Coleman, & Cable, 2003; DeVoe & Ross, 2012).

Military spouses are also then typically faced with adjusting from a two-parent household, to a single-parent household due to deployments (Gladding, 2015). This may involve heightened stress in the house as they reestablish routines and roles; more often than not, social

support is limited during this transition time (Pincus et al., 2001). It is common for military couples to experience marital distress throughout the different stages of deployment (Pincus et al., 2000). During lengthy deployments, military spouses experience a range of fluctuating emotions (Davis, Ward, & Storm, 2011; Morse, 2006; Pincus et al., 2001; Vincenzes, Haddock, & Hickman, 2014). Both Morse (2006) and Pincus et al. (2001) found military spouses to have a range of positive and negative thoughts and feelings following the stages of deployment, with higher anxiety occurring during the post-deployment stage. During this time, service member spouses are working hard to fit the service member back into the lives and families they built without them in order to emotionally survive during the time of separation (Pincus et al., 2001; Morse, 2006). A spouse can dictate the service member's well-being in deployments by how well they can cope on the homefront (Pincus et al., 2001; Pittman, Kerpelman, & McFadyen, 2004) as well as influence how their children cope (Huebner, Mancini, Bowen, & Orthner, 2009).

A common concern for military couples is infidelity. The military lifestyle of separations and homecoming adjustments puts tension on military couples putting them at higher risk for infidelity (Snyder, Gasbarrini, Doss, & Scheider, 2011). During deployments it is crucial for couples to maintain trust and effective communication (Military One Source, 2016d); rumors can easily spread in the military community (Pincus et al., 2001).

Deployment is not entirely considered a negative experience for the stay at home spouse since they learn to adapt and gain a sense of independence (Military One Source, 2016b). Military spouses may have difficulty with employment due to frequent moving and the offerings of the area that they are required by the military to relocate to (Clever & Segal, 2013). However, most spouses enjoy having a career which provides them with an identity separate from being a military spouse (Military One Source, 2016b).

Children. The military lifestyle impacts military children's lives in various modalities: socially, emotionally, behaviorally, and academically. Military children find themselves frequently adjusting to new homes, schools, peers, communities, and family separations because of deployment (Clever & Segal, 2013). While deployments can prove to be a stressful time, they can also be positive for military children, teaching them the significance of civic duty and maturity (Pincus et al., 2001). Bello-Utu and DeSocio (2015) explain that military children's ability to cope to deployment is dependent on their age and level of development; all children respond differently (Pincus et al., 2001). Children's ability to cope is related to how well their stay-behind parent is with establishing new routines, handling parenting, and their distance relationship with the service member (Flake, Davis, Johnson, & Middleton, 2009).

During deployments, young children show irritable moods and sometimes aggression, as they cope to understand the loss of their parent and the changes occurring at home (Pincus et al., 2001). Some children detach from the service member parent and do not consider them a parental figure or a person of importance in their life. When a parent returns, children may not even recognize their parent (DeVoe & Ross, 2012). Forming attachments with the service member is compromised and therefore the service member and child may have difficulties during reunions (Creech, Hadley, & Borsari, 2014). Depending on age, the children may not understand the entire deployment and/or reunification process (DeVoe & Ross, 2012). Young

children depend on older siblings and their stay-behind parent to comfort them during this time (Clever & Segal, 2013). Adversely, child maltreatment may also be a cause for concern during deployment due to the extra stress placed on the stay-behind parent (Creech et al., 2014).

Older children may worry about their deployed parent in terms of how safe they are (Bello-Utu & DeSocio, 2015). Adolescents may show aggressive and depressive moods as they cope to understand deployments (Pincus et al., 2001). During their adolescent years, they are able to understand the idea of military deployment and the potential danger involved (Lester & Flake, 2013). Teenagers in a military family during deployments may show irritable and aggressive behavior, as well as changes in interest of and performance in school (Chandra et al., 2010; Engel, Gallagher, & Lyle, 2010; Lyle, 2006; Pincus et al., 2001). Some adolescents expected to take on more responsibilities to help out at home while their service member parent is gone (e.g., babysitting and emotionally supporting their stay-behind parent; Clever & Segal, 2013). Teenagers may resent the service member for missing out on their life while being gone (Lester & Flake, 2013).

Adolescents who have a parent in the military have been found to have more psychosocial difficulties and increased physical health complaints (Creech et al., 2014). As a consequence of dealing with the stressors of deployment, adolescents and teenagers are at higher risk for substance use/abuse and suicidal ideation and both should be considered and monitored for (Bello-Utu & DeSocio, 2015; Creech et al., 2014).

A common concern for all ages of children and the service member is rebuilding a parenting relationship (DeVoe & Ross, 2012; Martin & Sherman, 2012). The stay-behind spouse has been appointed spokesperson for parenting issues for both them and the service member who is deployed (e.g., disciplining the children when they misbehave; Military One Source, 2016e). Transitioning the service member back into the role of taking care of the children can be a difficult process for all involved. The norms only are norms for specific durations of time and must be modified when their family reunites and separates for various lengths of time.

Family. There are times the returning service members may report feeling they are guests in their home because their opinions may not be as welcomed as they once were (Laser & Stephens, 2011). The reunification program is important for children because if the child is younger, than he/she may not remember the returning member. The child also may have loyalty to the adult that stayed behind caring for them, refusing the returning parent. This process may take several months to reestablish a bond with the returning service member. This program also gives the service member support to help not take the children's behavior personally (Laser & Stephens, 2011).

When the couple reunites, the emotional connection does not appear for some time in most cases (Laser & Stephens, 2011). The service member may struggle with feeling comfortable with their spouse and may feel more at ease with their unit members. This may lead to the spouse having resentments towards the service member and feel the service member is failing to respond to their family and the spouse feels a sense of abandonment, is frustrated, and angry (Laser & Stephens, 2011). The reunification program will assist the couple in mending these feelings of disconnect. Snyder and Monson (2012) recommend a 10 week family

intervention program because it encompasses three phases which support resiliency and re-identifying as a family unit along with being provided skills to help them attain a newly organized family structure: (a) psychoeducation, (b) conflict management, and (c) communication skills.

Phase one: Psychoeducation. During session one, the family covers the rationale and goals for the program. Session two and three provide the family members the opportunity to begin linking the trauma and the relationship problems, along with any common themes (i.e., deployments).

Phase two: Conflict management. During session 4, each family member practices interviewing one another about what they have learned about their own current ways of expressing anger and other emotions. Session five generates detailed timeout plans to use during conflict situations, along with developing the rules and guidelines of how to effectively use the time-outs.

Phase three: Communication skills. Session six emphasizes active listening skills as the foundation to good communication skills and an essential for deescalating conflicts. During session seven, the family members learn how to give assertive messages. Session eight is intended to explore emotions which are the underlying factors for anger since many service members struggle with expressing feelings. Session nine highlights ineffective communication strategies and session ten focuses on the gains experienced from the counseling experience and a creation of a relapse prevention plan. The family identifies common goals and strategies they want to commit to.

Separation from the Military

According to United States Code 38 (38 U.S. Code § 101), a veteran is defined as a person who served in the active military, naval, or air service, and who was discharged or released therefrom under conditions other than dishonorable. There are a number of ways one can discharge from the military: (a) honorable, (b) general discharge under honorable conditions, (c) other than honorable, (d) bad conduct discharge, (e) dishonorable discharge, and (f) entry-level discharge. Honorable discharges mean that the service member met all or most of the required elements in their contract and can receive most benefits later through the Veteran's Affairs (VA). Those who receive dishonorable discharges are not eligible for benefits. Additionally, entry-level discharge (when the service member was discharged within the first 180 days of service due to the service member not being a fit with the military lifestyle) will not receive benefits either (Lawyers.com, 2016).

The service member's ability to retire is dependent upon a variety of factors (e.g., contract, age, years of service, rank; RAND Corporation, 2011). Those who decide to retire are entitled to a variety of benefits through the VA. Some of these benefits include medical and dental care, life insurance, retirement compensation, and education benefits (Military One Source, 2016f). Many service members must make the difficult transition back into the civilian world through civilian careers, in attending higher education, or relocate to a permanent location (Military One Source, 2016f). In transitioning to higher education, the Veteran can have the

majority of his/her education covered by the Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944, commonly known as the GI Bill (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013).

Making the decision to separate or retire and understanding the implications can be a confusing and timely process. It is important for veterans to receive outside help to feel supported and empowered to enter the civilian world (Military One Source, 2016f). Family members should also consult these services since they are just as impacted by retirement. When the service member's commitment time has been met, the decision to retire or reenlist affects the entire family. This decision will decide if they will continue to live the military lifestyle for the next few years or begin the civilian way of life.

Transition from Active to Veteran Status

When service members separate from active duty, they have to make changes in almost all aspects of their life; the way they think, talk, act, believe, and even the way they interact with other people (Gaither, 2014). This drastic change can build anxiety and fear of what the service member is going to do for work. Will they receive a pay cut or an increase in salary? Depending on the rank of the members leaving the service this can affect the members' and their family's standard of living standards. The service member has been in a lifestyle of camaraderie, respect, rules and order. What will happen when that is gone? How will the service member act towards others who don't understand the tight bond that service members have (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016)? Leaving what is known as norm and trying to navigate a new VA system might create distresses in finding needed services. The culture shock will have to be dealt with for the entire family (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016).

The spouse and children also deal with the change of life and structure. Although the service members' family members are not in the service themselves, the structures they live in are similar. The lifestyle and working environment still have a level of rigidity that the civilian world does not. If the spouse is working on base most likely he/she will have a military structure within that workforce. A change in the family is happening again and the spouse has to adapt as well. The spouse and children will be leaving friends and support systems and starting over again outside of the current military lifestyle. With the change of the service member's status in the service the spouse and children are expected to adjust to the new environment and how the service member will react to the change as well (Snyder & Monson, 2012).

Transition from Active to Veteran Status Case Study Example

Linnea is a 31 year old female. She served in the United States Navy for 6 and ½ years after enlisting as an Aviation Electrician's Mate in 2006. She spent the majority of her time stationed in Virginia. Linnea married a Navy Veteran, who she married before beginning active duty service, had one-step daughter and a biological daughter that was born while on active duty. She was honorably discharged in 2012 upon completion of her contractual obligation.

Final days classified as active duty: Implications for the family. During her final days on active duty, she spent most of her time completing paperwork, attending medical evaluations, and participating in a mandatory transition assistance class until she utilized her terminal leave. Linnea described this process as being very different from some of her peers who had separated

from the military prior to her. She contributed the differences to command policy for the service member's unit, medical appointment wait times, and the amount of terminal leave that was saved. Linnea indicated commands want the service member's checkout process to be completed ahead of time to ensure there is no delay in their separation from the military.

Before Linnea was able to begin her 30 days of terminal leave, all of her paperwork for separation had to be completed. She spent the majority of her time attending appointments at the installation's medical and dental clinics as well as at the Personnel Support Detachment office. Linnea shared that the Personnel Support Detachment handled her service record and had to prepare the appropriate documentation before she could be separated from active duty and identified as a Veteran. On days that she didn't have to be at one of those places, she was expected to be at her Division doing her regular job as well as any additional duties that were required of her. Additionally, Linnea trained her replacements for the programs she had been managing in the Division and made sure there was a proper pass down on everything within the work center for a smooth transition to the next supervisor. Linnea shared this left her little time for accomplishing important tasks which would prepare her to enter the civilian world. She had little time to look for an apartment off of the installation, pack all of her and her family's belongings, or plan the logistics for the move. The majority of those tasks had to be done on the weekend, assuming the Division wasn't working overtime, or by her husband.

At the time of her service separation, her husband, a Navy Veteran, student, and stay-at-home dad, mostly prepared for the family's move. He had found the university he wanted to attend to complete his bachelor's degree post separation from the military, which determined where they as a family would be moving. He was also mostly responsible for beginning the packing process and he watched their youngest daughter during the day. Linnea shared that her husband felt overwhelmed by the responsibility that was put on him for the move. Linnea disclosed she was unable to assist with these matters because her time was inundated with the separation process.

When Linnea was in the process of separating from the Navy, her two daughters were worried about leaving their friends. Her step-daughter was in the 4th grade at the time, and had been in the same school with her friends since she started kindergarten. She was upset she would be leaving her friends and starting school in a new town where she didn't know anyone. Linnea's younger daughter was only 4 at the time. She was sad to be leaving a couple of her friends, but since she spent most of her time at home with her Dad, Linnea's husband, she wasn't too concerned. However, their identity of being part of a military community would cease to exist.

Linnea described her final days in the Navy as stressful and bittersweet. Linnea felt there was a lot to accomplish prior to beginning her leave on time, which needed to be used prior to final separation from the Navy. She had saved 30 days of terminal leave, which were used to move the family to their new home and spend quality vacation time with family they had been living far away from during her time active duty.

While on active duty, Linnea disclosed she was able to complete her Bachelor's degree using the Navy's Tuition Assistance Program and had earned her GI Bill to further her education after separation. She discussed seeing amazing places, meeting people that she formed lifelong

friendships with, and learned a lot about herself and what she was capable of accomplishing. However, she was ultimately glad to be moving on to a new chapter of her life with her family.

Veteran status: Implication for the family. Linnea described having *Veteran status* as different for each member of her family. For Linnea, it took a while to get used to being a *civilian* and not having to put on a uniform and be guided by a strict schedule every day. Linnea shared that she rarely gets recognized as a Veteran and contributes this to being a female. When she wears her Navy hoodie out in public, she is often asked, “How long was your husband in the Navy?” Linnea said that when this occurs she feels devalued and politely responds, “4 years, but I was in for 6 and a half.” Linnea shared she usually receives an apology and a “Thank you for your service,” but the damage has already been done to her. Linnea indicated she didn’t feel that women in the military get the recognition they deserve, and thinks it’s even worse once you become a Veteran.

Linnea shared that she has been ridiculed for being a Veteran as well. She discussed times when she and her husband have utilized Veteran discounts and how they have been scoffed for that. She was told that she shouldn’t feel so entitled to discounts just because they were in the military. Linnea says because of those instances, unless the discount is advertised, they no longer inquire about a discount in order to avoid a potential confrontation. Linnea disclosed how she never really thought of this component because while on active duty, often times in her uniform, was given the discount without asking. Linnea indicated it may have been given to her automatically because they lived in a military town. She knew most places offered it so she didn’t mind asking. Linnea said the separation left her feeling disconnected to her identity and ways of life.

Linnea shared that even though her husband was already technically a Veteran, his transition to Veteran status really occurred when she became a Veteran. Before her separation there was someone still in the household who was participating in the active military daily lifestyle. They also still lived in military housing and in a military town, so he didn’t really feel like a civilian.

Linnea shared that her step-daughter was nervous when she started her new school since many of the kids in her class had been in the same class since Kindergarten. Linnea’s daughter shared she felt like an outsider; while at the school on base, there were always new students coming in and students leaving. She found herself being bullied for being the new girl as well as for being in gifted enrichment classes; ridiculed for not being worthy.

Her youngest daughter tries to embrace the life they once had; she is proud of her parents’ service. She tells her friends and her teachers that her mom and dad were in the Navy and fixed airplanes any time it is relevant. She continues to make them cards for Veteran’s Day every year and has said she wants to be in the Navy when she grows up.

Active to Civilian/Veteran Status: Effective Counselor Support for Whole Family Transitional Effort Needs

Being in the military does not only affect the service member but the whole family. Each family member would benefit from some form of support through the trying times of the service member's contract as well as transitioning into civilian/Veteran status. Each person's resiliency ability will impact the support needed by each family member. When the service member transitions from active to civilian/Veteran status, the entire family transitions as well. Therefore, explorations of support needed for effective transition for the service member, spouse, children, and the family as a whole is an important consideration.

Service Member

As a service member prepares to transition from military to civilian lifestyle, numerous challenges may be faced. According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (2015), common challenges faced by service members readjusting to the civilian lifestyle are the following: (a) relating to people who don't understand military personnel, (b) reconnecting with family, (c) reestablishing roles within their family, (d) joining or creating a social community which is nonmilitary connected, (e) entering the civilian workforce, (f) creating structure within an environment which has more ambiguity, (g) adjusting to being able to choose and providing basic needs while often in the military there was little choice afforded and were provided, (h) adjusting to pace of life and work, (i) establishing benefits as well as how and where to obtain services, and (j) transitioning to an individualistic culture from a previous teamwork approach. Veterans may experience culture shock on various levels as they will feel disoriented, uncomfortable with their status change, and embark upon a journey to rediscover new meaning in their life as well as formulate a new identity for themselves (Coll, Weiss, & Yarvis, 2011). Seeking assistance of mental health services is viewed as a weakness within the military culture (Danish & Antonides, 2009); therefore, in order to address these particular needs, the first step is to provide the service member with an opportunity to build rapport and establish trust with a helping professional (Myers, 2013). Counselors will be able to build rapport with this client population if they are open to learning about military culture (Danish & Antonides, 2009).

When the service member works with a professional counselor in navigating the transition experience, the ethical responsibility of the counselor is to maintain awareness and sensitivity towards the cultural experiences of the client and their worldviews (American Counseling Association [ACA], 2014, B.1.a.). A counselor who stresses this aspect within the counseling relationship can develop a counselor-client relationship of trust which will allow them to be more open to and invested in the therapeutic process (Myers, 2013). Additionally, when the counselor does not have any previous military connection, this aspect will be increasingly important to stress as the client will become empowered (Myers, 2013) to share their story and be receptive to someone who sees value in their cultural context and honors, as well as, embraces understanding their social and cultural context (ACA, 2014, Preamble.2).

When working with service members, professional counselors who are aware of their clients' inner character will be open to exploring the clients' courage when faced with hardship or danger, known as *grit* (Myers, 2013). For Soldiers, the idea of *grit* is known to have kept them

alive while in theatre, and their motivation or inspiration to get them to complete their mission or for others to get them home (Myers, 2013). Additionally, the idea of courage is a foundational aspect to the everyday expectations for service members (Pryce, Pryce, & Shackelford, 2012). Service members transitioning to Veteran status may utilize the skill of using their grit to get through their counseling progress. Therefore, a counselor who is able to embrace and learn about the clients' culture from their perspective may be able to gain the trust of the client which is needed for counseling to be effective (Sharf, 2012).

When a counselor embraces the clients' worldview, spirituality is an appropriate consideration as it may act as a support network (ACA, 2014, A.1.a.d.). It is possible that the Veteran may decide to explore his/her faith/spirituality while in counseling. Spirituality tends to be intertwined when working with combat Veterans (Myers, 2013). Military One Source (2016a) indicates an installation's chaplain may be an appropriate resource to help the Veteran with this aspect on a deeper level. However, the counselor must also be aware that Veterans often struggle with internal conflicts regarding their faith in God, the government, or both (Coll et al., 2011). Therefore, the most effective approach the counselor should take to support the Veteran will be to understand the client's personal perspective.

Another effective approach to working with service members transitioning to the civilian world would be through advocacy efforts. Ways of advocating for them would be communicating their treatment goals and their progress with their other providers; along with linking them to community resources (Myers, 2013). This not only links to their culture of teamwork but also allows the client to see support for them, which is another important characteristic of military culture.

Spouse

When a person becomes a military spouse, he/she ultimately marry the military as well (Hightower & Scherer, 2007). Spouses of service members have an endless amount of roles, adjust roles often, play dual parent roles, and take on more responsibilities during deployment and are ultimately considered to be the "rock that holds a military family together" (Eubanks, 2013, p. 98). The spouses are used to acting in the director role as they need to redirect the family roles with each transition. When the family becomes Veteran/civilian status, reintegrating the service member into a new role which works with the previously assigned roles of the families may be a difficult experience.

When the family was active duty, Fleet and Family Support Centers located on installations provided support to helping them become resilient in their military lifestyle (Eubanks, 2013). The Family Readiness Group (FRG) provided social support and networking for the spouse; generally, for spousal support when deployments occur (Pryce, Pryce, & Shackelford, 2012). These resources are lost when transitioning to the civilian lifestyle. Spouses may benefit in receiving support from a professional counselor concerning how to become involved in social engagements which are non-military related. Often throughout their active duty time, the spouses have had the ability to reinvent themselves with each move (Hightower & Scherer, 2007). However, they had support from the military community in reinvention. The

civilian lifestyle requires the spouse to reinvent themselves again while having to identify a new support system.

Military spouses often struggle with trying to create an identity for themselves separate from being the service member's significant other; therefore, this struggle often encourages the spouses to find a fulfilling job at each new place to be called home (Hightower & Scherer, 2007). There are 711,375 active duty spouses (Office of the President of the United States, 2011, p. 16); in which 93% of the military spouses are female (Office of the President of the United States, 2011, p. 16). Seventy-seven percent (77%) of military spouses reported they wanted or needed to work (Office of the President of the United States, 2011, p. 16). In 2008, 84% of the spouses had some college, 25% held a bachelor's degree, and 10% held advance degree (Office of the President of the United States, 2011, p. 16). These statistics indicate a spouse's need for career support should be explored on an individual basis. Circumstances in their lives may have been altered by the separating of ways from the military, such as relocation or needing more financial stability. Veteran spouses may benefit from becoming empowered to self-create a new identity as a civilian and secure a civilian support system. Additionally, the professional counselor might educate the spouse on available support systems such as the non-profit agencies, Family of a Vet (2016), and the Real Warriors Campaign (2016).

Children

A recent study in 2010, indicated there was a 11% increase in outpatient visits for behavioral health issues among military children between the ages of 3-8 years old; this percentage increased to 18% with behavioral disorders and 19% with stress disorders while having a parent deployed (Office of the President of the United States, 2011, p. 7). Veterans' children tend to struggle with their emotions; having feelings of loss, anxiety, and anger, they struggle with academics, and their behaviors (Waliski, Kirchner, Shue, & Bokony, 2012, p. 349). However, research shows that children experience stress but have the ability to be resilient (Office of the President of the United States, 2011).

A Model for Positive Youth Development, known as The Seven C's, are known to foster children resiliency: (a) competence, (b) confidence, (c) connection, (d) character, (e) contribution, (f) coping skills, and (g) control (Ginsburg & Jablow, 2011). Fostering resiliency is effective with the support of adults, such as parents. There is an estimated two million children that have been separated from a parent during the Operations Enduring Freedom (OEF), Iraqi Freedom (OIF), and New Dawn (OND), totaling three million Soldiers during this time (Waliski et al., 2012, p. 348). Due to the extra stressors military children face, it is important for military children to have access to an adult social support system.

According to Office of the President of the United States (2011), military service children shared that they felt that they are not understood by both classmates and teachers. When in the active military lifestyle, children move frequently and are often unable to develop long-standing relationships with their peers and/or community (Easterbrooks, Ginsburg, & Lerner, 2013). Now that these children will be transitioning to a civilian lifestyle, being able to develop positive peer relationships and connections is vital to their well-being. Working with a professional counselor might ease their transition.

The DOD started the partnership with the nation's public schools, demonstrating that schools and military personnel must work together in advancing support programs and teacher training material, so supports can meet the exceptional needs of our military families (Waliski et al., 2012, p. 349). One support system would be introducing the Military and Family Life Counselor to help aid with the transition. This is a free service offered by the DOD (Mental Health Network Government Services [MHNGS], 2016). In addition, this counselor can also be instrumental in networking the children with school counselors to become acclimated in their new school and actively participate in practicing resiliency acquired skills. Children indicated schools have become a primary safe place for them when their home lives are becoming more stressful (Waliski et al., 2012, p. 349). Children discuss concerns about separation from a parent, financial matters, fears of loss, and change in a parent's behavior when returning from deployment with their school counselors (Waliski et al., 2012, p. 352).

Family as a Whole

There are various types of families in the military such as nuclear, blended, reconstituted, single, culturally diverse, and dual-career families (Pryce, Pryce, & Shackelford, 2012, p. 122). All families have the consistent struggle to meet the needs of the family, the demands of the mission, and reintegration after their mission was concluded. Military families might benefit from participating in psychoeducational groups and learning how to manage conflict, effectively communicate, and implement prevention skills (Snyder & Monson, 2012). Other interventions or support that might be available to the military families could be different reunification programs; such as family, children, and couple (Laser & Stephens, 2011). These programs allow the family to communicate and reconnect. At times it is difficult for the service member and the family to adjust back to the family roles they had before the deployment, after the deployment, and without military connection.

Summary

Military culture is a unique subculture. The service member, spouse, and children each have unique experiences within the subculture. Each family member acts in varying roles throughout their military lifestyle as well as their transition to becoming a civilian. Counselors should understand the cultural implications for the service member, spouse, children, and family as a whole (ACA, 2014, A.2.c.; B.1.a.) in order to effectively provide such clients with appropriate interventions (C.7.). This is also true when counselors work with Veteran families. Specific evidence-based treatments for the client(s)' population (ACA, 2014, C.7.a.) should ethically be considered by counselors when counselors work with any clients. Therefore, counselors gaining an understanding of the uniqueness of the military lifestyle for the whole family, as well as the experiences when transitioning to becoming a civilian, are imperative in order to provide effective treatment for this population.

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From Combat to the Classroom: Understanding and Addressing Veteran Transition

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Abstract

Student Veterans are returning to higher education institutions in increasing numbers with the advent of the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill. The campus community needs more information on the needs of enrolling Veterans. The article discusses a qualitative research study of student Veterans and their perceptions of their engagement in transition from the military to the classroom at a public university. The results indicated three overarching themes related to transition included: maturity, camaraderie, and college experiences.

Keywords: Veterans, transition, counseling

Since the advent of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act (G.I. Bill) in 1944, education has been a post service reality for many Veterans. Since introducing the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill, the number of beneficiaries that are utilizing their Post-9/11 benefits has risen from 555,329 in 2011 to 790,507 in 2015 (Veterans Benefits Administration, 2016). However, the 790,507 is less than half of the over 2.9 million Veterans who are utilizing any part of their Post-9/11 G.I. Bill Veteran Administration benefits, a number which is expected to rise to 3.6 million in 2019

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(National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2015). However, the transition back to college has not always been easy or smooth for Veterans pursuing postsecondary education. Alarming, Briggs (2012) and Wood (2012) report that an estimated 88% of student Veterans drop out during their first year in college. To highlight the need for mental health and transition support for Veterans, in the 2012-2013 academic school year, only 22% of 2-year and 4-year degree-granting institutions offer mental health counseling services that are specifically for military service members or Veterans (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014).

For this large and growing number of Veterans returning to colleges across the nation, one of area of concern is managing service-connected injuries (Radford, 2010). In fact, Cook and Kim (2009) report that nearly 18% of those service members returning from “Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom suffered or are currently suffering from psychological problems such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and depression” (p. 22-23). Specifically related to student Veterans, Rudd, Goulding, and Bryan (2011) determined that 35%, of the 628 student Veteran participant sample, experienced severe anxiety, 24% experienced severe depression, and 46% experienced significant symptoms of PTSD. More concerning was the 46% of student Veterans who were thinking about suicide. From those, 20 % of them had a plan, 7.7% had made an attempt, and 3.8% believed that suicide was likely or very likely. Given the increase in the number of Veterans and service members returning to university and college, especially those with mental health issues, it is imperative that university counselors and administrators understand student Veteran cultural issues in order to provide the most effective services to support their success.

Student Veterans

In order to better understand the population, there are some important characteristics of student Veterans to be considered. Post 9/11 Veterans are the youngest cohort being served by the Department of Veterans Affairs (National Center of Veteran Analysis and Statistics, 2015). Despite the 25% increase in the utilization of the G.I. Bill (Student Veterans of America, n.d.), Veterans only represent 4% of all students enrolled in post-secondary education (Radford, 2010). A number that is expected rise according to the National Center of Veteran Analysis and Statistics. Student Veterans also make up less than 25% of the entire Veteran population over the age of 25 (U.S. Census, 2009). The median age for the Post 9/11 population, the focus of this study, is 33 for men and 32 for women. Interestingly, and on trend with the general student population, women Veterans are more widely represented in the college Veteran population at 27%, whereas, women are only represented at 14% within the general military population (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2011, National Center of Veteran Analysis and Statistics, 2015).

Transition Issues of Student Veterans

The increasing number of Veterans who are utilizing their G.I. Bill has brought in a multitude of Veterans to college campuses across the nation (Brown & Gross, 2011; O’Herrin, 2011). When Veterans return they are then considered a subgroup of nontraditional students (Brown & Gross, 2011; Cook & Kim, 2009; Ford, Northrup & Wiley, 2009; O’Herrin, 2011; Persky & Oliver, 2011; Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). Thus with the increased number and unique

culture, student Veterans encounter a vast array of transition issues as they arrive on the college campus.

Rumann and Hamrick (2009) found in their study of student Veterans that issues range from role incongruities, maturity issues, relationships, and identity renegotiation. Role incongruities consisted of “military and academic life, the incompatibilities of lingering stress and anxiety with returning to college, and enacting aspects of the student role during deployment and aspects of the military role during college” (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010, p. 440). Maturity was highlighted as a strength for all of the participants in the Rumann and Hamrick (2010) study as each participant said that “they were more motivated to complete their degrees” (p. 442). In terms of relationships, additional results from the same Rumann and Hamrick (2010) study found that previous relationships were difficult to maintain after student Veterans returned from deployments because their college friends stayed in school and were nearer to graduation.

In addition to maintaining relationships, student Veterans experienced difficulty initiating new relationships because of the emotional and social maturity that they had developed while being deployed (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). Some Veterans feel a sense of isolation because they are only able to share their experiences with a small number of people on campus who understand their deployments and military experiences (Brown & Gross, 2011; DiRamio, Ackerman, & Garza-Mitchell, 2008; Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). Brown and Gross (2011) highlighted that student Veterans are “challenged by the adjustment in moving from a command and control environment to the openness of a college campus” (p. 46). Because of this, many student Veterans may feel a sense of frustration because of the unknown bureaucracy of a university environment (DiRamio et al., 2008; O’Herrin, 2011). O’Herrin (2011) pointed out that the military is a complex structure, but servicemembers are trained from the beginning of their careers to navigate that system.

College Resources for Student Veterans

Recent research (Brown & Gross, 2011; Cook & Kim, 2009; Ford et al., 2009; Livingston, 2010; O’Herrin, 2011; Persky & Oliver, 2011; Rumann & Hamrick, 2009; Van Dusen, 2011) describes the need for colleges and universities to be leaders in raising awareness of the needs of student Veterans as a first step in developing effective support services. Hassan, Jackson, Lindsay, McCabe, and Sanders (2010) suggested that student Veterans deserve to be on a campus where role models, accessible advisors, and engaged faculty and staff are available and knowledgeable to further the student Veterans capacity for an “occupational future, with skills and abilities related to teamwork, sacrifice, courage, perseverance, and future mindedness” (p. 31). Military savvy was described as the institution’s understanding of the military culture. Veterans affairs staff members, especially trained counselors (Persky & Oliver, 2011), serve a critical role in helping Veterans in their transition back to college, but with the increasing number of Veterans, from the Post-9/11 G.I. Bill, the counselors may become overextended and lose their ability to provide adequate support to student Veterans (Persky & Oliver, 2011; Rumann & Hamrick, 2009). Because of this, Rumann and Hamrick (2009) suggested:

Establishing proactive and working partnerships to help create a more seamless environment for students who need to successfully navigate multiple agencies, organizations, and bureaucracies to help create or find supportive individuals and

environments to facilitate the transitions of student veterans. (p. 32)

DiRamio et al. (2008) examined the transition issues that affected Veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts. Participants consisted of 25 student Veterans who had served in Iraq or Afghanistan from 2003 to 2007. The Schlossberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) and Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989) “Moving In, Moving Through, and Moving Out” model was used as the framework for DiRamio et al. (2008) to understand how student Veterans transitioned in the military and also in college. When Veterans transitioned to college, the results of the study indicated the following issues present: “connecting with peers, blending in, faculty, the campus veterans’ office, finances, students with disability, and mental health and PTSD” (p. 80). DiRamio et al. (2008) explained how each stage affected the student Veteran through personal accounts and then described the implications for student affairs administrators. Namely, the implementation of a personalized holistic approach by administrators would aid Veterans in their transition. Financial aid, counseling, student organization, disabilities offices, academic advising, faculty, and institutional research were student affairs offices that were the most utilized by Veterans where a designated and trained liaison could be the point of contact for the Veteran. Training could be provided to the entire campus that encouraged mentors to facilitate a Veteran-friendly atmosphere.

In addition to DiRamio et al. (2008), Cook and Kim (2009) also reported on how universities and colleges were structuring the various services they offered to determine the level of preparedness of their institution to educating the student Veteran. Of those surveyed, more than half of the institutions had some type of Veterans’ program (Cook & Kim, 2009). Most of the programs for student Veterans were housed in public universities and community colleges versus private and for-profit institutions. Additionally, Cook and Kim (2009) found that student Veterans were concerned with what programs and services were available, the perception flexibility of the campus program with respect to military students, the uncertainty of how their military courses would translate to college courses, and the lack of support when navigating their G.I. Bill educational benefits.

The increase in student Veterans returning to college post combat creates a unique challenge and opportunity for Institution of Higher Education (IHE). The complex needs of student Veterans are handled by a variety of offices all of whom need to be educated in the transition challenges faced by student Veterans. This study provides information to aid the IHE in creating an environment that is prepared to help service members make a smooth transition from the military to the university. The topic of Post 9/11 Veterans attending IHE is in an infancy stage; therefore, there were three primary purposes of this study. First, the study builds a better understanding of student Veteran transition into university life. Second, the purpose of this study was to increase the knowledge base of enrolling student Veterans in the university setting. Finally, the study sought to assist counselors and university personnel in their instruction, support, and attention toward student Veterans. The purpose of this study was investigated through one overarching research question: What transition issues do student Veterans encounter as they either enter or re-enroll in IHE?

Methods

Qualitative research methods were utilized to gain a personal understanding of the participants' perceptions of their transitions to college to gain a rich description of their experiences. Grounded research directed the methodological basis for the research since it dictates a constant comparative method when analyzing data (Charmaz, 2002). Thus, in grounded theory the research generates conceptual categories from the evidence, and then that evidence supports the concept generated (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). To illustrate the concept and develop a theory, the emphasis is on the data, and each theme and interpretation originates directly from the data. The use of a constant comparative method is used consistently throughout grounded theory research in different forms (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Context and Participants

The study was conducted at a large four-year public institution in the Southwestern United States. The student Veteran population at the research institution totaled 979 students identified through their use of Veteran educational benefits. Those utilizing Veteran benefits included Veterans and their dependents. Eligibility for participation was determined by the following criteria: attending the university where the research study was being conducted, enrolled as a full-time student at the time of data collection, self-identified as a Veteran, and deployed during the Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) or Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) conflicts. After receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval from the institution, student Veterans were recruited through placing flyers in the Military and Veteran Program Office and an email to the Military and Veteran Program Office listserv, and an email to the entire student body. Eleven student Veterans replied to the call for participants.

Participants included 11 student Veterans currently attending the university. The specific demographics varied among the participants. Because this study focused mainly on those student Veterans deployed during the OIF/OEF conflicts, the age range was between 27 and 33. Nine of the participants were men and the other two participants were female. All of the participants identified themselves as Veterans of the United States military. Specifically, during their OIF/OEF deployments, one identified as an Army Reserve servicemember, seven as Active Army servicemembers, two as Active Marine servicemembers, and one as an Army National Guard servicemember. Within the participant population, six Veterans identified their race as Hispanic and the remaining five Veterans identified as Caucasian. Two participants were in law school, with the remaining participants pursuing their undergraduate education.

Data Collection Instrument

The primary source of data collection came from individual interviews with participants. The semi-standardized interview structure allowed the flexibility of asking both structured questions that permit comparisons (Berg, 2009). The unstructured questions also allow the researcher to follow the insight of the interviewee (Berg, 2009). Participants were then able to represent themselves in the way that they would feel most comfortable in the interview process.

Interview questions were formulated utilizing previous research studies including the

Rumann and Hamrick (2010) study of student Veteran re-enrollment. The questions were formatted to stay neutral while simultaneously eliciting breadth and depth of information for proper qualitative research to be conducted (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Interview questions were based on the underlying theory of social constructivism in qualitative research (Glesne, 2011). The primary research questions asked of each student Veteran were:

- What are your perceptions on the transition issues that you faced from being in the military to a student on this campus? Please give specific examples where possible.
- What are the differences between your military and university experiences? Please give specific examples where possible.

Analysis

After interviewing all 11 participants, the interview recordings were transcribed and analyzed through constant comparative method (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998). As prescribed in the constant comparative method, open coding and axial coding was used to compare new data to previous data throughout the study. First, the interviews were analyzed one at a time through open coding which allowed the researchers to quickly determine the concepts by focusing on the participants' words. New codes were developed as they arose in the data. After the preliminary codes were developed, the data were uploaded into NVIVO 9 to further assist data analysis and comparison (Creswell, 2009). Once uploaded, axial coding was used to connect data into interconnected themes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998). The themes were named and reported in the findings below.

Limitations

Several limitations that could impact the findings are inherent in this research study. First, the data was collected by self-report of the Veterans, which could lead to biased results related to the fact that the research was conducted in an area of the country that values rugged individualism. Second, as with any research, the researcher could make methodological mistakes. Third, because the participants will be volunteers, the researcher could not ensure that all branches of the military are represented. Finally, a limitation to the research is related to the utilization of purposeful sampling methods. The convenience associated with purposeful sampling methods also limits the sample that will have the opportunity to participate in the research. Specifically, the researcher studied those student Veterans who are located at the particular institution, which decreases the transferability to other institutions.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness of the data was verified through member checking, inclusion of disconfirming data, and inclusion of unanticipated results. By utilizing the technique of member checking, the researcher validates that the themes derived are an accurate reflection of the participant's experiences (Creswell, 2009; Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). To decrease researcher bias during the research, once all of the themes were developed, student Veterans were sent themes to share their insight into what had been discovered. Having members check the quality of the interview transcription and theme development, these checks increase the credibility of interpretation of the participants' perception of their experiences and decreases the researcher's

bias towards the research topic (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). Also, by gaining the student Veteran perspective from the member checks, the researcher was able to verify that they reflected their understanding and perception, provided information about problematic areas, and helped develop new ideas (Glesne, 1999). One of the female participants responded, thanked the researcher for letting her participate in the research, and indicated that each of the themes were sufficient. To further increase the trustworthiness of the study, the findings were also compared with the review of literature to determine similarities in what they perceived their transition experience and what Veterans had previously experienced.

Findings

This study examined the perceptions that student Veterans have of the transition issues that they encounter on a college campus. The perceptions of transition issues from this study were divided among the following three themes: (a) maturity, (b) camaraderie, and the (c) college experience. The first theme concerned how student Veterans perceive themselves to be more mature than their fellow students because of their age, and how they deal with stressful academic situations and the lack of respect shown to others by traditional students. The second theme is an explanation of the sense of togetherness that student Veterans perceived among each other but not with fellow students and noncombat Veterans. The third theme describes how student Veterans felt frustration with their college experience. This theme includes the theme of structure and routine characterized by how student Veterans were able to transition from a structured environment to college life that is more flexible. The third theme also explores the invisibility that student Veterans experienced at the university.

The information garnered from the study may assist college counselors and administrators in their instruction, support, and attention toward student Veterans. Seeing the need for further research in this area was the stimulus for this research study. The findings from this study provide insights about the perceptions of those student Veterans. The information is presented utilizing pseudonyms that the student Veterans chose for themselves.

Maturity

The first theme to emerge prominently from each of the research interview questions was that of maturity. Maturity originates from a sense that a person is more developed and therefore has more life experiences and is able to see the world more fully based on their experiences. Student Veterans expressed that by going to war and experiencing what they felt was “real life” that they were different than their fellow traditional age classmates. Participants had a sense that they were overall more mature than their classmates. In addition to the overall theme of maturity, the student Veterans were able to identify four perspectives of maturity that helped each of them describe how they felt more mature than fellow classmates.

Age of the students. The student Veterans noted the age difference between themselves and those of their classmates as a way to distinguish themselves in maturity. Because of their age and maturity, student Veterans viewed their fellow traditional-age classmates as naive about life and the world that happens outside of college life. Addison noted that “just the fact that I am older than most undergrads, makes it a little weirder for me. I feel like I am a step ahead of

them.” The criticisms of students range from the ability to manage stress, to who pays for the student’s tuition, to a lack of respect for the professor and fellow classmates. In addition to the previous criticisms, student Veterans were also aware of the lack of value that students placed on the basic necessities that they have taken for granted. Corporal commented on the age of his classmates, “I was in Iraq when they were 13, riding their bikes, just practically 7 years ago, you couldn’t even fathom where I was at.” Student Veterans were also aware of the lack of respect the students showed toward each other as well as toward their professors. Addison again stated “they just think ‘oh I can go to class and do or miss or whatever and you know.’” Coming from a culture in which respect is paramount and integral for career advancement, student Veterans were particularly adamant about the perceived lack of respect from other students towards their professors and other students.

Valuing the little things. Because of their time in a warzone, all of the Veterans were acutely aware of the sacrifices they felt that they had made for their country. The amount of value the student Veterans placed on the little things was contradicted by their fellow classmates’ lack of maturity in understanding this concept. This gap between the student Veterans’ value of the everyday and their non-veteran classmates’ perceived disrespect creates complex challenges for peer relationships. The discussion below related their fellow classmates lack of appreciation of the time that the student Veteran spent in the military.

One participant, Charles first focused on his relationships past and present revealing that he had gotten a divorce after his first deployment, but currently had a girlfriend who had stuck by his side through his second deployment. Charles indicated that he appreciates his relationship in a way that many of his student peers do not seem to value the relationships they are in. Another little thing that Charles discussed valuing was a hot shower. He reported that in the field there are times he did not get regular showers much less hot showers, so now he appreciates that luxury a little more. Finally, Charles talked about being appreciative of getting five or six hours of sleep which was often not the norm in combat. Charles reports that he often feels like he has wasted time if he sleeps a full eight hours. Another participant, Victor highlighted the differences between maturity and values stating:

I am thankful to be here, nobody shot at me today, I am going back to my house tonight...it’s just the difference between what you are thankful for, and young people are upset because their mom and dad aren’t flying them out of the country this year.

Student Veterans expressed gratefulness in their everyday life. During the interviews, each Veteran shared gratitude for one thing or another that was important to them. For some it was a shower, for others it was the ability to be safe and still for others, it was the ability to attend college. It is through their more extensive experiences that student Veterans shared their frustration with the differences in appreciation and maturity between his or herself and the traditional student body.

Camaraderie

Camaraderie is a promoted value within the military. Most Veterans understand camaraderie to mean that other members of the unit will support and defend you during your service time. Most referred to the camaraderie they experienced during their time in the military.

However, some student Veterans were able to transition their sense of camaraderie to the college experience. Charles described his acceptance of the military value of camaraderie through describing how he felt different from his classmates in high school but then the military taught him to embrace camaraderie. He then experienced a strong camaraderie with his “battle buddies,” but has had difficulty transitioning this sense of camaraderie to the interactions that he has with other students. Jamie went on to say that “camaraderie...it’s especially engrained in soldiers that are overseas...we had each other.”

College Experiences

Student Veterans shared both positive and negative experiences within their college interactions. Some student Veterans were eager for the college experience because it provided freedom and a new experience. Conversely, other student Veterans became frustrated with the uncertainty that is associated with those freedoms. The codes developed, through the data analysis process, include frustration with the college experience, structure and routine, and invisibility and isolation.

Frustration with the college experience. Coming from a culture in which respect is paramount and integral for career advancement, student Veterans were particularly adamant about the lack of perceived respect. For Corporal, a Veteran student, the idea, “the military isn’t for everyone, and school isn’t for everyone,” was an overarching theme to the frustration that college life could elicit for student Veterans as they transitioned to college. The college experience was unique for all of the student Veterans who are either coming to college for the first time or re-enrolling from a break in their academic career. Transition issues affected student Veterans on both the system and classroom level. In addition, student Veterans were expected to academically perform at the same level as traditional college students. The transition to college also included the differing responsibilities, in particular relation to the student’s time management and freedom, the isolation that student Veterans faced from other students, as well as some who encountered easier transitions.

Structure and routine. Ten of the student Veterans interviewed found differences between the structure in the military and the structure they encountered in their college experiences. The responsibilities that the student Veterans had in the military were critical to their survival and advancement in rank; in college, the responsibilities were individualized to the student Veteran. Ricky expressed that structure in the military was defined for each soldier. He stated that “in the military, it’s you are here at this time. There’s no if’s and’s or but’s, you get it done at this time.” Student Veterans also noted that time management and discipline were externalized in the military, unlike their college experience where completion of schoolwork and assignments was the individual’s responsibilities.

Invisibility and isolation. As mentioned in the literature, student Veterans have a strong sense of isolation from their fellow students, faculty members, and staff when they are on campus. Because student Veterans are older, they are more likely to live off campus. In addition to living off campus, many student Veterans have friends who are not associated with the university. This creates a feeling of separation, as if the Veteran is a student on campus but not part of the overall campus experience and university culture. Ricky compared his feelings of

isolation and invisibility in college to the sense of belonging that he felt in the military. While active in the military, he said that everything happened as a unit. Charles, another student Veteran, also contrasted his experiences of feeling alone on campus to the time that he spent in the military. He indicated that when he was in the military, he always was around people doing work in a team atmosphere. He shared how he feels isolated from his fellow students, especially when he is not included in social events.

Both Victor and Ricky chose to keep to themselves, so that it wouldn't interfere with their academic progress. Victor, again referring to college as a mission, felt that he was isolated from other students, because he is the only one that he needed to worry about right now. Victor goes on to share that the isolation he faced with his fellow classmates is based upon a predetermined set of values and that he was here to complete a degree and not worry about anything or anyone else but that objective. He said that if a student wanted to "hang out" he would do so but he did not connect with the objectives of the students that he was interacting with because of the differences between the other students' culture and his military culture.

Discussion

This study highlights several different implications for officials who work in higher education and counseling. Student Veterans have various characteristics that set them apart from their traditional age counterparts which must be addressed by campus officials. While some student Veterans wanted to share their Veteran experiences with others, others chose to keep it hidden. The challenge, as was discussed in DiRamio et al. (2008), is to help student Veterans feel like they are part of the institution while navigating their various degrees of self-disclosure.

Three recommendations for practice emerge from this study. First, the campus community, campus employees who interact with students, must be educated about the unique characteristics of the student Veterans. Secondly, campus programs should be enhanced to support the transition of student Veterans to campus. Lastly, student Veterans are a cultural group returning to college and thus counselors should follow the multicultural counseling competencies and standards during the counseling process.

Recommendation 1: Provide More Specific Student Veteran Education to the Campus Community

Knowledge is the key that opens the door for effective and efficient services for student Veterans. The more knowledge the campus community has about the specific transitional needs of student Veterans, such as the student Veteran's focus on respect and camaraderie, the better it will be to effectively provide services. The educational procedures should consist of an overview of the specific issues that student Veterans face as they come to college, many of which were discovered in this study. University counselors and offices of veterans' services can work together to plan and implement the education trainings across campus. University counselors and offices of veteran services can then start with a group of stakeholders on campus that have a passion about the Veteran population and their successful transition to the university and college setting. Including stakeholders that have military or military related experience will help inform the trainings by inherently including some of the themes identified in this study. In addition to

informing the trainings, the military and Veteran stakeholders, can provide different strategies to encourage student Veterans to participate in programs for them.

Once the stakeholders are identified, the training is developed and implemented; the campus culture will begin to shift towards more understanding and helpful to the student Veteran on campus. Faculty and staff understanding of these concepts will facilitate more meaningful conversations between the student Veterans and the university faculty and staff members. Once faculty and staff are educated about the needs of the student Veteran on campus, the educational opportunities can expand to student organizations and into various courses across campus.

Recommendation 2: Enhance Programs that Support the Transition of the Student Veteran to Campus

With the increase of student Veterans in higher education settings, university campuses across the country are understanding the impact that student Veterans have and will continue to have on their student populations. Camaraderie and the college experience were major themes highlighted by the student Veterans in this study which speaks to the impact that a program solely focused on their needs can have in their overall campus experience. Rumann and Hamrick (2009) also encouraged partnerships among university offices and departments to support the transition of student Veterans and campus programs for Veterans have started providing support systems for student Veterans as they come to and attend the university. These programs range in size from a one-person office to full-service offices that provide support through academic advisors, tutors, and the benefits administrator. However, student Veterans in this study expressed a desire to either engage with the campus community and programs or to remain independent of it. Therefore, the difficulty lies in developing programs that student Veterans will seek out and utilize. One such suggestion would be to advertise programs that do not reference a diagnosis, such as PTSD or TBI, and thus the stigma associated with coming to a counseling setting. The military teaches servicemembers from the beginning that together they are stronger than they are as an individual person. By developing and fostering a student group of Veterans they will be able to advocate for their rights as students on campus. In addition to a general student Veteran group, college counselors can engage student Veterans in a growth group to enhance their understanding of the transition process and build on their sense of togetherness that most student Veterans missed after leaving their active military experience.

In addition to student groups, college counselors could integrate their services with the local Veteran's Administration and Vet Centers. Those programs might also collaborate to find physical spaces that would be a gathering spots across campus for Veterans. Again focusing on the theme of camaraderie, student Veterans could use this specified space to mingle with one another and also have a place to relax or study between classes. Many student Veterans live off campus and having a space on campus where they would feel safe would likely promote their overall well-being and positive attitude toward the university.

Recommendation 3: University Counselors Follow the Multicultural Counseling Competencies and Standards

In Sue, Arredondo, and McDavis' (1992) seminal article, the authors provide the initial

framework for how the counseling profession can increase multicultural competencies. For the minority client, they state “he or she is likely to approach counseling with a great deal of healthy suspicion as to the counselor’s conscious and unconscious motives in a cross cultural context” (Sue et al., 1992, p. 479). The cultural mindset of the military encourages strength and compartmentalization of feelings so they do not interfere with the mission at hand (Hall, 2008). Servicemembers face a stigma and are thus hesitant in relaying any mental health concern to a professional for fear of the impact on their career (Hall, 2008). Student Veterans then bring this same distrust of those outside of their culture to campus. Part of the role incongruities discussed by Runman and Hamrick (2009) such as the isolation and invisibility that student Veterans feel on campus was relayed during the interviews in that they could not relate to others and the campus could not relate to them and their experiences and in military culture.

Counselors have the responsibility to view the Veteran population as a unique culture and thus employ the multicultural counseling competencies and standards in their practices (Hall, 2008). Arredondo et al. (1996) outlined three overarching areas that counselors can follow in order to provide effective services to unique populations including: counselor awareness of own cultural values and biases, counselor awareness of client’s worldview, and culturally appropriate intervention strategies.

First, university counselors can seek out various training to educate themselves in the culture of the military and the impacts on that culture upon student Veterans transitioning to the college setting. Counselors in this first area are also encouraged to understand how they internally view the military culture and work towards understanding the Veterans’ identity and transition issues. Secondly, counselors’ skills should include the knowledge of the various research related to any mental health and mental disorders associated with student Veterans such as traumatic brain injury, PTSD, and depression.

Counselors must be culturally competent with student Veterans as they return to the college campus because student Veterans are a different population with independent and unique needs. Counselors are encouraged through ethical practice to know their population, know themselves and to implement this knowledge in the counseling interactions that they have with student Veterans. Student Veterans bring a unique set of worldviews to college campuses and thus the college community has an opportunity to prepare accordingly.

Unanticipated Conclusions

The transition issues discussed in the literature review were consistent with the Veterans interviewed. The research identified that student Veterans were more mature, had feelings of invisibility and isolation, had pride in their military experiences, and felt frustration with the overall transition to college. However, student Veterans are unique. It is not a blanket statement that all Veterans will be more mature or have pride in the military. Student Veteran Addison indicated that she did not identify herself as a Veteran on a regular basis, and it was only when there was a specific Veteran event that she thought about it. In addition, not all Veterans think of their fellow students as naïve and some wanted to learn from their fellow students as well. Wale said that he

...looked to those who I see have a wealth of knowledge. Even though they are younger,

I respect whomever and wherever they come from. So where I interact with the students, that is what I look for, just that other framework, that other viewpoint. Counselors too have the opportunity to learn from their student Veteran clients about their personal experiences.

Further Inquiry

First, more inquiry is needed in regard to the specific experiences that female Veterans feel as they return to college. Specifically relating to OIF/OEF, women are increasingly present in combat duty positions (Roulo, 2013). Further inquiry is warranted to determine the in-depth relationship that women, who have been through combat and are attending a university, experience in their transition during college. In addition, this study focused on OIF/OEF veterans. However, not all of the military Veterans attending college have been in combat situations. As mentioned in the themes above, within the military culture there is a bias among those Veterans who have seen combat to those who have not. Studies to determine the transition issues and identity of noncombat Veterans are also warranted in this area.

Duplication of this study could also be conducted on multiple populations, including graduate students and faculty members. Both populations have a unique insight into the transitions and meaning making of student Veterans. Because of the differences in expectations and culture, graduate student Veterans could offer researchers the ability to contrast their transition issues and meaning making to those who are pursuing their undergraduate degrees.

With student Veterans returning to college, college counselors have an important opportunity to prepare themselves, as well as, the campus community to appropriately help student Veterans in their transition. College counselors are often able to both educate the campus community and provide assistance in areas, such as with student Veterans, that many are not aware of in their daily lives. In addition to the education and support of the campus community, college counselors are also able to help student Veterans in their transition back to the university through learned skills and knowledge.

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The Implications of Social Support for Military Wives: Effects during a Post-Deployment Period

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Abstract

In this study, the impacts of social support for military wives during a post-deployment period were explored. Past research found that longer deployments, greater than six months, significantly increased the psychological distress levels for military wives during post-deployment (Vincenzes, 2013; Vincenzes, Haddock, & Hickman, 2014). The current research looked to identify a potential moderating variable that would impact the relationship between duration of deployment and psychological distress as experienced by the stay-behind wife. This study focused specifically on wives of male service members, and examines the role of social support, as measured by the MOS Social Support Survey (Sherbourne & Stewart, 1991) for 58 military wives' deployment and post-deployment experiences.

KEYWORDS: post-deployment, attachment, military wives, social support, deployment

In 2001, the terrorist attacks of 9/11 significantly changed the need for military service members in the United States of America. Since then, over 2.4 million service members have been deployed to the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, better known as Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF; U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, 2012). These wars changed the expectations in regards to deployments, which are temporary jobs away from one's home and family (Allen & Staley, 2007); short term training deployments (i.e., which can last a couple weeks or months) frequently take place stateside, in order to prepare for the mission deployment that takes place overseas (Beasley, MacDermid Wadsworth, & Watts, 2012). The OIF and OEF wars increased both the frequency and duration of deployments for service members, while also limiting the time for recovery in-between redeployments (Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008). Almost half of the total military personnel deployed more than once to

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Afghanistan and Iraq (U.S. Department of Defense, 2012). In addition, over 50% of service members report being married (U.S. Department of Defense, 2009), thus over 1.2 million families have been impacted by deployments. Research has found that a deployment not only impacts the service member, but the family is also impacted by the experience (Drummet, Coleman, & Cable, 2003; Mansfield et. al, 2010; Vincenzes, 2013; Vincenzes, Haddock, & Hickman, 2014). Unfortunately, research has found that the stay-behind wives continue to experience psychological distress even after the husband returns from deployment (Vincenzes, 2013; Vincenzes, Haddock, & Hickman, 2014). It is important that we identify how best to support stay-behind wives during this time so that they may be able to more positively support their husbands during this transition; in order to do this, one must understand deployments, social support, and psychological distress. With this understanding, counselors and other professionals can better meet the needs of the entire military family unit.

Deployments

Pincus, House, Christenson, and Adler (2001) and Morse (2006) have clarified key emotional stages of deployment for military wives and military families. Pincus et al. (2001) defined the deployment cycle as having the following five stages: pre-deployment, deployment, sustainment, redeployment, and post-deployment. Morse (2006) expanded this cycle, emphasizing pre-deployment and post-deployment, to include the following seven stages: Anticipation of Departure, Detachment and Withdrawal, Emotional Disorganization, Recovery and Stabilization, Anticipation of Return, Return Adjustment and Renegotiation, and Reintegration and Stabilization. Both Pincus et al. (2001) and Morse (2006) found military wives have higher anxiety during the post-deployment stage, because they are trying to comprehend how their husbands fit back into their lives after being apart for many months at a time. Furthermore, Vincenzes (2013) and Vincenzes, Haddock, and Hickman (2014) found a positive relationship between the duration of a service member's deployment and the wife's psychological distress during the post-deployment period. Wives who experienced a deployment lasting six months or longer experienced significantly higher levels of psychological distress during post-deployment, when compared to those who experienced shorter deployment times.

Social Support

Both service members and their families experience an array of mental health issues due to deployment (Mansfield, 2010); however, Drummet, Coleman, and Cable (2003) found social support to impact military wives' ability to cope with a deployment. While Drummet et al. (2003) found that wives reported positive experiences with social support, Skonorosky (2014) found that military wives reported negative experiences with social support when separated from their husbands. Social support is the notion that the individual is supported emotionally and physically by other sources such as family, children, friends, community, and church (Sherbourne, & Stewart, 1991). These sources have shown to be positive sources for distress regulation in military families (Hobfoll et al., 1991; Skomorovsky, 2014; Vormbrock, 1993). This is important because the lack of social support may have detrimental consequences on both the individual, the service member, and the family system, when looking specifically at the military family. Social support can naturally occur in the stay-behind spouse's environment (e.g., support from families and neighbors) and therefore they may serve to lessen stressors that come

with the military lifestyle. However, naturally occurring social support may not be enough to decrease the stay-behind wife's distress level. For example, a stay-behind spouse may feel emotionally supported by her family members back home from frequent phone calls, but, this emotional support does not provide her relief from the overwhelming and constant childcare she had inherited when her spouse deployed.

Strong social support has a number of benefits. In military families, social support has proven crucial to maintaining both emotional and physical benefits for the service members, as well as their spouse and children (Pincus, House, Christenson, & Adler, 2001; Vormbrock, 1993). Not only do military families share the common issues of most present day families to include challenges with child care, socioeconomics, and parenting, but they must also face experiences that are unique to the military culture. These experiences include frequent relocations to where the military needs them, family separations for deployment and trainings, family reformations (e.g., new roles or duties to account for the service members whereabouts) (Drummet et al., 2003; Di Nola, 2008), and worry about the service member's safety (Gewirtz et al., 2011). During deployments particularly, military wives may find themselves overwhelmed by new demands (e.g., by a new family structure or a new location) and present difficulty coping (Drummet et al., 2003; Vormbrock, 1993).

Negative effects of deployment can manifest in role overload, an increase in work and household stressors, financial concerns, child rearing, and relocations (Drummet et al., 2003; Vormbrock, 1993). These stressors are linked to anxiety, loneliness, distress, anger, and separation anxiety for the wife at home (Vormbrock, 1993). Since the stay-behind parent has the greatest impact on the children's psychological well-being (Dimiceli, Steinhardt, & Smith, 2010; Huebner, Mancini, Bowen, & Orthner, 2009), the implications for helping the mother cope is essential to the overall well-being of the family.

In general, social support has been found to be a significant moderator of life stressors (Kilpatrick et al., 2007). When analyzing military deployments specifically, research findings discovered that social support was an important factor in the stay-behind wives' well-being during a deployment (Larsen & Kia-Keating, 2010; Messecar & Kendall, 1990; Rosen & Hoghadam, 1990). Rosen and Hoghadam (1990) found that social support was a moderating variable for the wives' perceived levels of distress during a deployment. Demers (2009) found that military wives struggled with finding social support in having someone to talk to about the war. After reviewing the research on social support, particularly studies that have analyzed the impact social support has on different variables, no studies have examined social support as a moderating factor during post-deployment. The current research looks to determine the role of social support. Is social support a moderator variable (i.e., influences the relationship between the two variables) or a mediator variable (i.e., explains the relationship between the two variable) when looking at the relationship between duration of deployment and psychological distress during post-deployment?

Attachment Theory

In order to better understand the relationship between deployments and distress levels for military wives, to understand how social support may be able to intervene, Vincenzes et al.

(2014) explored Bowlby's and Ainsworth's attachment theories specifically with regard to separation anxiety. Bowlby and Ainsworth developed the attachment theory, explaining and supporting the notion that attachment is a strong emotional bond that joins one individual to another (as cited in Bretherton, 1992). Ainsworth focused on three types of attachment (secure, avoidant, and ambivalent) in early childhood, comparing and contrasting children's reactions to mothers leaving them and returning back to them later (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970). Children with secure attachment welcomed their mother's company after leaving and returning while children with avoidant attachment were uninterested in their mothers company after leaving and returning. Finally, children with ambivalent attachment showed great anxiety and anger in their mothers company after leaving and returning (Ainsworth & Bell, 1970). Bowlby looked closer at the formation of anxiety (i.e., separation anxiety) in stages of attachment in infants (as cited in Bretherton, 1992). When mothers were absent from their infant, the infant showed protest (e.g., crying, clinging, etc.), despair (e.g., inhibited), and denial or detachment (e.g., slowly accepted others, resentment towards mothers return; Bretherton, 1992).

While separation anxiety is often discussed in a parent-child relationship, it can also be experienced by stay-behind wives throughout a deployment cycle. Vincenzes (2013) and Vincenzes et al. (2014) discovered that a wife's psychological distress levels increased during the post-deployment stage when the husband returned from a deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan. As deployments increased in duration, the levels of psychological distress significantly increased. Since social support has been found to be an important variable to one's overall well-being, and research found that it impacts a military family's resiliency (Larsen & Kia-Keating, 2010), social support may be a variable to moderate separation anxiety as experienced by the stay-behind wife. Furthermore, attachment theory and social support may explain how psychological distress levels vary for wives during the post-deployment period.

These findings are important to improve counseling professionals' knowledge. By understanding the military family dynamics and the individual needs of family members (i.e., spouses), counselors can proactively intervene to help prevent dysfunction arising in the families. For example, if counselors know the importance of stay-behind spouses' social support needs, then they can create support groups prior to the post-deployment stage (i.e., in the deployment stage). This may decrease the likelihood that the stay-behind spouse experiences negative emotional consequences when their service member returns.

Method

Purpose

In previous research, Vincenzes (2013) and Vincenzes et al. (2014) found that a wife's level of anxiety during post-deployment was impacted by the duration of deployment, especially for deployments that lasted six months or more. The purpose of this quantitative study was to further examine stay-behind wives' experiences during post-deployment by using the same data to analyze the impact of social support on the previous relationship. The null hypothesis was that the proportion of variance for the psychological distress levels experienced by the stay-behind wife during post-deployment explained by the duration of deployment was not moderated by social support. The theoretical framework for this study focused on attachment between a

husband and wife in an attempt to comprehend how couples cope during post-deployment. In order to capture wives' experiences as they were occurring, wives were surveyed during the post-deployment period. For the purpose of this study, deployment was operationalized as the total number of months the service member served abroad in the military. Post-deployment was operationally defined as the 12-month period following the service member's return from a deployment. Social Support was operationalized by the global score participants had on the MOS Social Support Survey (Sherbourne & Stewart, 1991).

Sample Size

Using GPower, the sample size for this study was proposed to be 60. In order to find this number, the statistical test linear multiple regression was used. The fixed model, R^2 increase with a medium effect size of $f^2 = .50$, an error probability of $\alpha = .01$, and a power of .99 was used to determine the rationale for the sample size (Vincenzes, 2013).

Research Design

This study used a non-experimental, correlational design. This design was chosen for multiple reasons. First, there were few designs available to use when studying length of deployment. The specific variables in this study could not be manipulated, thus decreasing the availability of using any experimental designs. The second reason the design was chosen was because other researchers have used it when assessing the moderating effect of social support with stressful events (Kilpatrick et al., 2007). Finally, the design made it possible to examine the predictability of the independent and moderating variable on the dependent variable (Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008).

Instrumentation

Participants completed the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS-21; Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995), which was a 21-item Likert scale survey. The DASS-21 is a shortened version of Lovibond and Lovibond's (1995) original 42-item self-report assessment of depression, anxiety, and stress (DASS). The DASS-21 consists of three subscales (Depression, Anxiety, and Stress) with 7 questions pertaining to each subscale. In addition to the subscales, there is a total global score, which is what was used for this particular research. The global score was calculated by adding up the answers to each question and multiplying the total number by 2 (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995; Vincenzes, 2013).

Participants also completed the MOS Social Support Survey (Sherbourne & Stewart, 1991) which was used to operationally define social support. The MOS Social Support Survey is a self-administered survey that provides information on various types of support to include: emotional/information, tangible, affectionate, and positive social interactions. In addition, a global overall score can be calculated, which is what was used to conceptualize the wife's level of social support for this research. There are 19 items on the survey with 18 of the items in Likert scale format. The Likert scale identifies the magnitude of the social support available to the participant if needed from 1 (None of the time) to 5 (All of the time). The other remaining question asks: About how many close friends and close relatives do you have (people you feel at ease with and can talk to about what is on your mind)? Here the participant merely puts a number

in the designated box. A global social support level was identified by adding up each answer of the 18 Likert scale questions (Sherbourne & Stewart, 1991; Vincenzes, 2013).

Data Collection

Prior to the data collection, the IRB application was completed, reviewed, and approved (Approval # 01-03-13-0272569). Volunteer purposive sampling was used for this research. In order to attempt to control for the potential confounding variable of gender responses to psychological stressors, the current research only included stay-behind wives' experiences. Additional inclusion criteria were that the couple must currently be married and have experienced a minimum of a six month deployment. The final inclusion criteria was that the service member needed to have returned from his deployment within the past 12 months to ensure the couple was currently experiencing the post-deployment stage (Vincenzes, 2013). There were no specific inclusion criteria regarding the service member's branch in the military, rank, or status as Active Duty, Reserves, or National Guard. Furthermore, there were no inclusion criteria with regards to children and/or number of years the couple was married.

Military wives were solicited for the research through email, military advocacy groups, the Army Wives Network, and a military advocacy group called Pennsylvania Americans showing Compassion, Assistance, and Reaching out with Empathy for Service members (PACARES). Approximately 30 original emails were sent out, and recipients were asked to forward the initial solicitation email to other military wives (Vincenzes, 2013).

After reading the solicitation email, individuals could volunteer for the study by clicking on a link. The link took the participants to SurveyMonkey, where they reviewed the informed consent. Participants were not required to sign an informed consent, rather their consent was implied, which maintained the participants' confidentiality and privacy. Once the participants clicked on the link, they were taken to the demographic background questionnaire. Information asked included the following: gender, age, when the military member last deployed, duration of deployment, date military member returned home, years married, number of previous deployments, number of children at home (if any), military member's rank, military affiliation, employment, and completed education level. Participants who met the inclusion criteria (married to the military member prior to deployment, the wife experienced a deployment, and the husband returned within the past year from a deployment) were directed to the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales and the MOS Social Support Survey. After the completion of both surveys, the participants received a debriefing statement thanking them for their time and participation (Vincenzes, 2013).

Results

Of the 145 people who responded to the announcement, 48.9% (68) met the criteria; however, 14.7% (10) of the individuals who met criteria had missing data and were therefore excluded from the study. This resulted in 58 participants. The women aged from 21 to 47 ($M = 31.2$, $SD = 6.7$) years old with 50% of the wives under the age of 29 years. The majority of the participants (93.1 %) had some years of college (only 6.9% had a high school diploma/GED or less). Furthermore, 29.3% had some college but no degree, 20.7% had an Associate's degree,

31% had a Bachelor’s degree, and 12.1% had a Graduate degree. In regards to employment status, 53.4% of the participants were not employed and 46.6% were employed. The number of years couples were married ranged from 1 to 20 ($M = 7.2, SD = 5$) and 48.3% of the participants were married 5 years or less. The number of children under 17 who lived in the household ranged from 0 to 4 ($M = 1.5, SD = 1.3$) and 51.7% had either no children or 1 child. The length of deployments ranged from 6 months to 16 months ($M = 9.5, SD = 2.8$). Finally, the length of time since the husband returned from deployment ranged from 0 months to 12 ($M = 6.0, SD = 4.2$; Vincenzes 2013).

Previous research (Vincenzes, 2013; Vincenzes et al., 2014) found that duration of deployment accounted for 8.8% of the variance in psychological distress for women who experienced a deployment of six months or longer. Furthermore, the duration of deployment was positively related to psychological distress ($\beta = .296, sr^2 = .088$). These results led the current researchers to further investigate the relationship between duration of deployment and psychological distress during post-deployment. The new null hypothesis stated that the proportion of variance for the psychological distress levels experienced by the stay-behind wives during post-deployment explained by the duration of deployment was not moderated by social support. A stepwise analysis was completed to identify the results of this hypothesis. See Table 1 for the Summary of Model ANOVA. Results indicated that $F(2, 55) = 2.326, p = .133, R = .353, Adj. R^2 = .093$. Social support only accounted for 3.7% of the variance in psychological distress and was negatively associated with psychological distress ($\beta = -.199, sr^2 = .037$). See Table 2 for Coefficients of the Model for Global Social Support. Based on the results, the null hypothesis was accepted (Vincenzes, 2013).

Table 1. *Summary of Model ANOVA*

Variable	SS	df	MS	F	p
Duration of Deployment	3924.693	1	3924.693	5.384	.024*
Global Social Support	5580.827	2	2790.414	3.918	.133

* $p < .05$.

Table 2. *Coefficients of the Model with Global Social Support*

	B	SE B	β	sr^2
1				
Constant	1.740	12.771		
Duration of Deployment	3.013	1.299	.296	.088*
2				
Constant	24.627	19.611		
Social Support	-.285	.187	-.199	.037

R^2 change = .088 for variable 1, $p = .024$, R^2 change = .037 for variable 2 ($N = 58$), $p = .133$

Based on the results of the analyses, duration of deployment (six months or greater) significantly predicted psychological distress levels during post-deployment. In addition, global social support did not significantly moderate the relationship between duration of deployment and psychological distress for military wives during post-deployment.

Discussion

Bowlby's and Ainsworth's attachment theories may provide insight into the service member-spouse relationship and the separation anxiety that may be experienced by stay-behind wives throughout a deployment cycle. When the husband deploys, the wife detaches from him, which can then carry over when he returns from the deployment (Vormbrock, 1993). Anger and anxiety that are often associated with detachment may increase the distress levels experienced by the wife during post-deployment (Vincenzen, 2013; Vincenzen et al., 2014). This distress may be further exasperated because the social support systems that the wives built in order to cope with the loss of their original attachment figure (the spouse) dissipate during the post-deployment stage while families are trying to form relationships with each other again. Riggs and Riggs (2011) believed that wives who had a secure attachment when they were growing up were able to better cope with these military separations.

While the results indicated that duration of deployment was an important variable to a wife's overall distress levels, the global social support did not significantly impact the wife. This is very interesting because past research (Figley, 2002; Messecar & Kendall, 1998) found that social support is a significant variable in an individual's ability to cope with stressful events. Furthermore, other researchers (Larsen & Kia-Keating, 2010) discovered that social support is an important variable particularly for a military wife's ability to cope with a deployment. In fact, Kilpatrick et al. (2007) found social support to not only be significant, but that it moderated the level of psychopathology experienced during a stressful event. Prior research results lead to some interesting questions. First, could the type of research design impact the results of the study? For example, Wood, Scarville, and Gravino (1995) and Larsen and Kia-Keating (2010) used a qualitative approach and interviewed military wives about their ability to cope. Both research study findings discovered the importance of social support for military wives. The current research study used a quantitative approach and everything was completed electronically. Since the variable social support refers to a relationship between individuals, perhaps it needs to be researched using a qualitative interview. The qualitative approach may integrate a more relational approach to the research itself.

Another interesting question relates to the operational definition of social support. Rosen and Hoghadam (1990) studied military wives and analyzed different types of social support to include: support from other military wives in the soldier's unit; support from wives not in the husband's unit; support from parents, siblings, or family members; and support from friends outside of the military. The results found that the only type of social support that moderated the wife's perceived level of distress was social support received from other military wives in the husband's unit. Unlike Rosen and Hoghadam (1990), this research analyzed social support on a global level using the MOS Social Support Survey (Sherbourne & Stewart, 1991). This survey took a global look at the participant's perceived levels on the various subcategories of support: emotional/informational, tangible, affectionate, and positive social interaction. Perhaps social support needs to be operationally defined differently for military families. Could it be that culture plays a role in how social support is defined and accepted; therefore, resulting in how much it impacts one's well-being? If military wives view social support differently than civilians, then researchers need to identify what social support looks like to the military family.

After key factors are identified, it is proposed that a new social support survey be created that will effectively assess levels of social support for military families.

This ability to effectively assess levels of social support could be a widely used tool by counselors for the prevention, intervention, and treatment of military families experiencing an upcoming deployment, having problems during the separation that comes with a deployment, or for those who are experiencing difficulties reuniting after a lengthy deployment. Additionally, if the specific type of social support that moderates the stay-behind wife's perceived level of distress is better understood, then counselors and other professionals working with military families can improve or create programs that promote this needed support (e.g., Wives Only Retreat, spouse support group, etc.).

Limitations

With the current study, it is important to analyze the possible limitations to the findings. First, participation required that participants have working technology. All data, to include the informed consent, was collected online. The study was also limited to those who had experienced a deployment of 6 months or longer, thus those who were currently in the pre-deployment stage, deployment stage, or had experienced a deployment shorter in duration would not meet this inclusion criterion. Next, is the external validity of the study. This study only included 58 stay-behind wives. The sample size is small as compared to the 1.3 million service members who report being married (Department of Defense, 2009); therefore, it is difficult to generalize the current research findings to the larger population of military wives. Perhaps in the future, the survey could be opened longer to try and increase the number of participants. In addition, the current research only surveyed women, which means the results cannot be generalized to stay-behind husbands who experience a deployment. As married women serving in the military increase, future research will need to include stay-behind men as well.

Lastly, the internal validity also may limit the findings from this study. For example, the research relied on the participant's willingness to be honest and self-report levels of distress and perceived levels of social support. Some people may minimize or suppress their actual levels of distress because it may make their situation more of a reality. Some participants also may be new to the post-deployment period versus others who are closer to the end of this time frame (post-deployment was operationalized as lasting up to 12 months). This in turn may impact the severity of the symptoms experienced by the stay-behind wife. Finally, some of the participants may be new to the military and experiencing a deployment for the first time whereas others may have been in the military for quite some time and have experienced multiple deployments. The participants' past experience with deployment may impact their current distress levels.

With regard to social support, sometimes individuals do not recognize all of the support they have around them until they begin identifying and/or naming the people around them. Since this survey was more generic, the participants may have not accounted for the various individuals who do support them, thus decreasing the overall levels of support the participant actually receives. In addition, the current physical location of the stay-behind wife may impact the results. For example, if the service member is not active duty, then the stay-behind wife may have less connection or support from other military spouses due to not being located near a

military base. This leads to a potential interest for further research in identifying what social support looks like for the stay-behind wife.

Conclusion and Implications

Military families are continuously experiencing deployments, which impact a multitude of people and systems (i.e., service member, family, community, and nation). For the family system, a deployment impacts the service member, spouse, and children. The wife's emotional well-being was found to impact her ability to care for the emotional needs of her children (McNulty, 2003). When the family system is intact and strong, this may positively impact the service member's overall stability as well. In fact, Pittman, Kerpelman, and McFadyen (2004) found that the wife's ability to positively cope with a deployment impacted the husband's well-being in future deployments, because he was not worrying about the impact the deployment would have on the wife. Rather, he was able to focus more intently on the mission at hand. This not only has implications for the service member in a combat zone, but it impacts his fellow combat members serving with him. This in turn may impact the safety of our nation.

The purpose of this study focused primarily on the stay behind wife who experienced a deployment six months or longer. It was hypothesized that the variance between duration of deployment and psychological distress for the stay behind wife would not be impacted by social support. These results reiterated this hypothesis. The results were not what the researchers would expect, given prior research findings stating social support is an important factor in military wives' ability to cope with deployments (Larsen & Kia-Keating; 2010; Messecar & Kendall, 1998; Wood et al., 1995). This finding leaves the researchers curious about the way social support was operationally defined. Perhaps the global score on the MOS Social Support Survey did not adequately measure the wife's perception of social support in her life. It could be that military families perceive social support to mean something different than the civilian population. In order to determine if social support truly impacts the stay behind wife's psychological functioning during post-deployment; research needs to focus on the following questions: What is social support? What does social support look like to the military family? After answering these questions, counselors, family therapists, clergy, educators, and the military can better meet the unique needs of this population.

All members working with military families can incorporate this knowledge into treatment approaches (e.g., counseling intervention) and consider it when referring individuals to applicable resources, such as official branch programs (e.g., U.S. Marine Corps LINKS [Lifestyle, Insights, Networking, Knowledge, and Skills] program; Marine Corps Community Services, 2001). Those on an administrative level can use the information learned from this research to develop and/or improve programs, which are intended for military families to use (e.g., U.S. Marine Corps LINKS program; Marine Corps Community Services, 2001). For example, administrators may better understand the dynamics of social support, and the social support necessary to support military wives during both deployment and post-deployment. Furthermore, administrators may in turn create a social support program specific to spouses during the post-deployment stage.

In conclusion, continued research needs to occur to further understand the military culture, population, and lived experiences of those who endure a deployment. By identifying strategies that will help family systems cope with the stressors of the different stages of deployment, it may significantly impact the overall well-being of the service member, family, other military personnel, and our nation. This will further enable those providing services to this population to more effectively meet their needs.

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The Role of Identity, Environment, and Fusion on Veterans in Transition

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Abstract

Veterans have reported challenges in multiple domains of personal and community functioning upon their return to civilian life. Many Veterans may not experience transitional difficulties after military service, yet there is increasing concern about the well-being of the ones who do. The purpose of this study was to explore Veteran's perceptions of their transition experience to identify common factors. Theoretical explanations proposed include group fusion and social intensity theories. A thematic analysis across qualitative studies was completed, resulting in the identification of evidence that many Veterans are deeply influenced by the military socialization process. The results of this study explain how identity, group cohesion, and environment impact Veterans in transition. Recommendations for research and counseling interventions utilizing measures of identity fusion and social intensity are supported.

KEYWORDS: *veteran, transition, social, intensity, identity, fusion, counseling*

The Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) Veteran Population Projection Model (VetPop2014) estimates there are more than 21.6 million Veterans in America today (United States Department of Veteran Affairs [DVA], 2015). While the total number of Veterans will decline over the next 20 years to 15.7 million, it is anticipated that the percentage of Veterans of the Iraq, Afghanistan, and Syrian conflicts (Operation Iraqi Freedom [OIF], Operation Enduring Freedom [OEF], Operation New Dawn [OND], Operation Freedom's Sentinel [OFS], and Operation Inherent Resolve [OIR]) will increase over the same period from 10.8% to 26.2% (United States Department of Labor [DOL], 2016). Nationwide, licensed professional counselors will be engaging with the more than 200,000 military members who will transition from active duty each year over the next decade.

While there are many Veterans who appear to return to the civilian culture and manage without significant problems, there is increasing recognition that some do not. Transitioning to the civilian world is a formidable challenge for many Veterans (Ahern, Worthen, Masters, Lippman, Ozer & Moos, 2015). Recent statistics suggest that as many as 51 percent of returning

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post 9/11 Veterans have experienced difficulty readjusting to civilian life (Morin, 2011). Many perceive that their military identity is in direct conflict with civilian society's expectations for them (Demers, 2011; Demers, 2013; Smith & True, 2014). From a historical perspective, Veterans of all eras of service have confronted barriers to successful transition with sometimes devastating results including fractured or broken relationships, challenges in their achievement of educational and vocational goals, mental health problems, involvement with the criminal justice system, substance misuse, and suicidality (Braswell & Kushner, 2012; Brown, Stanulis, Theis, Farnsworth, & Daniels, 2013; Castro, Kintzle, & Hassan, 2015; Hinojosa & Hinojosa, 2011; Pals, & Oak, 2007; Sayers, 2011).

Veterans transition from a collectivist military environment where there is little room for autonomy to an individualistic civilian environment which celebrates self-reliance, self-government, and free will (Weiss, Coll & Metal, 2011). Society, as it exists upon their return may seem foreign and military behaviors, values, and experiences may be perceived as incongruent with those embraced by civilian society. These perceived incongruencies can foster doubt and conflict in the way the Veteran feels, thinks, and behaves, since they are now functioning in a very dissimilar environment (Savion, 2012). As a result, some Veterans may become focused on returning to the location of their deployment, even redeployment to combat zones, to return to an environment which is perceived to be structured or predictable, and decisions are made through the military's strict chain of command (Zimbardo, Ferreras, & Brunskill, 2015). According to Castro and colleagues (2015), the paradox in this behavior is that some Veterans hate war but love combat, and they may feel that there is unfinished business to attend to (p. 302). Rielly (2000) explains, "Most soldiers value honor and reputation more than their lives because life among comrades whom a soldier has failed, seems lonely and worthless" (p. 63).

These personal challenges are reflected in the 2011 Pew Research Center Veterans Survey (as cited in Morin, 2011). Of 1,853 Veterans, 27 percent report that re-entering the civilian world was difficult for them. That number increases to 44 percent when focusing solely on those Veteran respondents who served in the ten years since 9/11. According to the PEW report (as cited in Morin, 2011), Veterans indicated that they experienced challenges in multiple domains of personal and community functioning upon their return to civilian life including a reduction in economic self-sufficiency, disruptions in social relationships, social networks, and vocational pursuits. In a large scale national survey of male and female Veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts, Sayer and colleagues (2010) also found that at least 25% of the entire mixed gender, mixed race sample group (N=754), experienced some to extreme difficulties in many of the same capacities including the maintenance of social relationships, keeping a job, completing tasks, dealing with strangers and making new friends. These findings were later confirmed in a second study by Sayer and colleagues (2014), which added different dimensions including added increased legal problems, unstable housing, and the potential for homelessness to Veteran accounts of challenges.

Transition difficulties are not solely reflective of a 21st century cultural phenomenon. From Erikson's (1968) research with U.S military Veterans returning from World War II, to Borus (1975) research with Vietnam Veterans to the research of Sayer (2010), and others who are investigating the problem of Veteran re-entry into civilian society has been intermittent

throughout the years. The recently developed concepts of identity fusion and social intensity provide a contemporary theoretical perspective on the transition process and its social and contextual influences (Swann & Buhrmester, 2015; Zimbardo, Ferreras & Brunskill, 2015).

Identity Fusion

According to Swann and Buhrmeister (2015), “Identity fusion is a visceral sense of ‘oneness’ with a group and its individual members that motivate personally costly, pro-group behaviors” (p. 1). Identity fusion is associated with an array of emotions described as reflexive and intuitive involving automatic rather than well-considered processes that result in a visceral sense of oneness with the group (Jimenez et al., 2016). The theory is constructed around four principles which distinguish it from traditional social identity perspectives (Fredman et al., 2015). These principles include the agentic self, identity synergy, relational ties, and the irrevocability principle. These principles interact with one another to create the state of fusion.

Bandura (2001) described the *agentic self* as self-organizing, proactive, self-regulating and self-reflecting suggesting that individuals make free choices and can act independently according to their interests. However, for strongly fused individuals, this is not the case as they will actually demonstrate the exact opposite effect. When identity fused individuals become strongly aligned with a group, they maintain an active and agentic personal self, even when the social self is activated (Swann et al., 2009) resulting in identity synergy.

Identity synergy exists when the boundaries between one’s personal (*internal*) and social (*external*) selves become functionally equivalent (Swann, Gomez, Seyle, Morales, & Huici, 2009), or synergistic. The synergistic nature of identities leads to the kinship ties to persons who are not kin. The benefit of these strong ties particularly among military members, is a sense of mutual obligation, shared strength (Gomex, 2011; Swann et al., 2014), which will motivate extreme behavior (e.g. fighting, dying) as required by the group or in defense of the group (Swann, Gomez, Dovidio, Hart & Jensen, 2010). Given these behavioral characteristics, strongly fused individuals will experience difficulty in separating from their group identification which represents the *irrevocability principle*. When these individuals encounter challenges to their personal or social identities, their desire for stable self-views will trigger compensatory self-verification strivings (Swann et al., 2012), encouraging continued fusion.

Social Intensity

Zimbardo, Ferreras and Brunskill (2015) social intensity theory focuses on the importance of socialization influences on post-deployment behavior among Veterans. The authors maintain that the impact of military socialization, particularly as it occurs in combat zones, is so intense that this way of life becomes fused within the individual’s mentality. Over time, that degree of social intensity becomes a “set point” of desirable functioning, operating at a non-conscious level. As such this intense socialization process and its resulting situational pressures, follow the military member into their civilian lives. From this theoretical perspective, the researchers have begun to explore and potentially explain the effects of what Zimbardo and colleagues (2015) refer to as social intensity syndrome (SIS). Because the socialization process required to develop individuals into cohesive military units with strong connections to other

members cannot be replicated outside of that culture, Zimbardo and colleagues (2015) posit that the social intensity experienced by military members poses a potential hindrance to civilian integration. The effects of SIS on Veterans' lives range from mild to profound, are multi-dimensional, and include the need to be around particular others, self-isolation from civilians, poor bonding with family and participation in high-risk behaviors (Zimbardo et al., 2014).

Purpose of the Study

Difficulties in successfully negotiating a transition from their military identity into a new, civilian identity have been well documented in research; therefore, this is an important topic for the counseling profession. Given the challenges faced by Veterans related to social connectivity and adaptation to the civilian milieu, a thematic analysis of qualitative research findings was conducted to determine how social and environmental factors influenced Veterans' perceptions of their transition from military to civilian life.

Method

An analysis of qualitative literature surrounding Veterans in transition was conducted with a focus on those studies that described the phenomenon of Veteran's transition from military to civilian life from various perspectives. This was a cross disciplinary literature review including scholarly literature from counseling, education, nursing, sociology, social work, political science, and psychology. A linear analysis of the literature yielded key terms. Terms were highlighted based upon the frequency of their occurrence which then led to the development of key patterns and themes.

Searching

The databases Medline, EMBASE, PubMed, Central, and PsychINFO were searched for publications between January 2006 and January 2016 related to Veterans in transition. Search terms included combinations of keywords relative to military culture, socialization, unit cohesion and vulnerability to socially intense situations for Veterans deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. Representative search terms included transition, readjustment, military culture, military environment, unit cohesion, social support, post 9/11, OIF/OEF/OND, transition, diffusion, redeployment, and syndromes. Once articles were identified, and authors known to publish on the topic were identified, a second searched was conducted for research published between 2010 and 2016.

The search parameters were limited to those studies whose focus was on social and contextual influences. Studies which focused on the influence of disabling conditions for Veterans in transition were not included. Studies which focused on Veteran perceptions of their experiences in transition from military to civilian life, including school, work, family, and community were included.

Quality Assessment

Studies were assessed for quality using a framework described by Thomas and colleagues (2012). The investigator examined study criteria related to the quality of the reporting of a study's aims, context, rationale, methods, and findings (e.g., was there an adequate description of the sample used and the methods for how the sample was selected and recruited. Other criteria related to the sufficiency of the strategies employed to present the findings in an understandable way (e.g., were concepts clearly stated), and finally the appropriateness of the study methods to assure those findings were rooted the Veterans own perspectives.

Thematic Synthesis

The synthesis took the form of three stages: free line-by-line coding of the findings of primary studies; the organization of these codes into related areas to construct common descriptive themes; and the development of analytical themes which were guided by the review of the literature related to transition theories. An analysis of the narratives was conducted using NVivo Qualitative Software, to identify existing patterns and to draw meaning from the data. A bottom-up approach was used in that the researcher read qualitative documents and created nodes when themes arose from the data during the coding process. Coding was conducted by identifying a passage of text in any of the documents that exemplified ideas or concepts and connecting it to a node that represented that idea or concept. Coding was conducted using the NVivo Document or Node Browser, Text Search queries and Word Frequency queries among the selected qualitative research documents.

Data abstracted from the studies included: sample characteristics, sample size, objectives, primary measures, and main findings. Eleven studies were identified which met the study criterion. These studies cumulatively included 237 male and female OIF/OEF Veterans, who were living in the community and responded to calls for in-person or telephone interviews. The cumulative mean for participant age across all 11 studies was 23 years-old. The journal articles that met inclusion criterion, a summary of their contents, and the results of the analysis of the transition experiences as reported by veterans are summarized in Table 1.

Results

Commonalities were noted among Veteran narrative descriptions of their individual and group behaviors. Common descriptive themes emerged relative to Veterans' attitudes and their perception of the transition process. The thematic analysis supported theory in that Veterans struggle to make sense of their individual identity in a civilian environment, that for some the military environment had become a set point, and that relational ties formed during the military socialization process remained fixed even out of that environment. This resulted in three new themes which were used to organize the narratives of Veterans: identity confusion, relational ties and environmental influence.

Table 1. *Summary of Qualitative Studies*

<u>Authors</u>	<u>Sample (n)</u>	<u>Gender</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Themes</u>
Ahern, Worthen, Masters, Lippman, Ozer & Moos, 2015	24	Both	26	Military as family, normal is alien, searching for new normal
Brinn & Auerbach, 2015	25	Male	29	Brotherhood, post-combat identity, civilians, finding meaning in the meaningless, warriors
Burkhardt and Hogan, 2013	20	Female	43	Being female in the military, transition, group support, making meaning out of being a civilian
Diramio, Jarvis, Iverson, Seher, & Anderson, 2015	13	Female	--	Pride, worth, self-doubt, peer support
Demers, 2011	45	Male	36	Deployment, warriors together, no fear, feeling high, crisis of identity, time travelers
Koenig, Maguen Monroy, Mayott & Seal, 2014	31	Both	30	Culture difference, inter and intrapersonal, challenges, influence of psychological state
Livingston, Havice, Cawthon, & Fleming, 2011	15	Male	--	Military influence, invisibility, peer support
Mankowski, Haskell, Brandt, & Mattocks, 2015	18	Female	45	Multiple roles, identity interference, disconnects
Osborne, N. J., 2014	14	Both	26	Cultural disconnect, connection to the institution, stigma
Rumann & Hamrick, 2010	6	Both	22	Role incongruity, internal conflicts, relationships, identity negotiation
Smith & True, 2014	26	Male	35	Context, collectivism, withdrawal, disconnect, combat identity

Identity Confusion

Across the qualitative studies identity conflict, cultural difference, and a sense of alienation were noted to describe how different Veterans felt and how different they felt they were perceived in the civilian world (Ahern et al., 2015). “I am pretty sure I am here alone, that's how I would explain it to everyone; I am an alien.....I am not the same person that they remembered” (Smith & True, 2014, p. 151). As civilians now themselves, Veterans indicated that they felt set apart from their peers “I don’t really feel like I am part of anything here” (Castro et al., 2015, p. 253).

Another reported

Your entire time in the military nothing you do is for you, everything you are belongs to the Marines. Then you get out of the military, and you try and get back into the civilian worlds, but you quickly realize that no one else is thinking that way no one thinks that everything they do they do for a team. (Smith & True, 2014, p. 152)

Confusion arose when Veterans believed they “no longer knew the rules of the game” forcing them to turn “emotions on and off like a light switch” (Demers, 2011). They felt that they were “no longer the same,” “don’t fit in.” Some subsumed their Veteran identity

I am tired of telling people I served in Afghanistan they look at me with this expression like, and is this guy going to snap my neck? Is he ok? When I told my advisor, the first thing she told me about was a really good counseling center on campus. (Osborne, 2014, p. 7)

Relational Ties

Reference to strong relational ties was consistent across studies, “The guys that I served with over there... we have that connection, that bond” (Ahern, 2015, p. 5). “You become attached to them, they truly are your family-and after returning you feel uprooted” (Rumann & Hamrick, 2012, p. 446). Another clearly related relational ties to a sense of safety as well as a willingness to die for one another

I just felt like these guys were my family, I never wanted deployment to end, we were together for so long, that deployment with those guys was my safe zone, whenever we’d go on convoys, I would feel so confident because I’d know I was with a team of guys, that we were either all going to die together, or else no one would die. (Smith & True, 2014, p. 154)

Environmental Influence

The final commonality across studies was the importance of the environment and for some, the desire to return to that environment. Veteran responses suggest a lack of preparedness for the spectrum of emotions they experienced and the difficulty they had in identifying environments bearing contextual resemblances to the military environment,

I think the two biggest problems, being completely separate from each other, that a soldiers might have coming back is he either sees the two worlds as completely separate and can’t relate to them, or he tries to attack the problems in his world, the same way he attached problems in the other world. (Rumann & Hendrick, 2010, p. 447)

Another veteran noted, “It’s really hard to put in words, but I just miss the environment. I miss the common goals and the way people put aside their own personal [agendas]” (Ahern et al., 2015, p. 6).

Challenges facing Veterans upon their return included boredom, “Boredom. You know, during deployment you function at such a high level, like, ‘What’s gonna happen? What’s gonna happen’...but when I went back to my old job I found myself falling asleep, we didn’t have any comradery” (Koenig, Maguen, Monroy, Mayott, & Seal, 2014). The “rush” of the military setting, a sense of purpose, and the lack of anything similar in the civilian context was noted, “I felt like I had a purpose over there, I was worthwhile, and I felt pretty good about it” (Demers, 2011, p. 171). One Veteran noted, “They call it combat stress disorder, but I think everyone gets

it a little bit, like for some you get used to the adrenalin rush because you're always in action. So you get used to the rush of being scared" (Rumann & Hamrick, 2012p. 441). Another reported, "I have never gotten the same thing on the civilian side" (Ahern, et al., 2015, p. 7) and "really, nothing can ever beat that rush, and nothing will ever be more significant" (Brinn & Auerbach, 2015, p. 6). These comments contrast well with this Veteran's willingness to return to combat, where life is perceived as normal,

It's a lot easier to go back into combat where things are normal than to deal with this stuff here... The idea of being a Marine in the United States, being put back into the box (civilian life) with this stupid shit, I would rather die in Iraq than fake it over here. (Demers, 2011, p. 169)

Discussion

Current research suggests that the Veterans' response to the military socialization process may have significant long-term effects. Therefore, research on post-deployment experiences among recently returning Veterans is critical to inform the development and dissemination of appropriate interventions for counseling services. The findings of this study suggest that while transitioning into and out of the military is part of the process for all service members, some Veterans cannot move past this final transition phase towards reintegration. The principles described for identity fusion and social intensity syndrome suggest that once intensely socialized into a group, individuals will tend to remain bonded with that group. For some Veterans, the psychological impact of separation from the group is likely to be an emotionally charged experience, creating identity confusion. The strong influence of relational ties and the alien nature of the new civilian environment may create relational barriers that inhibit the development of rapport with others, that may be misunderstood by counseling professionals and significant others. Given the complexity of this transition process it is important for professional counselors to be aware that individuals approaching these changes often do so with reluctance and only if remaining in the group is simply impossible (Bridges, 2013).

Nonetheless service members are compelled to change upon discharge. They must develop a new social identity and find a meaningful life in the civilian world as a U.S. military Veteran (Sorenson, 2015). Their known existence, whether they like it or not, is replaced by an unknown one. For some Veterans, a struggle exists in finding continuity between who they were, what others expect them to be, and whom they would like to be in the future. The source of the problem appears to lie within the military socialization process itself which is suited for preparing new recruits for combat but makes readjusting to civilian life a challenge. The process that contributes to an individual's willingness to risk life and limb for a group member may blur barriers between the individuals personal and group identity. This psychological overlapping may create conditions in which the Veterans perceive their own essence and strength as coupled to the group they belong to. Existing research and theory suggest that the transition from the military to the civilian environment can result in a perceived loss of purpose, a desire to return to combat, high risk behaviors, and isolation. The thematic analysis of qualitative studies supported the literature reviewed, revealing that Veterans experienced identity confusion, a loss of purpose in their new environment, and the inability to establish relational ties of the type experienced by military members. The inability to recreate the emotional and environmental set points they experienced when deployed, created significant challenges for Veterans in social connectivity

and peer relations. As has been established in the literature reviewed, both of these elements are crucial for a successful transition into a new environment.

The unanswered question raised by this thematic analysis becomes, what can be done to defuse or alter the set point if it is, in fact, problematic? For strongly fused Veterans, in other words those for which the irrevocability principle is evident, interventions are needed which will facilitate “defusion.” Logic suggests that moving the Veteran towards immersion in a new support structure, should encourage a shift in identities from military to civilian and programs have been established that provide Veterans with support in the community, vocational, and family reconnection. However, as the literature review suggest, these programs may not always achieve what is intended. Absent from their support group, some Veterans may become completely alienated from civilian society, perceiving civilian engagement as threatening or compromising. A visit to a popular Veterans chat and blog site, called “Dysfunctional Veterans,” (n.d.), whose motto is “Leave us alone,” gives an example of this mindset. The challenge in engaging with these Veterans will be significant, due to the psychological distancing that often interferes with the therapeutic process between military and on military civilians (Exum, Coll & Weiss, 2011; Liberman, Trope & Stephan, 2007).

People can easily get stuck by failing to change the way they see themselves and their outlook on life (Bridges, 2004). This why it is so vital to assist Veterans in becoming intentional about shedding attachments to their past way of thinking, doing and being to discover new ways of living that are meaningful and purposeful. For those who are willing, the process of re-connecting with one's civilian identity and reestablishing oneself within the community of civilians may take weeks, months, or longer (Savion, 2012). During this time, Veterans will likely experience heightened emotional and social distress. Helping Veterans see their personal self as distinct from the group may improve their ability to embrace a more transcendent sense of self, opening the door to acceptance of new relationships.

An example of a useful counseling technique may be found in acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT; Hayes & Strosahl, 2004). ACT uses acceptance and mindfulness strategies, together with commitment and behavior-change strategies, to increase psychological flexibility. This therapeutic intervention encourages new insights into the effects of emotional avoidance and imagined ideals to encourage defusion from mental content and identification of achievable values (Hayes et al., 1999; Hayes et al., 2013). In addition, Bridges (2004) and Scholssberg, Waters, and Goodman (1995) both offer methods that move individuals through transitions to anticipated and unanticipated change. Both view transition as happening in phases, both are holistic in nature, and both posit that individuals cope best with transition when they remain flexible and use multiple strategies (Bridges, 2004; Schlossberg et al., 1995).

As professional counselors take a more active role within institutional settings which provide services to Veterans, they will become active in connecting Veterans to needed services or in influencing the nature of services being provided to a Veteran in transition. Zimbardo and colleagues (2015) note that the traditional supports provided to military members who are exiting the military are “insufficient to address the complexities veterans will face as they inadequately address military discrepant cultural norms” (p. 18). If the transition is to be successful, the difficulties that Veterans face must be dealt with by a full range of human service professionals

who can provide multiple forms of service immediately after, if not before discharge. These may include primary prevention, diagnostics, treatment, rehabilitation, education, outreach, and community support programs. To become active and valuable contributors in this interdisciplinary process, professional counselors must be able to demonstrate military, cultural competency, and recognize the important role that military comradery and group membership play in the lives of Veterans and be active ambassadors for Veterans in the community (Meyer, 2015). For some Veterans seeking assistance, the therapeutic relationship alone may provide sufficient opportunities for the readjustment process to take place, while other Veterans may need a referral to other supports. While the development of new relationships and groups outside of the military is necessary for transition into the community, counselors are working with Veterans, cannot ignore the salience of military group reference and the value of peer support for Veterans (Hinojosa & Hinojosa, 2011). Peer support offers more than a chance to be with others who share the same experience; these groups have at their core a source of hope, healing, and empowerment for their members.

Limitations of the Study

The outcomes of this study provides value to the existing literature surrounding Veterans in transition as it contributes to a collective understanding of the existing data, not by establishing definitive causal links (Bearman & Dawson, 2011). In some qualitative synthesis studies teams are used to establish triangulation and thus study rigor, and a team was not used in this study. There are several cohort groups which were not noted in the research reviewed. They include, but are not limited to, the variance in experience between Active Duty and National Guard/Reserve Veterans, between returning male and female service members, and those from racial and ethnic minority backgrounds who may face additional difficulties with transition. In sum, the findings represent structured judgements based upon a small number of studies; consequently, caution should be used in applying these findings too broadly across the population of Veterans.

Future Research

Research on post-deployment experiences among recently returning Veterans is critical to inform the development and dissemination of appropriate interventions for counseling services (Sayer et al., 2011). Despite the availability of research that addresses the physical and mental health causalities of conflict, basic knowledge of the personal and socially meaningful outcomes of those without such complications is lacking (Finley et al., 2010; Bradford et al., 2012). Research which identifies how transition impacts families and those whose identification or help-seeking is limited by stigma is critical to assure that support is offered to the entire spectrum of individuals who are impacted by the military socialization process. Since social intensity theory is currently measuring the effect of military cohesion on male Veterans, research into the effect of cohesion on female Veterans is needed.

In addition, future research that captures the subjective voice of the service member will provide, researchers, clinicians, and policymakers will provide an enhanced understanding of the environmental barriers and facilitators influencing the transition process. While additional quantitative studies are desirable to support qualitative theories, there is a need for concentrated

efforts to advance the science of measurement of transition from military to civilian groups (Whiteneck, et al., 2004).

Conclusion

The intent of the study was to draw unique correlations between theory and qualitative findings to spur interest in the topic of Veteran transition for future research. Identity fusion and social intensity syndrome represent challenges for professional counselors. The results of this study place emphasis on the subjective experience of Veterans. Consideration of the social and environmental influence of the military experience, and consideration of the principles of identity fusion and social intensity, provides a new perspective on what might otherwise be considered problematic behavior. These findings create questions and opportunities for further research on the influence of military socialization on the transition experience for today's returning military members.

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