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THE WARRIOR-TO-SCHOLAR IDENTITY TRANSFORMATION:

A STUDY OF ENLISTED COMBAT STUDENT VETERANS

AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO

BY

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B.A., Business, University of New Mexico, 2015

M.A., Organization Information and Learning Sciences,
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DISSERTATION

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DEDICATION

The Warrior to Scholar Identity Transformation dissertation is dedicated to all Armed Forces Service Members who served, serve, and will serve. And to Dr. Patricia Boverie, whose guidance in growing me into a professional researcher, inspiring me to focus on the veteran community, and her unconditional support of my learning objectives were my grounding rod throughout the last five years. I will always aspire to be an educator, human being, and professional of her high stature.

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative emergent study investigated the identity transformation experiences of

enlisted combat student veterans (ECSVs) from warriors into scholars at the University of

New Mexico (UNM). ECSVs are a sub-population of the student veteran community who

served in military combat jobs and thus underwent a military indoctrination process that

inculcated a warrior identity in them. When ECSVs bring the warrior identity with them

to campus, it may conflict with the scholar identity, causing them to struggle to assimilate

into the university environment. The study used semi-structured individual interviews

and a focus group for data collection and open, thematic, and values coding for the

analysis. It yielded several themes: UNM as a transformative space, identity acquisition

as a ceremonial process, the importance of imposter syndrome, help-seeking, socializing,

and indoctrination vigilance. The study calls for both ECSVs and the university to engage

transformative learning processes to support their journey to become scholars.

Keywords: Enlisted combat student veterans, identity transformation, military,

scholars, university, and warrior.

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Introduction

"The nation that insists upon drawing a broad line of demarcation between the fighting

man and the thinking man is liable to find its fighting done by fools and its thinking done

by cowards."

—Butler (1889, p. 85)

Fighting men and women have been instrumental in the construction and defense

of nations throughout human history. This is no different in the United States Armed

Forces, where combat warriors are required to conduct very difficult, inhumane, and ugly

tasks under the "defense of the nation" motif. These men and women serve in active duty,

Reserves, and National Guard combat units and then return to civil life after service. This

study is primarily interested in *enlisted combat student veterans* (ECSVs). This is a new

category constructed by combining enlisted combat warriors and student veterans in

higher education. *Combat veterans* "are the men who happened to be called upon to fight

lines" (Congress, 1941, pp. 245–246), and women have also recently been authorized to

serve in combat roles. In the near future, research studies may include them in the combat

veteran construct. "A Student *veteran* is any student who is a current or former member

of the active-duty military, the National Guard, or Reserves, regardless of deployment

status, combat experience, legal veteran status, or GI Bill use" (Vacchi, 2012, p. 17).

Therefore, ECSVs are former military combat arms warriors who have enrolled in

colleges and universities seeking to become scholars by attaining their baccalaureate

degree (Dr. Coleman, personal communication, November 7, 2019). Their military

service includes participating in occupations within the combat arms arena, i.e., air

defense, artillery, intelligence, infantry, military police, and special operations groups. I

selected ECSVs for this study because they possess unique identity transformation

experiences that have not yet been explored. This study traced their identity

transformations from civilians to combat warriors and then from warriors into scholars at

the University of New Mexico (UNM). These lived transformative experiences are

unique to this small sub-group of the student veteran population and are produced

through participation in military combat fields and studying in the university academic

system.

ECSVs are a unique sub-group amongst the student veteran body, as they enlisted

in military service shortly after completing their high school studies and have limited

experience in adult civilian and academic life. This differs from officers who become

scholars by attaining a baccalaureate degree prior to entering military service, meaning

that they enlist at an older age and have the opportunity to mature and to experience

civilian and academic life; before engaging in the military indoctrination process. While

officers lead combat units, they may not participate in actual fighting on the battlefield.

Other student veterans serve in military occupations that are similar to civilian

occupations and lifestyles, as accountants, lawyers, logisticians, and more. An important

distinction to make is that, in actual combat, soldiers must sacrifice their individual

identity for a collectivist identity "to enable recruits to view themselves in collective

terms" (McGurk et al., 2006, p. 13). The military service mantra is "God, country,

military service, and unit," and this informs the warrior's ethos.

In the social sciences, there is some knowledge regarding the integration or

transition of student veterans in general into higher education institutions. Eaton (2014)

wrote about the transition of combat warriors into civilian life, linking the warrior identity to Jung's warrior archetype. Additional studies are beginning to break down the student veteran population into sub-groups, such as combat, LGBTQ+, and women student veterans. Combat veterans have produced autobiographical accounts of battlefield experiences, such as *The Things They Carried* by Tim O'Brian (1990). O'Brian (1990) does an extensive job of narrating his experiences in the Vietnam conflict. Other veterans have authored books about combat tactics that may be applied in the business environment or in other fields. For instance, Dr. Hoge's *Once a Warrior, Always A Warrior* (2010) examined the warrior transition home including psychological conditions, coping strategies, and resiliency.

The lack of knowledge about student veterans is challenging university stakeholders to address systemic shortcomings by becoming more culturally responsive: "When academic advisors, faculty members, and staff know the issues of and resources for veterans, then colleges and universities can facilitate student veterans' achievement of personal and academic aspirations" (Ryan et al., 2011, pp. 61–62). Other studies suggest that colleges and universities are developing varying service structures for student veterans. For example, Daly and Garrity (2013) asked, "does variation exist in the organizational structure designed to service the needs of veteran students at 'military friendly' institutions?" and they then "found broad variation in department placement, level of the position, and whether service of veteran students was a collateral duty or sole job responsibility" (pp. 10–11).

Blaauw-Hara (2017) revealed the perception in higher education that student veterans lack learning abilities or at least question their ability to produce high quality

academic work. He drew attention to learning disconnects between the military and

academic environments, indicating that student veterans have learning skills that need to

be modified to fit academic classroom demands. Another distinction Blaauw-Hara (2017)

made was between the use of pedagogy, the instruction of children, and andragogy, the

instruction of adults, to design instruction bridging the student veteran learning gap.

Student veterans are adult learners entering higher education institutions as they return to

civilian life from military service; therefore, Blaauw-Hara (2017) was correct in arguing

that andragogy should be the approach used to instruct them.

These systemic problems negatively impact not only student veterans and ECSVs,

but also university budgets, diversity, and resource acquisition efforts. When student

veterans enroll in university courses, they bring federal dollars from various Department

of Veterans Affairs educational programs. The most well-known of these programs is the

GI Bill of Rights, enacted by the United States Congress in 1944.

Context

In the last 20 years, the United States has engaged in two large-scale wars in

Afghanistan and Iraq. These wars have produced an increased enrollment of student

veterans in colleges and universities:

> Recent military operations in Iraq (Operation Iraqi Freedom, OIF; Operation New
> Dawn, OND) and Afghanistan (Operation Enduring Freedom, OEF) represent the
> most sustained ground combat operations since the Vietnam era. As over 2.5
> million OIF/OEF/OND veterans return home, many are attending college using
> benefits provided by the U.S. government. (Borsari et al., 2017, p. 166)

This increase in student veteran presence on higher education campuses is

challenging leaders throughout government and higher education to meet student

veterans' needs. Some universities have created veteran resource centers, administered by

a veteran service officer (usually a low- to mid-level university staff member) to process

the educational benefits and operate the centers.

Student veterans may also organize and operate a student veteran group on

campus; some groups may even be affiliated with the Student Veterans of America

national organization. These leadership efforts are admirable and may yield some positive

results, but there is still more to do:

> Student veterans often face complicated situations—such as working through
> confusing or perplexing expectations in regard to personal and social roles;
> resolving unpredictable disruptions of their good standing with respect to
> eligibility for services or financial assistance; negotiating, ending, or initiating
> personal relationships; locating or creating comfortable and supportive
> environments; or resuming their life as a student—frequently with greater
> seriousness of purpose than the student population at large. (Rumann & Hamrick,
> 2009, p. 30)

Much like the Department of Veterans Affairs, colleges and universities are well

intentioned in serving student veterans but may lack the knowledge to effectively

facilitate their identity transformation.

UNM has been an innovative or proactive institution in developing the student

veteran support system. This started with the 2008 proclamation by New Mexico

Governor Bill Richardson that created the Military and Veteran Resource Center

(MVRC) and the Student Veteran of UNM Association (SVUNM). The MVRC started

with office space in Mesa Vista Hall with one veteran education certifying officer. It now

employs five veteran staff members, including certifying officers, veteran program

coordinators, and numerous student veteran work studies. The Center is now part of the

Student Affairs department and has seen its budget increase over the last 5 years. The

SVUNM is a chapter within the Student Veterans of America national organization,

which provides additional resources to its members. In 2018, the *Military Times*

magazine recognized UNM as a "Top 10 Military-Friendly" institution. Like most

institutions of higher education, the UNM veteran structure is not perfect and has plenty

of room to continue to improve its veteran-centric programs, resources, and support

services.

Positionality Statement

　　　This study is important to me personally because I served in the United States

Army as an air defense specialist and was deployed to Bosnia in 1996 and Kosovo in

1999. My identity as a combat warrior was cemented at the end of basic training at the

graduation ceremony and supported throughout my career in a combat unit. I left the

army in May of 2001 and struggled for the next 10 years to integrate back into civilian

life. This is a common experience in the veteran community. In 2011, I enrolled in

college at Central New Mexico Community College to pursue a business degree; this was

the start of my own warrior-to-scholar identity transformation process as an ECSV.

Throughout the last 21 years in civilian life, I had to figure out my identity, psychological

conditions, and systemic processes, such as how to become a student, scholar, and now a

Ph.D. candidate and researcher. Once I healed myself from my past experiences, I dealt

with the conflicted warrior identity in civilian life that caused me a lot of problems. I

decided to set aside the warrior identity by leaving it in the past military service while

crafting a new identity that I call the *maverick scholar*.

　　　In becoming a scholar at UNM, I served in many roles: as President of SVUNM,

as a founding member of the Women Student Veterans of UNM Association, and as a

Councilmember plus Vice-Finance Chair in the Graduate and Professional Student

Association (GPSA). Serving in these leadership roles allowed me to advocate for an

increase in resources and support services for student veterans on campus with great

success. For example, I participated in attaining and operating the Student Veteran

Support Building, fundraising nearly $500,000 for veteran programs and renovation

funding. Serving the student veteran body in these roles provided me with unique insights

into the operations of the university and its veteran structure.

      My positionality is both as an insider and outsider. I am ECSV that transformed

my identity from a warrior into a scholar and, at the same time, advocated and led student

veteran organizations. I cultivated strong relationships with student veterans, the UNM

administration, faculty, and staff that informed my insider positionality. As a doctoral

research student, I was an outsider seeking to explore the ECSV's warrior-to-scholar

identity transformation experiences at UNM. This researcher role differed from the

insider positionality, as I then needed to co-construct identity transformation knowledge

with the ECSVs that chose to participate in this study. The participants did inquire about

my personal history as an ECSV, vetting their military service, Ph.D. candidate

credentials, and intentions in conducting this study. Being open with the participants-built

rapport, limited any potential influences that may have impacted this study from the

shared military service, and possible identity transformation experiences. In the data

collection process, I refrained from sharing their own identity transformation narrative as

it might influence the participants' telling of their own experiences.

Marginalization

      The marginalization of veterans is a black eye on the face of this nation and

remains an unresolved problem today. After their military service, veterans must still

fight on multiple fronts: in academia, in national and state legislatures, and in the public

sphere, in order to gain the basic resources, they need to reconstruct a decent quality of life. Some veterans would agree with President Roosevelt's stance, expressed in 1935, "that wearing a uniform did not accord a citizen special treatment" (Bannier, 2006, p. 36; Ford & Miller, 1995, p. 12). He made this statement as veterans were seeking federal governmental support to attend classes in higher education. Even though President Roosevelt maintained an anti-veteran stance during most of his presidency, he ultimately relented by signing the GI Bill into law in 1944. Edmondson (2002, p. 824) and Bannier (2006, pp. 36–37) stated that, "[p]lanning to seek reelection and recognizing the potential voting power of millions of veterans, President Roosevelt set aside his earlier opposition and quietly requested that a variety of government and private agencies make postwar planning recommendations to Congress".

Even after the GI Bill was passed to provide financial support for student veterans enrolled in post-secondary institutions, colleges and universities have been less than welcoming of student veterans. The worst treatment of returning veterans may have been directed at Vietnam veterans; in the words of Hoge (2010), "Vietnam veterans faced yearlong tours involving high-intensity conventional and guerrilla warfare. They faced a hostile public upon their return that had little understanding or compassion for the impact of their combat experiences" (p. xvi). This marginalization may have contributed to a deficient support system structure when compared to those in place for other cultural groups, including White, African American, Hispanic, or Latino, LGBTQ, ROTC cadets, and women. Bannier (2006) observed that, "[c]olleges and universities in the United States were historically elitist institutions; many within those institutions found the thought of opening their doors to primarily working-class veterans outrageous" (p. 37).

The ongoing marginalization of student veterans and ECSVs may negatively impact their assimilation efforts into greater academic life. Phillips and Lincoln (2017) formulated their veteran critical theory and stated that, "looking at the veteran is important, we need ways to look at the larger picture and push for equity, equality, and, when appropriate, emancipation" (p. 660). Critical theory studies have increased marginalized students' ability to achieve a sense of belonging in a hostile environment and to make recommendations to create a more equal learning environment or academic society. "The uneven distribution of opportunities and disparate outcomes for students of different racial backgrounds has been a stubbornly persistent problem in U.S. higher education" (Teranishi, 2007, p. 37). UNM is proactively seeking to reduce marginalization through a robust equity and inclusion structure that includes the Division of Equity and Inclusion, cultural academic programs, and resource centers.

Protected Status

Student veterans in general do not seek special treatment due to their military service, but they do have the same rights as all students to access education, healthcare, and other support services as mandated by federal, state, and university policies. The veteran population is one of the protected classes under the Office of Equal Opportunity (OEO) at all levels of government and higher education. UNM's OEO 2019 Annual Report lists 17 protected classes among enrolled students that include veterans: "The 17 protected statuses are age, ancestry, color, ethnicity, gender identity, gender/sex, genetic information, medical condition, national origin, physical or mental disability, pregnancy, race, religion, sexual orientation, spousal affiliation, and veteran status" (p. 3). The protected statuses identify groups vulnerable to discrimination that require legislative

protection. Such legislative policies are created primarily to correct or police a level of

discrimination or marginalization that exists within publicly funded organizations. UNM

has the policy in place, so it is important to explore the resource system it offers to all

students. UNM has culturally based (ethnic, gender, race) academic programs, resource

centers, and support services. Differences may exist in funding for each resource center

or program, which impacts their ability to provide adequate services and support to the

student body. For example, the Reserve Officer Training Corp's cadets and its military

science program may differ from that of students in African American and Hispanic

programs of study.

Identity

According to Erikson (1980), identity is the sum of negotiated experiences, self-

perception, and social programming that individuals use to engage with the social world.

It includes our intrapersonal conditions, familial engagement and history, and the habits

of mind (beliefs, schemas, and values) we acquire through the life process that allow us

to experience our lives. Thus, identity is the human tool we use to engage, recognize

individuals, and their place within the social world.

The identity formation process suggests a dichotomy between individual personal

development and the social world people engage with during development: "Our identity

is formed in webs of affiliation within a shared life world" (Mezirow, 2012, p. 90). The

"psycho" in Erikson's concept refers to the intrapersonal psychological development of a

person, while the "social" refers to the external world the person engages in simply by

living in a community on this planet. According to Waterman (1982), "Erikson's theory

of identity development—that movement from adolescence to adulthood involves

changes in identity that can be characterized as progressive developmental shifts" (p.

355). During this transition, the adolescent gains greater autonomy and starts to develop

an identity. Self-identity is similar to Mezirow's (1990) habit of mind, which informs the

identity frame of reference: "A habit of mind is a set of assumptions—broad, generalized,

orienting predispositions that act as a filter for interpreting the meaning of experience" (p.

86). The self-concept falls under the psychological assumption, which is one of the six

assumptions that inform the habits of mind concept:

> The six assumptions are sociolinguistic (the study of language in social settings),
> moral-ethical (the practice of moral behaviors or norms), epistemic (learning
> practices or processes), philosophical (the world perspective or view held by each
> person), psychological (the identity or self-concept which guides our life
> experiences), and aesthetic (our judgement system or attitude that differentiates
> between beauty/ugly, good/evil, humor/tragic, etc.). (Taylor & Cranton, 2012, p.
> 83)

The social part of the identity formation process for enlisted combat student

veterans takes place in military and academic environments. A glance from a distance at

the environments and resources that contribute to identity formation/transformation is

important. At the time of military enlistment, many ECSVs are in the early stages of the

identity development process as adolescents.

The military inculcates the combat warrior identity through its indoctrination

system. The Department of Defense (DoD) invests billions of government dollars into

this system annually in order to maintain a dedicated cadre (drill sergeants), training

centers, and other support systems. ECSVs willingly alter their identity within the context

of military training centers. The indoctrination process incorporates basic training,

advanced individual training, and combat unit life: "Indoctrination into the military is

epitomized by the experience of basic training. Reflected in film and novels, the world of

basic training is portrayed as a harsh, intense, and unforgiving experience in which

individuals are turned into killing machines" (McGurk et al., 2006, p. 28). The first two

stages are designed to break down the adolescent's civilian identity and to replace it with

the combat warrior identity. This warrior identity is then maintained throughout the

warrior's career within the combat unit. Similarly, ECSVs enroll in university programs

and willingly participate in university academic courses or programs in order to become

scholars. UNM's financial resources come from both federal and state governments

through a variety of funding packages in the forms of financial aid, operational funding,

and research grants, salaries for faculty and staff members, additional support resources,

and services.

　　　　Both the military and university represent similar hierarchical structures that are

designed to produce identity transformations. The biggest difference between these two

environments is their approach towards the identity transformation process: the military

employs a harsh indoctrination practice, whereas universities opt for a developmental or

growth learning approach. These social environments contribute to the identity

transformation process by imposing requirements to become either an enlisted combat

veteran (warrior) or a student on the way to becoming a scholar. There are no ways to

adopt these identities other than engaging and participating in the context of each social

environment.

　　　　Military indoctrination produces the warrior identity, while the university growth

learning system produces the scholar identity. A scholar is a learned or erudite person,

especially one who has profound knowledge of a particular subject (Dictionary.com,

2020). A scholar becomes educated by participating in and meeting educational

requirements set forth by an academic program or university. Being educated means to

train by formal instruction and supervised practice, especially in a skill, trade, or profession (Merriam-Webster, 2021). It also means achieving an awakened liberated state of being in one's own reality within the context of national and global structures (Dr. Aeron Haynie, personal communication, 2021). Freire (2000) called this educated state *conscientização*, defining it as "the deepening of the attitude of awareness characteristic of all emergence" (p. 109). This study combines all of these definitions, defining a scholar as a person that attains a university degree, possesses critical thinking skills, and has the ability to apply their skillset within a real-world professional context or as academically educated professionals/lifelong learners (Dr. Aeron Haynie, personal communication, 2021).

ECSVs seeking to identify as either warriors or scholars must engage with the military or academic structures, their resources, and stakeholders, including administrators, drill sergeants, faculty, and support staff. In so doing, they may undergo unique identity transformation experiences that are worthy of being explored, that contribute to the creation of new knowledge, and that form the foundation upon which scholars can conduct future research studies. These identity transformations occur at the epochal or core level of the person and are the main lens through which they experience life. These identity transformations are not shallow or superficial; rather, the change processes may be drastic and painful. At the same time, they may be empowering, uplifting, or build resiliency by generating new ways of being.

Identity Transformations

The term *transformation* is a construct linked to other terms such as *altering*, *becoming*, *changing*, *conversion*, and *metamorphosis*. The term *becoming* is strongly

linked with transformation, as it has been applied to many different ways of being. In the

social sciences, becoming and transformation are linked together through studies on ways

to renegotiate one's identity for a multitude of reasons. Stetsenko (2012) studied

personhood and stated that, "humans come to be and come to know—each other,

themselves, and the world—while transforming their world and, in the process while

collectively creating their own life and their own nature, along with their society and

history" (p. 148). On the other hand, Natanasabapathy and Maathuis-Smith (2019)

observed that, "[b]ecoming is a transition towards an embodiment of the desired change

which will demonstrate a transformative movement" (p. 370). For this study, *identity*

transformation is defined as the altering of one's core identity or psychological habit of

mind by engaging in transformative learning processes in order to become a scholar.

Thus, in being or by existing in the world, we create our personal identity through

a dance between two forces: the self and the social world. The transformation of identity

becomes an exercise of renegotiating who we are and who we wish to be while existing

within social environments. As we engage in different social environments, such as

academia and the military, we then transform our identities.

ECSVs may experience multiple identity transformations by engaging in both the

military indoctrination and university growth learning processes. The military designed

its indoctrination process to ensure it would produce a civilian-to-warrior identity

transformation. This indoctrination process is inculcated upon enlisted military personnel

by people in positions of authority, i.e., family figures, military officials, prison

authorities, and religious leaders. As Ioana and Cracsner (2016) noted, "[t]he first step

towards indoctrination is the deconstruction and reconstruction on one's self in order to

better suit the needs of the indoctrinator—be it a group, an ideology, a political party,

religious dogma, or the society itself" (p. 573).

This indoctrination process results in a dehumanized identity that recalls Pavlov's

(1906) work on classical conditioning or conditioned reflexes that resulted from his work

with dogs. As Eaton (2014) stated, "[t]hose joining the military are immersed in a warrior

culture and develop a strong connection to the warrior archetype. The warrior archetype

is no longer an aspect of the collective unconscious called upon in times of need but part

of the identity of the person" (p. 57). There is no program to harmonize the warrior

identity with a civilian or academic identity. The last program any military service

member will engage in the out-processing cycle is the Transition Assistance Program

(TAP). This program is designed to assist military service members in their transition

back to civilian life with introductory services that focus on employment and veteran

resources. In this program, service members are encouraged to write resumes to help

apply for future professional career endeavors and also to engage or enroll in Department

of Veterans Affairs services.

To my knowledge, no comprehensive study exists on the effectiveness of the

program as competing interests exist. For example, the Department of Defense rates the

program as highly effective, while participants may rate it lower:

> The experience described by many of the participants suggests that, as predicted, they did not experience a transitional space that was effective in aiding them in moving into a new phase of their life. Many reported not having attended the TAP program offered to them by the military. Those who did attend found the program lacking any benefit for them. (Eaton, 2014, p. 57)

My observation is that DoD has a financial and public relations interest in

maintaining the program; therefore, it attempts to project an image of proactively

transitioning military service members back to civilian life. However, in the absence of

an identity intervention program enabling veterans to return to a civilian identity, it is

possible that the warrior identity will persist throughout a veteran's lifetime.

The intrapersonal desire to become self-actualized, liberated, and/or to generate a

new identity ignites a path to identity transformation. As individuals enroll and

participate in courses at the university, they are seeking to become scholars. For most

traditional students, the scholar identity is generated through the novice-to-scholar

growth learning process. Traditional students arrive on campus directly from high school

with little experience as adult learners, and there they develop into independent lifelong

learners. Kidwell (2005) stated the following about traditional students' transformation

into scholars by graduating their university programs:

> If the student survives this academic hazing, he or she will have learned two
> important lessons that will prove invaluable over the tenure of the college
> experience: (1) College is not high school; one cannot just "coast" through; and
> (2) The successful college student takes responsibility for his or her education. No
> longer the passive recipient of the knowledge bequeathed by the teacher, the
> student has now become an active participant in constructing knowledge. (p. 253-
> 254)

Unlike traditional students, ECSVs may arrive on campus with an established

identity as experienced learners. Very similar to mature age or returning students who are

experienced learners, they may have to modify their learning skills to align with

academic learning requirements. Possibly, the only differences between ECSVs and

returning students are their individual identities. Both populations may share the same

life circumstances as they engage in university life, and these include familial, financial,

and social responsibilities beyond the classroom. Members of these two student

populations may share similar learning needs in the classroom. Whannell and Whannell

(2015) noted that, "[i]n the case of mature age students who have been absent from

education for a substantial period and who are well established in existing long-term

social, family, and work contexts, the individual is attempting to assume the new identity

and role required as a university student" (p. 45). However, within the university

environment, ECSVs may experience various identities as proposed by the sixth tenet of

veteran critical theory suggesting that "veterans experience multiple identities at once"

(Phillips & Lincoln, 2017, p. 662). Reflecting back to my undergraduate years, I did

experience multiple identities, as I am a male ECSV with a single father with a Hispanic

background and warrior identity seeking to become a scholar.

Other transformative learning constructs include shifts in paradigms of belief,

schemas, or values. These are categorized as shallow transformational experiences:

> It is clear that there are many themes and variations to transformative learning;
> some change our hearts forever as they transform our identity as a core theme.
> Others, in their many variations, bring us into a larger consciousness as we forge
> new patterns of connections that change the vibration of our cells and our souls,
> our brains and our beings. (Tisdell, 2012, pp. 33–34)

Using the word *shallow* does not minimize the value of a transformation as a person

expands the schema of their world. However, this study focuses on the *epochal*

transformation that may be experienced as ECSVs shift from the warrior to the scholar

identity. Mezirow (1990) defined *epochal transformation* as "a sudden, dramatic,

reorienting insight" (p. 86). He characterized this type of transformation as altering the

core identity, and this does not happen often or to everyone. Lave and Wenger's (1991)

work on social practice theory highlighted the identity transformation of learners through

engagement with the social world by living daily life. They described such engagement

as:

> Common ground for exploring their integral, constitutive relations, their
> entailments, and effects in a framework of social practice theory, in which the
> production, transformation, and change in identities of persons, knowledgeable
> skill in practice, and communities of practice are realized in the lived-in world of
> engagement in everyday activity. (p. 47)

Vygotsky in his book *Mind in Society* (1978) stated that, "[t]he mastering of nature and the mastering of behavior are mutually linked, just as man's alteration of nature alters man's own nature" (p. 55). Since the identity transformation process is intricately linked with transformative learning theory and practices, the identity of a learner may therefore be transformed within the university environment. ECSVs may arrive on campus with a warrior identity and begin the identity transformation process of becoming scholars as they participate in academic coursework and engage in campus life.

Conceptual Framework

Arriving at this conceptual framework was an iterative process that included presentations at national conferences for the Student Veterans of America, at the 2016 National Conference in San Antonio, Texas, and at the 2018 National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, held in Los Angeles, California. The presentations focused on student veteran chapter leadership and student veteran mentorship by non-veteran students on campus. Figure 1 depicts the inputs of the two transformative environments that impact the transformation of ECSVs from warriors into scholars.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework

Warrior to Scholar Identity Transformation Conceptual Framework

Psychosocial Development **Transformative Learning** **Veteran Critical Theories**

Transformation 1 (T1):
1. ECSV experience (?)
2. Military indoctrination
3. Warrior identity construction process:
   a) Basic training
   b) Advanced Individual Training
   c) Combat unit
4. Military hierarchy (chain of command) with drill sergeants and support staff as transformative specialist.

Military   ECSV   UNM

T1   T2
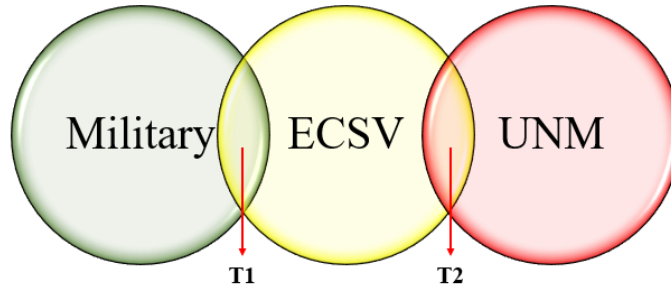
Transformation 2 (T2):
1. ECSV experience (?)
2. UNM learning growth process
3. Scholar identity construction process at UNM:
   a) Academics
   b) Campus life
   c) Student support
4. Open campus independent learning environment with faculty and staff as transformative specialist.

ECSVs encounter these structural identity transformative environments and the key stakeholders that operate within them. The military has a multi-layered indoctrination system, a hierarchical authoritative staff, and an isolated combat training environment. By contrast, the university provides an academic growth learning process (identity transformation) and an open campus environment consisting of faculty and staff as stakeholders. An ECSV may experience two identity transformations at the epochal core level T1: civilian to warrior and T2: warrior to scholar. Foundational to this conceptual framework are the psychosocial development, transformative learning, and veteran critical theories.

Psychosocial Development Theory

Erik Erikson (1980) developed psychosocial development theory based on the psychoanalytical works of Sigmund Freud. Erikson produced the Eight Stages of Development, which are: trust vs. mistrust; autonomy vs. shame and doubt; initiative vs.

guilt; industry vs. inferiority; identity and repudiation vs. identity diffusion; intimacy and

solidarity vs. isolation; generativity vs. self-absorption; integrity vs. despair. For this

study, the focus lies in the identity and repudiation vs. identity diffusion constructs. As

mentioned above, Erikson used the term *psychosocial* to discuss identity formation where

the intrapersonal condition of the person and social engagement occur. The identity

development, formation, and transformation constructs have been applied to a variety of

university social groups. Mezirow (1990) developed his transformative learning theory

after studying women's experiences upon returning to the higher education environment.

However, these constructs have never been used to study the ECSV community.

ECSVs engage both the military and university as social environments that impact

their psychological habits of mind through their identities either as warriors or as

scholars. Their identity transformation paths may be seen as adolescents enlist in the

military and arrive on campus as adult learners seeking to become scholars. The warrior-

to-scholar identity transformation may be the main place within the growth learning

environment of higher education or post-secondary adult education institutions.

Transformative Learning Theory

Merriam-Webster (n.d.) defines *identity* as an individual's distinguishing

character or personality. Identity transformation is the altering of one's core identity or

psychological habit of mind by engaging in the transformative learning process in order

to become or generate a new identity. This identity transformation fits into Mezirow's

(1991) concept of *epochal transformation* which births a new state of being, habit of

mind, or knowing.

The common thread between the work of Erikson (1980) and Mezirow (1991) is

that they produced their identity theories at the core being level of human existence. I

recognized that not all transformations are as deep or as drastic as epochal

transformations. Some may be as superficial as changing a belief due to being exposed to

new information or a new experience. Mezirow (1990) further identified a 10-step

process for transformative learning that includes:

> Transformations often follow some variation of the following phases of meaning
> becoming clarified: 1. A disorienting dilemma, 2. Self-examination with feelings
> of fear, anger, guilt, or shame, 3. A critical assessment of assumptions, 4.
> Reconciliation that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared,
> 5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions, 6. Planning a
> course of action, 7. Acquiring new knowledge and skills for implementing one's
> plan, 8. Provisional trying of new roles, 9. Building competence and self-
> confidence in new roles and relationships, 10. A reintegration into one's life on
> the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective. (p. 86)

Another construct at play in the transformation process is the subjective reframing

an individual undertakes: "Subjective reframing commonly involves an intensive and

difficult emotional struggle as old perspectives become challenged and transformed"

(Mezirow, 1990, p. 87). The identity transformation process presents many intrapersonal

challenges that may require persistence and strong willpower. We can equate it to the

cleansing of the intrapersonal landscape where a person works proactively to heal their

emotional baggage while adopting new habits of mind.

Veteran Critical Theory

Phillips and Lincoln's (2017) veteran critical theory (VCT) is built on the solid

foundation of other critical theories. VCT provides a resource for student veterans and

veteran-focused researchers to challenge the status quo within academic environments.

Phillips and Lincoln (2017) stated:

> Veteran Critical Theory, therefore, is a theory designed for the insider, those researcher-practitioners that understand the multiple constructions that form a student veteran identity—those researchers that understand the complex "system" of higher education and recognize where it may champion some students and fail others. (p. 658)

This is a tool by which to explore and investigate the student veteran and ECSV identity transformation within the higher education environment. Below are the 11 tenets that form the structure of VCT. Of particular importance is the sixth tenet stating that veterans experience multiple identities simultaneously. They may arrive on campus with the warrior identity (epochal) at their core level and also experience other identities based on their culture, disabilities, gender, race, and more. The 11 tenets of VCT include:

> 1) Structures, policies, and processes privilege civilians over veterans, 2) Veterans experience various forms of oppression and marginalization including microaggressions, 3) Veterans are victims of deficit thinking in higher education, 4) Veterans occupy a third space (country) on the border of multiple conflicting and interacting power structures, languages, and systems, 5) VCT values narratives and counternarratives of veterans, 6) Veterans experience multiple identities at once, 7) Veterans are constructed (written) by civilians often as deviant characters, 8) Veterans are more appropriately positioned to inform policy and practice regarding veterans, 9) Some services advertised to serve veterans are ultimately serving civilian interests, 10) Veterans cannot be essentialized, and, 11) Veteran culture is built on a culture of respect, honor, and trust. (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017, pp. 660–663)

These tenets serve as exploration tools by which to gain greater insight into the student veteran experience in higher education environments. The majority of the tenets focus on resource and service support system distribution that may be utilized to meet or advocate for student veteran needs. The VCT aligns with the critical reflection and exploration of transformative learning theory. Tenet six, "veterans experience multiple identities at once," coupled with Mezirow's (1991) 10-step transformative learning process, may yield deeper identity transformation knowledge about ECSVs as they

become scholars. The use of VCT can enhance the rich knowledge produced by the
psychosocial development and transformative learning theories.

Other critical theories can also be used in place of VCT to determine identity
construct needs. For example, critical race theory incorporates group identity for ECSVs
and the student veteran population. A potential model might therefore be the
Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) with its four dimensions: "racial
salience, the centrality of the identity, the regard in which the person holds group
associated with the identity, and the ideology associated with identity" (Sellers et al.,
1998, p. 18). I chose not to use the MMRI model because race is only one of many
components that combine in the formation of a person's identity, along with age, culture,
disability, gender. Central to this study is the core or epochal identity transformation,
which is less frequent than shifts in beliefs, schemas, or values. Other cultural group
models may produce new knowledge that further cements ECSVs as a sub-population
within the student veteran body.

In summary, the conceptual framework used here incorporates psychosocial
development, transformative learning, and veteran critical theories. All three are linked
through identity constructs and provide a foundation for this study to explore the identity
transformation experiences of ECSVs, a unique segment of the university student
population, as they have experienced multiple complex social environments.

Problem Statement

In the process of defending this nation, the military inculcates a combat warrior
identity in enlisted combat service members that they maintain throughout their military
careers. This indoctrinated combat warrior identity may persist post-military service as

ECSVs return home and enroll in higher education institutions. Neither the military nor

higher education institutions have a second identity transformation program or provide

knowledge for warriors to harmonize their warrior identity with academic life:

> There is no training from elders on what it means to be a civilian again. The
> warriors are left to themselves to figure it out. They leave with the values that
> were instilled in and expected of them from their respective branches of service,
> and they continue to maintain a sense of being a warrior for the rest of their lives.
> (Eaton, 2014, p. 22)

Therefore, ECSVs may be operating within higher education campuses with a

warrior identity, and this may hinder their ability to obtain a baccalaureate degree or to

seek the services they need to succeed. Whannell and Whannell (2015) observed, "[a]n

associated problem for the aspiring undergraduate student is that the adoption and

development of the new identity as a university student occurs relatively slowly" (p. 45).

Thus, the problem this study explored was ECSVs' epochal core identity transformation

experiences while becoming scholars within the University of New Mexico environment.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to explore the identity

transformational experiences of ECSVs from warriors into scholars at UNM, a flagship

university in the southwestern United States. ECSVs may experience multiple identity

transformations, starting with the military-inculcated warrior identity. The military does

not have an identity transformation system for warriors at the end of their military

service; therefore, this warrior identity may persist and conflict with university life or

present obstacles for ECSVs in their identity transformation into scholars. By conducting

semi-structured interviews and a focus group, I hoped to develop a greater understanding

of the warrior-to-scholar identity transformation.

Research Questions

Main Question

How do enlisted combat student veterans describe their experiences transforming their identity from warriors into scholars at the University of New Mexico?

Sub-Questions

1. What are the experiences of enlisted combat student veterans as they adjust to their role as students at the University of New Mexico?

2. How do their narratives inform the ongoing process of identity development and transformation?

Significance of the Study

This study may serve as foundational knowledge for researchers interested in detailing the experiences of ECSVs as they shift from warriors to scholars. The knowledge generated by this study may also aid higher education decision-makers in building programs to better support veterans. ECSVs may use this knowledge to proactively engage the identity transformation process themselves to become scholars. Economic literature indicates that becoming a scholar may lead to improvements in life expectancy, quality of life, and wage earnings:

> Median weekly earnings in 2017 for those with the highest levels of educational attainment—doctoral and professional degrees—were more than triple those with the lowest level, less than a high school diploma. And workers with at least a bachelor's degree earned more than the $907 median weekly earnings for all workers. (Torpey, 2018, p. 1)

The final potential impact of this study may be informing or guiding for-profit and non-profit veteran-focused organizations in their advocacy, service program offerings, and resources.

Assumptions, Limitations and Delimitations of the Study

Assumptions

1. Student veterans remain a marginalized student population throughout the higher education environment.

2. Student veterans graduate at a lower rate than all other cultural groups within higher education.

3. ECSVs' classroom performance may be negatively affected as they are unfamiliar with this learning environment and its behavioral expectations and practices. They may feel alienated in the classroom environment.

4. The ECSV population has not been studied in the higher education environment; therefore, limited knowledge exists in the forms of autobiographies, ethnographic accounts of battlefield experiences, and ill transitions back to civilian life. There is limited knowledge about warriors transforming their identities in higher education literature.

5. I expected that some or all of the participants might state that they had not transformed their identities into scholars.

Limitations

1. I was an insider of the student veteran community, having served in the Army combat arms field of air defense. I had conducted my own independent transformation process and had successfully become a scholar. Since I held biases about the topic, I needed to be careful about imposing my views on the study participants and to strive to keep an open mind as I interviewed them.

2. By employing a purposeful sampling of ECSVs that now included women participating in military combat arms fields, this process shut out other members of the student veteran population, like officers and support role or service student veterans. Therefore, the transferability of the findings are limited.

Delimitations

This study was limited to ECSVs, a subgroup of the student population within higher education institutions. The ECSV population on campus may be a small fraction of the 850 student veterans that have self-identified on the university's admissions application. In focusing on ECSVs, I reduced the pool of potential study participants, which negatively impacted the transferability of the findings.

The study was also delimited to a university that is a mid-sized institution in the southwestern United States. This university is a state flagship university and may differ from others in terms of culture, ECSV population, and student body size.

Definitions of Terms

The following terms are defined in the context of this research study. These terms are technical terms that provide clarity to the study.

Combat veterans: The men who are called upon to fight lines (Congress, 1941, pp. 245-246).

Educated: To train by formal instruction and supervised practice, especially in a skill, trade, or profession (Merriam-Webster, 2021).

Enlisted combat student veterans (ECSVs): Former military combat arms warriors that have enrolled in colleges and universities seeking to become scholars by attaining an academic degree (Dr. Coleman, personal communication, November 7, 2019).

Identity: The distinguishing character or personality of an individual (Merriam-Webster.com, 2021).

Identity transformation: The altering of one's core identity or habit of mind by engaging in transformative learning processes in order to become a scholar (Dr. Boverie, personal communication, September 16, 2017).

Indoctrination: To imbue with a usually partisan or sectarian opinion, point of view, or principle (Merriam-Webster.com, 2020).

Military indoctrination: A process by which civilians are transformed into military service members (McGurk et al., 2006).

Scholar: A learned or erudite person, especially one who has profound knowledge of a particular subject (Dictionary.com, 2020). Also, a person that attains a baccalaureate degree, possesses critical thinking skills, and has the ability to apply their skillset within a real-world professional context or who is an academically educated professional/lifelong learner (Dr. Haynie, personal communication, 2021).

Student veterans: Any student who is a current or former member of the active-duty military, the National Guard, or Reserves, regardless of deployment status, combat experience, legal veteran status, or GI Bill use (Vacchi, 2012, p. 17).

Veteran critical theory (VCT): Looks at the structures and systems that affect veterans through a critical lens (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017, p. 657).

Warrior: A person engaged or experienced in warfare broadly (Merriam-Webster.com, 2020).

Conclusion

This was a qualitative emergent study that explored the lived identity transformational experiences of ECSVs at UNM. The research questions served as a beacon anchoring this study to the identity transformation construct. They addressed the multiple identities ECSVs may have experienced, and I expected that some participants might state that they had not transformed into scholars yet.

The warrior-to-scholar identity transformation has not been studied before, and I hoped that the knowledge generated may impact a variety of stakeholders and serve as a potential starting place for future student veteran-focused researchers, aid current university leaders in developing new programs and support services, and, finally, serve as an identity transformation guide for ECSVs becoming scholars.

Chapter 2

Review of Related Literature

This qualitative emergent study sought to explore the lived experiences of ECSVs in transforming their identity from warriors to scholars at the University of New Mexico. Very little was known about ECSVs, their identity, and identity transformation needs. To better understand the relationship between student veterans and the higher education environment, it is necessary to take a historical view and then refocus to explore the literature on identity, transformative learning, and veteran critical theory. Identity, identity transformation, and transformative learning theories were developed throughout the 20th century by numerous scholars, from Erikson (1980) to Mezirow (1997) to more recent contributors like Boverie and Kroth (2001), Gunawardena et al., (2004), Taylor and Cranton (2012), and others. In veteran critical theory, tenet six states that "student veterans experience multiple identities at once" (Phillips & Lincoln, 2017, p. 662).

History of Student Veterans in Higher Education

Many prominent university presidents expressed negative perceptions of veterans and the GI Bill in the 1940s when it was on the verge of being signed into law. Some went as far as to state that the GI Bill would negatively impact both educational environments and veterans themselves: "Colleges and universities in the United States were historically elitist institutions; many within those institutions found the thought of opening their doors to primarily working-class veterans outrageous" (Bannier, 2006, p. 37). The university environments have displayed an unfriendly attitude towards student veteran presence, and their administrators voiced their concerns also. According to Buckley (2004), "University of Chicago President Robert M. Hutchins declared the

proposal 'unworkable,' and added that the GI Bill threatens to demoralize education and defraud the veterans. Harvard University President James B. Conant offered even more biting remarks, stating, 'that the bill did not distinguish between those who can profit most by advanced education and those who cannot'" (p. 24). Extreme measures were discussed to deal with the potential presence of student veterans on college and university campuses: "Many colleges even announced plans to segregate veterans from other students if the GI Bill passed, but these plans were never realized" (Bannier, 2006, p. 38).

The more recent literature indicates that Vietnam student veterans experienced greater abuse or marginalization on college and university campuses nationwide: "It has been repeatedly observed that military service during the Vietnam era resulted in a reduction of the years of education obtained by veterans relative to others who did not serve" (Lyons et al., 2006, p. 38). At the very least, Vietnam veterans were not treated equally with other student populations, which may be seen as marginalization, meaning that the veterans were "relegate[d] to an unimportant or powerless position within a society or group" (Merriam-Webster.com, n.d.). Thus, it appears the higher education and student veteran historical relationship has been one of marginalization and singling out veterans as different from other student populations.

> Further marginalization in the classroom complicates the student veteran's academic pursuit. "Implicit marginalization (e.g., lack of Veteran-specific services) and explicit marginalization (e.g., anti-military comments made by faculty or staff) undermine the academic success and degree completion by disrupting the student veteran's engagement in the classroom and larger college community." (McCaslin et al., 2014, p. 199)

Educators may have additional instructional blind spots as they design and implement curricula due to their lack of knowledge about the military learning and teaching system. Each military service branch operates its own educational system called

the Training and Doctrine Command (TRADOC), which is similar to the post-secondary

education structure of higher education. The point is that ECSVs and student veterans in

general possess learning skills that need to be adjusted for the academic classroom and its

demands:

> Success in the military is predicated on an aptitude for learning, and, moreover,
> by the ability to internalize and apply knowledge in diverse, often high-stress
> situations. However, the learning environment and the theoretical underpinnings
> of the military do not mesh exactly with those in academia. When student
> veterans transition poorly from one learning environment to the other, their
> difficulties should be viewed not in terms of lack, but of disconnect. They do not
> lack ability or experience learning new skills and information, but the way they
> are accustomed to doing so may not immediately connect with how they are asked
> to do it in college. (Blaauw-Hara, 2017, p. 1)

Thus, when student veterans arrive on campus, they already possess learning abilities or

skills, unlike traditional students who arrive on campus directly from high schools.

Lack of knowledge about the military TRADOC system and how student veterans

are asked to learn throughout their military experiences may create problems for faculty

and instructional designers who use andragogy principles to enhance their course designs.

Upon arriving on campus, ECSVs may not advocate, engage, or promote their learning

skills to the university and its stakeholders. They may be overwhelmed adjusting to new

surroundings and developing a new identity as civilians and students. Therefore, they

themselves may not know their own learning skillsets.

Freire (2000) made a distinction between banking education that deposits

oppressive systemic knowledge into students and problem-posing education that leads to

the development of critical thinking and that rehumanizes the student: "The capability of

banking education to minimize or annul the students' creative power and to stimulate

their credulity serves the interests of the oppressors, who care neither to have the world

revealed nor to see it transformed" (p. 73). About problem-posing education, Freire

(2000) remarked that, "[p]eople develop their power to perceive critically the way they

exist in the world with which and in which they find themselves; they come to see the

world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation" (p. 83).

While emerging from their previous military indoctrinated combat warrior

identity, ECSVs may experience new ways of being or redefined their roles as students in

the classroom. As they engage in new ways of learning, are exposed to new knowledge,

and take charge of their own learning process, they may begin to transform their identity

into that of a scholar. Freire (2000) noted that, "[h]umankind emerge from their

submersion and acquire the ability to intervene in reality as it is unveiled" (p. 109). In

creating the term *conscientizacao* (conscious awareness), Freire (2000) provided the

liberating transformative end state that serves as the ideal goal of the education process as

experienced by scholars.

Identity Transformation

Identity

Identity as a construct has been studied in the West for the last two centuries,

particularly in the field of psychology. Erickson (1980) produced a model of the Eight

Stages of Development and placed identity development in early adolescence, with two

constructs as factors: 1) the psychological development of a person, and 2) the social

world in which they engage. He used the term *psychosocial* for the identity formation

process: "They are psychosocial in the way that they concern the character of the

connection between the individual and her or his surrounding world" (Illeris, 2014, p.

46). Others (Bouck, 2011; Du Gay & Hall, 1996; Stetsenko, 2012; Whannell &

Whannell, 2015) have since contributed to the knowledge base of identity, validating the dual structure of identity as a *psychosocial* construct.

The field of psychology is the epicenter for studies of identity, as almost all disciplines in the social sciences use the construct of identity to generate knowledge by exploring people's lived experiences. Scholars study identity from the cultural, gender, geographical/national, race, and social constructivist perspectives. In the United States, individual identity is seen as central to personal achievement: "Americans readily endorse the concept of individualism, the belief that individuals are responsible for shaping their own fates and can earn happiness by striving to succeed in competition with others" (Eichelberger, 1999, p. 4). In U.S. society, then, individual identity is seen as a systemic part of meritocracy.

In this study, identity is shaped through continuous activity or relationships with a social structure, either the military or university social worlds. "The self is, therefore, conceived as a collection of identities that reflects the roles that a person occupies in the social structure" (Terry et al., 1999, p. 226). This suggests that identity, at the core level, is the aggregate of self-concept roles experienced or played, and the place we occupy in the social world. It is essential to understand identity in active engagement within the social contexts of an organization. Students become scholars through their active participation in the university social structure. The scholar identity is a product of the constant friction between identity and the social environment.

Wenger's *Communities of Practice* (1998) provides a five-step model of individual identity as it pertains to learning. This model includes:

> (1) Identity as a negotiated experience. We define who we are by the ways we
> experience ourselves through participation as well as by the ways we and others

reify ourselves; (2) Identity as community membership. We define who we are by the familiar and unfamiliar; (3) Identity as a learning trajectory. We define who we are by where we have been and where we are going; (4) Identity as nexus of multi-membership. We define who we are by the ways we reconcile our various forms of membership into one identity; (5) Identity as a relation between the local and the global. We define who we are by negotiation local ways of belonging to broader constellations and of manifesting broader styles and discourses. (p. 149)

This identity learning model supports Erickson's (1980) psychosocial identity structure by detailing the learner's relationship with the social world. Wenger's (1998) model establishes that learner identity contributes to the growth identity development approach the university employs to nurture and produce the scholar identity.

The Warrior Identity

The combat warrior identity is a result of the individual enlistee successfully mitigating the military indoctrination system. This population can be divided into officers and enlisted members of the military, but this study applies the combat warrior identity solely to enlisted combat warriors. Officers in the military who have already completed an academic degree program prior to enlisting or being drafted into the military have experiences different than those of the participants included here.

Enlisted combat warriors enroll in universities post-military service and thereby become ECSVs: "Military and service academy minimum entrance age requirements are 17 with parental consent or 18 without parental consent" (Today's Military, 2020, para. 2). Erikson (1980) placed the identity developmental stage at the crossroads between childhood and adulthood, post-puberty and in the adolescent stage in the late teens and early twenties. Military recruit enlistees who are in their early adolescent stage find it easier to break the civilian identity and instill that of the warrior: "The sense of ego identity, then, is the accrued confidence that one's ability to maintain the inner sameness and continuity (one's ego in the psychological sense) is matched by the sameness and

continuity of one's meaning for others" (Erickson, 1980, p. 94). Enlistees who are willing

participants in this indoctrination process are aware that their civilian identity is being

transformed into a combat warrior identity. In the words of McGurk et al. (2006):

> Despite the externally applied pressure of indoctrination, individuals being
> indoctrinated, at least in the case of the military, are quite aware that they are
> being subjected to an active change process. This self-awareness may not be
> typical of other kinds of indoctrination. In the studies cited here, both cadets and
> the basic trainees were conscious that they were in the midst of a life-changing
> experience. They were quite aware that they were going to be subjected to
> stressful events designed to turn them into members of the organization. They
> were motivated participants in that transition. (p. 25)

> The individual identity is replaced with that of a collectivist warrior identity at a

stage of development where social life is important. Studies in psychology indicate that

the warrior identity is a classically conditioned identity that exists within the highly

structured confines of a military combat unit:

> Rewards and punishments reinforce this conditioning and when there is conflict
> between the signals or between the excitatory and inhibitory responses, he then
> tries to use his powers of integration to rescue himself. However, the conditioning
> process that he undergoes is the same for him as for the animal. (Cammer, 1961,
> p. 818)

Another way of emphasizing this military collectivist culture is through McGurk et al.

(2006):

> Intense indoctrination settings are inherently stressful, and therefore the pressures
> to conform to group and authority norms for proper conduct will be great. Within
> a military context, conformity during indoctrination occurs on multiple levels:
> conformation to the actions of fellow unit members, conformity to the demands of
> authorities (e.g., drill sergeants), and conformity to the more abstract values
> emphasized by the particular branch of the armed service. (p. 22)

Indoctrination is defined as "to imbue with a usually partisan or sectarian opinion, point

of view, or principle" (Merriam-Webster, n.d., para. 1).

> The concept of indoctrination is often used in a negative sense to refer generally
> to a process whereby an authority structure, whether an individual, group,
> government, state, or agency, seeks to impose a set of beliefs on individuals or

groups in such a manner that the questioning of those beliefs is not tolerated. (Petrus, 2019, p. 84)

The warrior identity is then characterized as a collectivist or group-centered, classically conditioned, emotionally distant, highly structured, or rigid, obedient, strong, and task-oriented. Indoctrination is a type of force learning that yields proficiency in combat skills yet lacks in analytical or critical thinking skills. The warrior identity is characterized as, "emotionally distant as long as he is in the warrior mode… he does not make his decisions and implement them out of emotional relatedness to anyone or anything except his ideal… he looks at his tasks, his decisions, and his actions dispassionately and unemotionally" (Enns, 1994, p. 128).

Among the effects of enduring the indoctrination process is the desensitization of human emotions in the warrior identity. Thus, the warrior as a learner is highly proficient in learning under high stress situations but lacks emotions beyond the military environment that may contribute to other issues in civilian life. It can be stated that the warrior identity is closer to a mechanical existence guided by the conditioned programming the military inculcates on the individual.

Baron (2000) produced the *Stage Model of Intense Indoctrination Applied to the Military* that describes the process of transforming the civilian identity into the military service member (SM). In this table, Baron (2000) lists four stages of this process, including:

> 1: softening up, 2: compliance, 3: internalization, and 4: consolidation. The right hand column describes the military application that includes: SM isolation from the outside world: SM trains for long, intense hours; some emphasis on fear of drill instructor; SM quickly "falls into line" and performs expected behaviors, even if for fear of reprisal; SM incorporates military values into value system; role of SM takes on central importance; SM completely committed to values of service; SM willing to kill and be killed in service of unit and country. (McGurk et al., 2006, p. 17)

The negative side of the warrior experience and identity is found in medical research studies that consistently identify the mental and physical changes veterans face after military service: "Taken together, results of these studies suggest that repeated exposure to death and killing, especially involving one's own military unit, is associated with strikingly higher risk for suicidal ideation and attempt(s), over and above sociodemographic characteristics and lifetime trauma burden" (Nichter et al., 2020, p. 236).

ECSVs may experience negative psychological problems by maintaining their warrior identity that hinder or jeopardize their academic careers. A study about emotional numbing (EN) in combat veterans found that EN "exerts negative psychosocial effects in the domains of symptom non-improvement, mental health, service utilization, relationship functioning, quality of life, substance use disorders, suicidality, and aggression/violence" (Schuman et al., 2019, p. 657). Maintaining the warrior identity in civilian life often comes with a cost of suffering or a lower quality of life.

The resulting warrior identity is a classically conditioned, unit focused, service to nation indoctrinated entity. Furthermore, it is devoid of cognitive critical thinking and emotions and mirrors a mechanical existence. Baron (2000) observed, "[a] systematic scrutiny of various examples of intense indoctrination reveals a variety of procedural events and internal states that lower one's ability and motivation to carefully process social information" (p. 252). Living this warrior identity outside of the military environment may be the source of many challenges ECSVs face after leaving the military and an obstacle they must overcome during their academic pursuit of the scholar identity.

The Scholar Identity

The scholar is defined as a person who attains a baccalaureate degree, possesses critical thinking skills, and has the ability to apply their skillsets within a real-world professional context. They are also academically educated professionals/lifelong learners (Dr. Aeron Haynie, personal communication, 2021).

Thus, the scholar exhibits well-developed skills in the areas of analytical/critical thinking, life-long learning, and a professional skillset within an industry that leads to a higher quality of life: "Developing a scholar identity is essential for success in higher education especially among underrepresented minority students" (Cabrera et al., 2019, p. 115). The scholar identity is built through a learning growth process where novice learners enroll at a university and grow throughout their education: "Education involves learning and growth, it implies the difference between truth and lie, but above all, education means critical thinking with regards to the content of the received information" (Ioana & Cracsner, 2016, p. 561). These skills may be underdeveloped in ECSVs due to the adherence to authority required within the military environment. Other scholarly characteristics are described as follows: "(a) empowerment and pride in self, (b) skill acquisition, (c) future goals, and (d) voice as a scholar" (Cabrera et al., 2019, p. 120).

The economic benefits of developing the scholar identity, or at least attaining a bachelor's degree, are substantial. Torpey (2018) noted that, "[w]orkers with at least a bachelor's degree earned more than the $907 median weekly earnings for all workers" (online). Additionally, existing research shows that education is associated with longer, healthier lives due to healthier behaviors, higher earnings and social status, stronger

cognitive skills, greater knowledge about how to avoid health risks, better adherence to

medical treatments, and more salubrious social connections" (Krueger et al., 2019, p. 65).

Becoming a scholar is a quality-of-life improvement exercise that has positive

outcomes for all students in higher education. It may be the path toward fulfilling

President Lincoln's promise "to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his

widow, and his orphan" (Lincoln, 1865, p. 1). Through this statement, President Lincoln

challenged the whole country to care for military veteran's post-military service,

including colleges and universities. Becoming a scholar by obtaining university degrees

affords each student the opportunity to experience higher living standards through

increased economic and health experiences post-graduation.

ECSVs are no different than the rest of the student body in seeking to attain

degrees as credentials in a capitalistic system. In post-military service, they seek to

reconstruct themselves in civilian life, and no longer as adolescents. Not every enlisted

combat warrior will pursue the scholar identity, but for those that do, there must be a less

hostile environment and fewer negative experiences on higher education campuses.

Identity Transformation

The identity transformation process is not easy at all, as change is a construct with

which many people struggle. Transformation is change in motion: "To 'transform'

something is to change or reshape it" (Illeris, 2014, p. 16). When ECSVs change their

social environment by enrolling in university coursework, they may transform their

identities and experience new forces that promote their transformation into scholars:

> In order to understand the full transformation process, one has to comprehend the
> nature of being, becoming, and the developmental forces that induce it. Vygotsky
> (1978) shared with Hegel (1817), Marx (1844), and Engels (1940) the notion that
> all phenomena are in motion and subject to continuous change and should be

investigated in terms of their origins and development. (Marginson & Dang, 2017, p. 121)

Researchers in the psychology field have produced considerable identity

transformation knowledge, especially from the 1800s to the present:

James built an ethics of self-transformation upon this Darwinian structure… Indeed, the crux of James's ethics and his entire melioristic philosophy is that individuals may in this way spiral their ideals both centripetally into themselves and centrifugally into a broader cooperative social world. (Turner, 2019, p. 120)

Some theorists have used examples of historical figures who reached enlightenment, such

as an Indian prince who transformed his identity into a Buddha, the visions that

precipitated the Prophet Mohammad's identity transformation, and Jesus Christ, who

achieved his identity transformation through baptism and death. In so doing, Jesus stated:

Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Do not marvel that I said to you, "You must be born again." The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So, it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit. (New American Standard Bible, John 3:5–7, 1995)

People experience identity transformation within a variety of social structures.

Some seek transformation in academia, the military, religion, or self-improvement

disciplines. This enables people to renegotiate their place in society or to reach their fully

self-actualized state of being.

Theorists like Freire (2000) and Mezirow (1997) have explored identity

transformation from different perspectives. Freire (2000) used educational efforts to bring

conscious awareness (*conscientização*) and empowerment to oppressed masses while

guiding them in transforming their identities and lives. His scholarly lens focused on

equity and social justice brought about through critical analysis of government and social

oppressive systems. He advocated for problem-posing education to generate critical

thinking skills in students, while denouncing the government banking form of education.

On the other hand, Mezirow (1997) identified epochal transformation as a core

level process and generated transformative learning theory with a 10-step process.

> These steps are (1) a disorienting dilemma, (2) self-examination with feelings,
> anger, guilt, or shame, (3) a critical assessment of assumptions, (4) recognition
> that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared, (5) exploration
> of options for new roles, relationships, and actions, (6) planning a course of
> action, (7) acquiring knowledge and skills for implementing one's plans, (8)
> provisional trying of new roles, (9) building competence and self-confidence in
> new roles and relationships, (10) a reintegration into one's life on the basis of
> conditions dictated by one's new perspective. (Mezirow, 1990, p. 86)

These 10 steps help facilitate the transformation of habits of mind or assumptions.

Researchers who followed Mezirow (1997) have generated knowledge by applying the

transformative learning theory and practice to diverse groups of people, organizations,

government structures, and a variety of learning environments.

Taylor and Cranton (2012) brought together authors from diverse fields to record

their experiences applying transformative learning practices. Some shared their

knowledge from applying transformative learning with individuals in informal learning

settings, such as apprenticeships or within the context of organizations. For example,

Willis (2012) stated the following about educators: "An existential credible educator who

has had a chance to feel, dream, appraise, and practice tactfully in her or his educational

craft may be well equipped to invite learners to explore a similar range of learning

opportunities" (p. 225). This is important, as ECSVs engaging in academic pursuits may

engage the transformative learning process and not be aware of having done so. As an

educator in the transformative field, Willis's (2012) statement provides guidance about

how to create a transformative learning space in which students feel comfortable and safe.

A diverse group of transformative learning theorists have made the argument that Mezirow's (1997) definition is too narrow and does not adequately account for factors beyond the cognitive construct. Illeris (2014) formulated an argument that viewed "identity" as a possible target of transformative learning. He stated that, "a general understanding of learning appears as a tendency to stress the cognitive dimension at the expense of the emotional and social dimensions and the situatedness of learning processes" (p. 149). Illeris (2014) acknowledged that Mezirow was open to this criticism and attempted to include emotion in his more recent works (p. 149). He then settled on Erikson's term of identity to inform the transformative learning definition and structure. Transformative learning and Mezirow's (1997) definition of it may not be a well-balanced approach. Identity is a continually fluid experience or construct and creating a stable structure for transformative learning as a one-size-fits-all has been and will remain a challenge for future scholars.

Eaton (2014) explored the warrior-to-civilian transition and discussed the combat warrior within Carl Jung's warrior archetype. He recognized there are no identity transformation programs for soldiers transitioning from the military environment into civilian life. While he identified the transitional perspectives of returning warriors and their needs, he did not discuss the identity transformation construct and acknowledged that the warrior identity may persist beyond the military environment.

The end of military service is the proper time for the military to employ a civilian identity harmonizing program. In the absence of one, warriors may continue with an

identity that no longer serves their needs. While some veterans may desire to keep their

warrior identity, the economic and health literature mentioned previously states that

doing so is detrimental to them. One can be proud of their military service and at the

same time adopt new identities that better align with the demands of civilian life.

Stetsenko (2012) stated that, "[p]eople perceive the world and things only through

the prism of their relevance in the overall fabric of their life—what these things stand for

in their activity and vis-à-vis their goals and purposes" (p. 149). Essentially, what

Stetsenko implied is that the warrior identity served a great purpose in the military

combat environment as it allows for the defense of a free state. Yet, outside of combat

and in a civilian context, the warrior identity may be detrimental to ECSVs and veterans

in general.

Identity dissonance may contribute to other problems, such as revolts against law

enforcement. Law enforcement statistics vary, but roughly 20% of law enforcement

officers have a combat military service background. This translates to over 100,000

officers who might be living out their warrior identities while policing our streets. Law

enforcement studies show that these officers are more likely than their civilian co-

workers to be involved in shootings or disciplined for excessive use of force. Early and

Gordon (2020) pointed out that:

> Military veterans are more prevalent to use violence in their policing work than
> non-veterans, stating, "Nearly a third believed that veterans on their force often
> had 'psychological issues' of some sort, 14 percent had received more citizen
> complaints about officers who were veterans than they did about non-veterans,
> and 10 percent reported instances of 'excessive violence' involving former
> military personnel." (para. 8)

Clearly, the warrior identity can cause issues for professionals outside of the

academic environment: "Results from our study suggest that military veterans—

regardless of deployment status—were significantly more likely to be involved in a

shooting compared with non-veterans" (Reingle Gonzalez et al., 2019, p. e249).

Weichselbaum (2018) saw a need for further research on the impact of the warrior

identity, veterans, and job performance in the law enforcement field: "There is critical

need for additional studies on the relationship between veteran status, deployment history

and combat experience, and officer-involved shootings" (para. 4). The warrior identity

experienced after military service can have a negative impact on ECSVs' quality of life,

the para-military professionals (first responders and law enforcement), and the general

public or society as a whole.

> *Identity transformation* is the altering of one's core identity or psychological habit

of mind by engaging in transformative learning processes, in this case to become a

scholar. The literature shows clearly that living with a warrior identity after military

service may be detrimental to an ECSV's quality of life. ECSVs may generate new

information about their experiences in becoming scholars, thereby successfully aligning

their identity with the higher education environment. This harmonizing of identities may

be the beginning of positive quality-of-life experiences.

The University as a Transformational Space

> The university campus is a transformational environment where students arrive as

novice learners and develop or grow into independent lifelong learners or scholars.

Veterans are often marginalized on university campuses, but the university space is

unique in producing the scholar identity. Eaton (2014) stated that, "[a]ttending college

meets most of the transitional space criteria. Like the high school student transitioning

into adulthood through attending college, so, too, can the warrior transition into his or her

new role as a civilian" (p. 61).

The university environment is not only a self-regulated institution, but also

depends on the actions of its stakeholders, including administrators, faculty, staff,

students, legislators, community partners, and society. Universities do not exist in a

vacuum as self-sustaining entities. For example, UNM's Mission Statement identifies all

the aforementioned stakeholders and states, with regard to students, that "UNM will

provide students the values, habits of mind, knowledge, and skills that they need to be

enlightened citizens, to contribute to the state and national economies, and to lead

satisfying lives" (UNM, 2020, online). This statement aligns with Mezirow's (1997)

transformative learning theory and therefore establishes the university as a transformative

space. As students engage in the learning of academic materials, they transform their

beliefs, habits of mind, schemas, and values. These transformations may be at a

superficial level and may not meet the epochal transformation level that Mezirow (1997)

described, but they still comprise transformational change.

Differing perspectives exist about the university as a transformational place.

Some critical theorists view it this way:

> Such transformational places with unique emotional resonance have an almost
> sacred nature. The word "religious" comes from the Latin verb religare, meaning
> to bind or reconnect. Thus, anything that reconnects us is, inherently, a deeply
> personal or spiritual experience that has great meaning—and the university
> campus is ripe with opportunities for people to reconnect. (Broussard, 2009, p.
> B12)

Other critical theorists would disagree and point out all the shortcomings of a university

campus from their lens:

> Despite forty-five years of equality legislation and several decades of policy
> aimed at widening participation in higher education, the study found evidence of

an uneven development of equality and diversity policies and practice across the eight higher education institutions (HEI) sites and across different equality strands with less impetus for change than might have been expected. (Fletcher et al., 2015, p. 132)

Theoretical Framework

This study focused on identity transformation at UNM and relied on combination of three theories: psychosocial development, transformative learning, and veteran critical theory (see Figure 2). These theories narrow the studies framework down to the individual participant level. Brought together with the research questions and data collection instruments, I was able to explore and capture the unique lived identity transformational experiences of ECSVs within two distinct transformative environments: the military and the university.

Figure 2

Theoretical Framework
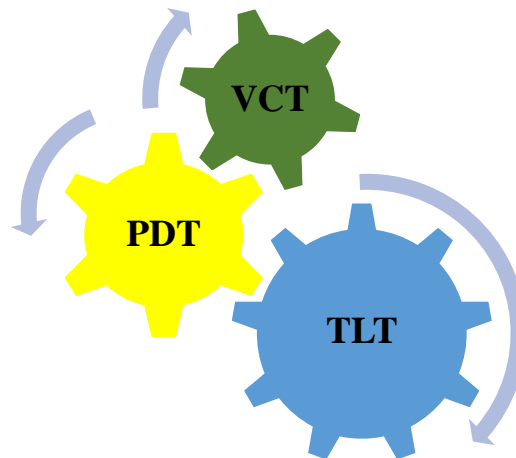
ECSVs are adults enrolled in an academic program seeking to become scholars by attaining a bachelor's degree. Mezirow (1991) created transformative learning theory with a focus on adult learners. His theory encompasses a broad range of topics such as

epochal transformation and psychological habits of mind, with 10 specific transformative

learning steps. The ECSVs who participated in the present study and who indicated that

they had transformed their identities into scholars may have recognized using some of

these steps. ECSVs may enroll in university courses from their early twenties and

beyond, which means they arrive on campus with life experience with the hope of

becoming scholars. Some ECSVs may not seek to become scholars and may have their

own motives for enrolling in university courses. Either way, they are adults with life

experience who enroll in academic programs that may afford them the opportunity to

transform their identities from warriors into scholars. Illeris (2014) stated that:

> Adulthood is, so to speak, the golden age in relation to both identity and
> transformative learning. When we—typically during the middle or the last part of
> the twenties—have acquired a reasonably stable and coherent identity, then we
> have at the same time provided a basis of more comprehensive and important
> transformative learning in relation to all parts of this identity. This is so, both
> regarding our meaning perspectives and frames of reference that are important
> and mainly cognitive elements of the identity, and also regarding all the other
> parts of the identity in the emotional and social areas, and in relation to others, to
> society and to the surrounding world altogether. (p. 89)

ECSVs are adult learners who may experience transformational learning that

allows them to become scholars through their academic endeavors. Also, some ECSVs

may state that they have not experienced any identity transformation or transformative

learning at all.

Erikson's (1980) psychosocial development theory links to transformative

learning theory through its identity development construct. Erikson (1980) stated that,

"[t]he sense of ego identity is the accrued confidence that one's ability to maintain inner

sameness and continuity (one's ego in the psychological sense) is matched by the

sameness and continuity of one's meaning for others" (p. 94). Both theories emphasize

the psychological condition of a person as the underlying process. Mezirow stated,

"[t]ansformations in habit of mind may be epochal: a sudden, dramatic, reorienting insight, or incremental, involving a progressive series of transformations in related points of view that culminate in a transformation in habit of mind" (Mezirow, 1990, p. 86).

All three theories are interwoven through the epochal habit of mind (psychological) identity transformation and the fact that veterans experience multiple identities on campus. All three theories form a strong, triangulated theoretical framework that is essential to understanding the experiences of veteran combat students as they pursue further education and undergo the warrior-to-scholar identity transformation. I considered other theories, such as Knowles's (1984) *Andragogy in Action*, Lave and Wenger's (1991) *Situated Learning*, and Wenger's (1998) *Communities of Practice*, along with research on brainwashing and cognitive behavioral methods. However, these theories were too expansive and risked detracting from the focus on the transformational processes ECSVs experience upon engaging with the academic world.

Additional or Indirect Supporting Literature

A more comprehensive literature review yielded further work on student veterans in higher education. Barry et al. (2014) stated that "student service members/veterans (SSM/V) might benefit from a 'crosswalk' explaining ways in which campus and military culture are similar and different and how to navigate their new environment" (p. 39). Their findings pointed to psychological and mental health issues among SSM/Vs, the impact of combat exposure on mental health, high risk behaviors, academic functioning and performance, and difficulties with peers and faculty, all of which are barriers to student veteran success on campus. Bichrest (2013) further cemented the need for studies on student veteran acculturation to higher education:

There is no, one-size-fits-all, solution for veteran acculturation to the educational setting. Nor, are there any simple solutions to the other challenges that veterans are currently facing. However, there is a need for continued awareness and improved researched-based methods of identifying services that can best assist this community of learners. (p. 9)

Additional Themes in the Literature

Health and Transition

Barry et al. (2014) found that "there is little readily identifiable peer-reviewed research identifying health-related and/or transition-associated issues pertinent to student service members/veterans (SSM/V) of previous eras participating in higher education" (p. 31). While their investigation focused on SSM/Vs or the student veteran body in higher education, they identified a clear gap in the literature, and one that the present study seeks to respond to. Barry et al. (2014) also included a call to action: "This systematic review serves as a call to action for health researchers, practitioners, and policy makers. The time is now for scholarly investigations examining SSM/V and their unique health needs and transition-associated issues" (p. 40). They also echoed many of the challenges student veterans face in higher education, including marginalization, assimilation, connection, or the ability to maintain relationships with peers and professors, and help-seeking. Their work differed as they focused on "transition" among SSM/Vs while the present study emphasized the "identity transformation" of ECSVs. Regardless of the difference, scholars agree that more research is needed on ECSVs and student veterans.

Veterans and Acculturation

Bichrest (2013) conducted a literature review on 60 sources, including articles, books, dissertations, and web-based materials located through keyword searches on terms including *veteran*, *acculturation*, *veteran and acculturation*, and more. He noted that, "[h]e knew how to be a Marine. He hadn't a clue how a Marine becomes a college

student. Neither, it seemed, did anyone else on campus" (Marklein, 2007, p. 1). Bichrest

(2013) also suggested that veterans need to take a leading role as advocates and as

researchers generating more knowledge on this topic. This matches with Phillips and

Lincoln (2017) eighth tenet of VCT: "Veterans are more appropriately positioned to

inform policy and practice regarding veterans." Veteran researchers must produce more

literature that sheds light on the needs of student veterans while advocating for change in

policies and academic programming to be more inclusive.

Reintegration

Ghosh et al. (2019) reviewed 24 articles on the reintegration of veterans into the

higher education environment and produced four findings: "a) mental health, (b)

academic and career development, (c) support, and (d) identity" (p. 386). They also

recognized that "there is limited research on student veterans' identity issues" (p. 400)

and stated that student veteran can be supported if there is increased institutional

awareness of their needs. Ghosh et al. (2019) also raised the issue of diversity and

inclusion or marginalized groups within the student veteran body and enlisted combat

student veterans are one of those groups.

Transformative Space Inclusion

Jenner (2017) reviewed literature on multiple non-traditional student groups, like

returning students, student veterans, and minority students and compared them to

traditional students. Jenner (2017) identified many of the challenges non-traditional

students face as they transition into higher education: attrition, college preparation,

culture clashes, financial struggles, gaps in education, peer support, and

race/ethnicity/gender challenges. Jenner (2017) ultimately argued for the need to generate

unified advocacy to meet these students' needs through policy changes: "To positively transform institutions of higher education, researchers, administrators, and policy-makers must always be attentive to structural factors that may be at play, the important differences within the student veteran population, and student veterans' own notions of success in higher education" (p. 14). Similarly, I made a call to action for UNM stakeholders to implement a formal identity transformation program.

These four literature reviews present a more complete picture of the known student veteran literature. The focus on reintegration and transition into higher education complements the identity transformation construct of this study. All four reviews support the need for more research focusing on the student veteran population, yet there are still gaps in the literature, especially on sub-groups of student veterans.

Gaps in the Literature

I found no literature on the warrior identity of ECSVs or on their need to transform it upon returning to civilian life and engaging in academic pursuits. There is extensive literature, however, on the concept of identity and changes in identity. There is also a great need for research conducted by student veterans. Encouraging student veterans to assume lead research roles would allow them to discover intricate nuances that only insiders to a specific student group can know or share with the world, like the process of transitioning from warriors to the campus environment, which administrators, faculty, and staff know little about. In order to better advocate for changes within higher education institutions, it is critical to know what forces either contribute to or hinder student veterans' assimilation and success on campus.

ECSVs may bring their warrior identity from the military to the university campus environment. As there are no identity harmonizing programs in academia or in the military, the warrior identity may persist uninterrupted for a lifetime, leading to student veteran marginalization (Bannier, 2006). Over the last 20 years, universities and their stakeholders have taken positive steps to improve student veteran support structures, yet the literature indicates that more needs to be done to support student veterans on campus. Becoming a scholar has many benefits, including financial advantages, an improved quality of life, and increased life expectancy. Participating in academic courses and socializing on university campuses may help ignite the transformative learning process for ECSVs. Being a scholar may present the with new professional development opportunities for employment at the university or in the private and public sectors. Additional benefits may include improved intrapersonal conditions, better relationships with family members, the opportunity to earn higher wages, and the ability to increase one's quality of life and life expectancy. However, none of the existing literature addresses these possible benefits for ECSVs.

The transformative learning field is vibrant in discourse or dialogue as many researchers point out shortcomings of Mezirow's (1997) work. Illeris (2014) stated the theory focused too much on cognitive processes and not enough on emotional and social constructs. I agreed that more work must be done to improve upon Mezirow's (1997) theory but still found it an important starting point to help ECSVs and student veterans in their quest to become scholars.

Researchers' Perspectives

The theorists who have produced work on identity, identity transformations, transformative learning, and veteran critical theories have offered a generous range of tools by which to further explore these constructs. The difference in the literature is each scholar's perspective on the topics of identity, identity transformation, and the warrior and scholar identities. Illeris (2014) may be correct in his interpretation of transformative learning and on Mezirow's (1997) focus on cognition over emotional and social constructs. Phillips and Lincoln's (2017) VCT points to the multiple identities' student veterans experience on a university campus. Additional differences may be due to the field of study each researcher works in. These differences exist, but researchers do not engage in the knowledge generation process to discredit each other, but because they are contributing to an ongoing conversation on our humanity.

I was surprised to find that Erickson (1980) had studied military veterans and concluded that, "[a]bove all the men, 'do not know any more who they are': there is a distinct loss of ego identity. The sense of sameness and of continuity and the belief in one's social role are gone" (p. 42). Erickson (1980) pointed to the identity dissonance that ECSVs and veterans in general may experience in civilian life. This amplified the importance of the present study in exploring ECSVs' identity transformation experiences.

Summary of the Literature

This research study was a qualitative emergent exploration of the identity transformation of ECSVs from warriors into scholars at UNM. This literature review highlighted the identity, identity formation, and identity epochal transformation needs of ECSVs. It further revealed that the warrior identity may persist post-military service and

hinder ECSVs' ability to become scholars. Economic literature reveals the benefits of becoming a scholar, including possible increases in wage earnings, improved health, and longer life expectancy. The literature reviews by Barry et al. (2014), Bichrest (2013), Ghosh et al. (2019), and Jenner (2017) provided additional support for this study by discussing the reintegration, transition, and institutional systemic problems, and by calling for student veterans to take a lead role in research studies with the hope of increasing student veteran persistence on campus. All four studies agreed that more research was needed to gain greater insight into the student veteran experience and the strategic decision-making processes that can transform institutions of higher learning.

Combining the four literature reviews enhanced this study by validating the psychosocial complexities or forces that impact the student veteran experience in higher education. The lack of literature on ECSVs may contribute to their marginalization on university campuses. New methods are emerging to aid student veterans through the prism of VCT. A big-picture approach to the plight of ECSVs on university campuses is informed by Erickson's (1980) psychosocial identity formation construct. This literature review incorporated the individual identity of ECSVs, the military indoctrination process that inculcates the warrior identity, and the scholar identity. It also incorporated VCT to establish the university as a transformative environment.

Chapter 3

Methodology

This qualitative study design employed an emergent approach to explore the identity transformation experiences of ECSVs from warriors into scholars at UNM. The emergent approach is used when very little is known about a topic; it is characterized as being highly flexible allowing for the combination of multiple qualitative techniques as data collection and analysis tools. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2008) stated that, "emergent methods are about the methodological innovation for the purpose of enhancing knowledge building and advancing scholarly conversations" (p. 4) Creswell (2014) noted that, "emergent design means that the initial plan for research cannot be tightly prescribed, and some or all phases of the process may change or shift after the researcher enters the field and begins to collect data" (p. 186). Since little was known about ECSVs in the higher education environment, I decided that a flexible emergent process would be the most beneficial approach for this study.

Research Questions

Main Question

How do enlisted combat student veterans describe their experiences transforming their identity from warriors into scholars at the University of New Mexico?

Sub-Questions

1. What are the experiences of enlisted combat student veterans as they adjust to their role as students at the University of New Mexico?

2. How do these narratives inform the ongoing process of identity development and transformation?

Positionality

Having served in the military as an air defense specialist, I was an insider to the

ECSV and student veteran community on the UNM campus. Then participated fully in

the military indoctrination process and adopted the warrior identity. I deployed to Bosnia

in 1996/1997, Kosovo in 1999, and was honorably discharged in May of 2001. For the

next 10 years I struggled to assimilate into civilian life. In 2011, I was given the

opportunity to attend college and complete a bachelor's degree in Organizational

Leadership from Anderson School of Management at UNM. I used those 4 years to heal

and implement my own identity transformation from warrior to scholar which came fully

into fruition in graduate school.

Being a doctoral researcher who conducted this study made me an outsider to the

participants. I recognized that they had their own narrative of identity transformational

experiences that pertained to this study and did my best to refrain from interjecting or

guiding the participants as they told their transformative stories.

Ontology

In qualitative research, ontology "addresses questions of the nature of reality and

addresses ideas about the relationships between people, society, and the world" (Baden &

Major, 2013, p. 57). My ontological perspective is that human life is an experiential

process that becomes a historical tool through human memory storage processes. My job

in this study was to facilitate the use of reflective dialogue to explore ECSVs'

transformations. This examination of the lived experiences of ECSVs incorporated tenet

six of VCT, which states that student veterans may experience multiple identities. The

identity transformation process was a fluid experience for the participants which informed their narration of their transformative stories.

Epistemology

My epistemological perspective is that knowledge is crafted through purposeful human interaction. Yin (2016) defined epistemology as, "the philosophical underpinnings of researchers' beliefs regarding the nature of knowledge and how it is derived or created" (p. 335). I believed that the study participants and readers of this study would all use the knowledge created to bridge their understanding of the participants' unique transformative experiences in the world. This knowledge can then become the tool a variety of stakeholders use to facilitate the identity transformation process, to provide resources, and to create new support systems for future generations of ECSVs. For example, this knowledge may become a tool for ECSVs to understand and craft a new scholarly identity. In addition, it may inform university stakeholders on how to become more culturally responsive, thereby constructing a more inclusive campus environment for all students.

Research Design

Mode of Inquiry

I hold a constructivist perspective, believing that people construct and attain knowledge throughout their lives. Since people possess a wealth of knowledge within them, in their memories, it was important that I worked collaboratively with the participants to share their knowledge with others. This perspective is defined as such: "Constructivism is the notion that knowledge lies in the minds of individuals, who

construct what they know on the basis of their own experiences" (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 29).

I chose a qualitative emergent study design to answer the research questions instead of a specific qualitative methodology, while incorporating aspects of narrative inquiry in the interviews and data collection process: "Emergent methods are about methodological innovation for the purpose of enhancing knowledge building and advancing scholarly conversations" (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2008, p. 4). I expected the inclusion of the narrative inquiry processes to enhance the co-creation of identity transformative knowledge with ECSVs: "Narrative analysis is an analytical method that accommodates a variety of approaches. Through these approaches, social researchers explore how people story their lives. This is also a process through which researchers understand the complexities of personal and social relations" (Esin et al., 2014, p. 203). In the data analysis, I kept the narrative analytical lens by coding open, thematic, and values. Facilitated the organization of constructs, such as how a potential participant might recount their experiences after they enlisted in the military and attended basic training which potentially resulted in a sense of culture clash.

Figure 3

Study Concept Map
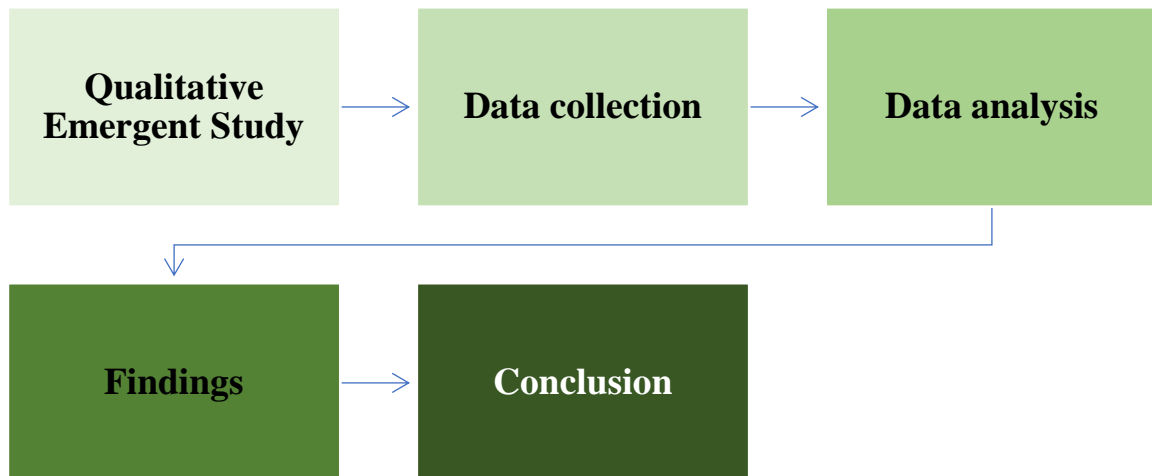
Study Design

The qualitative research method was appropriate for this study as it allowed for me to explore the warrior-to-scholar identity transformation experiences of ECSVs. Creswell (2014) stated the following: "Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (p. 4). ECSVs had unique identity transformation experiences that merited further social scientific knowledge exploration. For example, the participants had their identity transformed from adolescent civilians into warriors through the inculcation of the military indoctrination. In pursuing their baccalaureate at UNM, they once again engaged the process of transforming their identity from warriors into scholars or other professional identity. I was aware of the potential for the participants to state that they had not transformed their identities at all. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2008) observed: "Emergent methods typically require the researcher to remain flexible and open to modifications. In fact, emergent methods are often discovered as a result of modifying more conventional research projects when traditional methods fail to 'get at' the aspect of social life the researcher is interested in" (p. 3).

Little was known about the ECSV population, and their identity transformation experiences within the context of higher education in general or at UNM in particular. Identity and identity transformation were unique constructs for study, as they occur in a constantly changing real world environment: "Whether the researcher focuses on every day, commonplace practices, or is concentrating on the unique and unusual, there is general consensus that studying a world that is in flux necessarily requires the researcher to remain flexible in the methods used for investigating their phenomena" (Staller et al., 2008, p. 42). The flexibility this approach allowed me to collect descriptive, rich, and thick data from ECSVs regarding their identity transformation experiences.

Methods

In order to recruit participants for this study, I reached out to the two veteran organizations on the UNM campus: the Military and Veteran Resource Center (MVRC) and the Student Veterans of UNM (SVUNM) Association. They operate their own email listservs, and I provided them with a recruitment flyer which they distributed to student veterans. These organizations had been very supportive in past studies that I had conducted, including by distributing recruitment flyers. I sought out five ECSVs to participate in this study. Six potential participants responded, therefore; the last respondent was put a waiting list.

The study participants were ECSVs who served in one or both of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. To participate, they did not need to have been deployed, as all combat warriors undergo the military indoctrination process. However, they allowed me to see their DD214 to verify that their military occupation specialty or job was in the combat arms field. I verified box 11 and the participants were in control of their

document at all times. Another requirement was that they were close to completing or

had earned a bachelor's degree at UNM.

      The participants and I followed COVID-19 protocols as we conducted the

interviews and focus group sessions through Zoom. I requested their permission for the

session to be audio recorded. The participants gave their consent to be audio recorded and

after the data analysis the recordings were erased from the digital recording device. I

minimized the collection of identifiable data of the participants and gave each a

pseudonym. The ECSVs were men, with disabilities, and of Hispanic or White ethnic

backgrounds. One female warrant officer wanted to participate but did not meet the

ECSV criteria.

      Women have gained access to serve in the military combat jobs as enlisted

warriors. Yet, the only respondent that was a female had transitioned from enlisted into a

chief warrant officer capacity in the military. This disqualified her from the ranks of

enlisted combat student veteran. In the near future, female ECSVs, may enroll in

academic programs at UNM and their identity transformation experiences will need to be

explored.

      The participants were advised that their audio-recordings would be sent to a

transcribing organization or online third party that would produce written transcripts. I

assigned the focus group participants a number from one to four, which made it easier

track their statements. Upon receiving the written transcripts, I provided a copy to the

participants for them to check for accuracy and/or clarify any statements. This is called

member checking, and it has a positive impact on the reliability and trustworthiness of

the study.

Data Collection

The data collection process consisted of two different steps: first, I interviewed five participants individually, and then asked them to participate in the focus group. Four of the five individual participants took part in the focus group. I had experience conducting both individual interviews and focus groups on face-to-face formats for previous qualitative coursework. The individual interviews helped the participants share their stories freely and in a low-stress environment. The focus group produced richer, deeper data by allowing the conversation to flow organically. I was challenged due to the complexity of conducting both types of interviews via the Zoom meeting platform as a result of the COVID-19 restrictions. My lack of familiarity with the Zoom became a limitation.

The individual semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions yielded findings about the ECSVs' identity transformational experiences at UNM. The interviews provided each participant the opportunity to tell their transformational experiences in a one-on-one setting: "Interviews are appropriate when a researcher wants to take advantage of the one-to-one communication in order to probe deeply into a participant's experiences and are ideal when the researcher wishes to follow up initial responses by probing for additional information that can help clarify or illuminate" (Sabin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 358). I created an eight-question interview guide as the main data collection instrument for this study. The questions were as follows:

1. How old were you when you enlisted in the military?

2. Describe your experiences in becoming a combat warrior (combat trained professional soldier) in basic training, advanced individual training, and in your combat unit.

3. Given your experiences, tell me if you ever felt like a warrior? At what point? What events made you feel like a warrior?

4. What programs or services did the military provide when you left your military life that prepared you for civilian life?

5. Describe your experiences returning to civilian life, transition programs that you participated in, and how you were impacted.

6. Discuss your experiences at this university as you pursued academic life (challenges and successes) in becoming a scholar (academically educated professional or life-long learner).

7. Given your experiences, tell me if you now feel like a scholar. At what point? What classroom resources or services made you feel like a scholar?

8. Is there anything else that had a major impact in becoming the person you are today?

The focus group served as a study enhancing instrument for the individual interviews, as the participants expressed their identity transformation experiences in a group setting more easily. Their statements amplified remarks other participants made and brought flexibility to the conversation in a group setting. Morgan and Krueger (1993) stated that, "there is no right way to do focus groups"—instead, there are many alternatives, and it is up to the researchers to select a set of options that are appropriate for any given project" (as cited in Hesse-Biber & Leavy (Eds), 2008, p. 189). As the

mediator for this focus group, I was challenged to keep the discussion lively to allow the participants to engage one another, while being vigilant not to get into war stories or to move off topic.

A five-question focus group interview guide followed the individual semi-structured interview questionnaire with identity transformation as the central theme. I asked the questions within a 60-minute session. The data collection process ended with the participants stating that their statements were accurate and that they did not want to change anything. The focus group questions were as follows:

1. Please share your thoughts about yourselves in your combat role. Did you consider yourselves warriors (combat trained professional marines/soldiers)? If yes, describe the processes that contributed to this experience.

2. Having completed or nearly completed a baccalaureate degree, describe any experiences as a result of pursuing academic credentials or becoming scholars (academically educated professionals or lifelong learners) after being warriors?

3. What were your experiences participating in classroom activities that helped you become scholars?

4. What resources does the university make available to students that either help or hinder their efforts to become scholars?

5. How are you different today from the person who arrived on campus that first day?

My goal was to produce interview guides that comprehensively explored the participants' lived experiences before they enlisted in the military, their identity

transformation experiences in the military, their post-military service life, and finally

their identity transformation experiences in becoming scholars at UNM.

Data Analysis

I used Mezirow's (1991) transformative learning model in the data analysis

process to confirm that the civilian-to-warrior and then warrior-to-scholar identity

transformation processes took place. Then looked for patterns and statements of

transformation and the timeframe of new identity acquisition, such as the graduation

ceremony in basic training or the university graduation ceremony. Also, I looked for

statements on trying new roles as students, fathers, professionals, scholars, and more.

Finally, I was attentive to statements of projected fears, like indoctrination through

education. The participants validated these transformations, which I reported in their

individual profiles in the "findings" chapter. Then, after I completed the data collection

process, sent/received the transcripts from a third-party transcription service, and

conducted member checking, I used an Excel spreadsheet to organize the data analysis

process. I included a section of text from the interviews and focus group with vertical

columns with open, thematic, and values codes and a fourth column for memos. Color-

coding common or similar themes helped me to further organize the data. The data

analysis process ended when the codes repeated. I did not reach data saturation there

were not enough participants to fulfill the theoretical saturation requirements; hence, the

findings are not transferable to the whole enlisted combat student veteran population.

In the data analysis stage, I triangulated several coding processes. Creswell (2014)

defined *coding* as "the process of organizing the material into chunks or segments of text

and assigning a word or phrase to the segment in order to develop a general sense of it"

(p. 241). I combined the open and thematic coding processes with the values coding

process. Creswell and Poth (2018) noted that, "in open coding, the researcher forms

categories of information about the phenomenon being studied by segmenting

information" (p. 87). Savin-Baden and Major (2013) characterized the thematic coding

process as such: "it acknowledges that analysis happens at an intuitive level. It is through

the process of immersion in the data and considering connections and interconnections

between codes, concepts, and themes that an 'aha' moment happens" (p. 440). On the

other hand, Saldaña (2011) stated that, "values coding explores intrapersonal,

interpersonal, and cultural constructs or ethos" (p. 105).

This coding process produced rich, thick data and allowed for codes to emerge

throughout the data analysis process. It was of the utmost importance that I allowed the

codes to emerge and remained open to all possible outcomes. The analysis process took

roughly six weeks to complete. Then, I reviewed the transcripts and listened to the audio-

recordings to ensure that nothing was missed, listening also for tones, speech rates,

inflections, emotional differences between topics, and more. Finally, I recorded the data

onto an excel spreadsheet, which is found in Appendix D.

Population

According to the U.S. Census of 2010, there were approximately 23 million

veterans living in the United States. In the state of New Mexico, the veteran population

was roughly 157,000. Within higher education institutions, an estimated one million

student veterans are enrolled as students, and this number is expected to grow: "Over one

million veterans received Veterans Affairs Educational Benefits in 2013 through the

Post-9/11 G.I. Bill and with an increasing volume of service members separating from

the military, the number of educational beneficiaries is expected to reach two million

before 2020" (Tinoco, 2014, p. 28). At UNM, the student veteran count was difficult to

track as some veterans did not self-identify on the university's admissions application.

However, an estimated 850 student veterans had certified their Department of Veterans

Affairs educational benefits at the Veteran Resource Center. The estimated size of the

ECSV population at UNM was problematic, but I estimated the number to be between

100–200, as the last two wars in Afghanistan and Iraq increased the numbers of student

veterans returning from the battlefield. The participants enlisted in the military at such an

early age that they had limited exposure to or experience in both academia and civilian

life as young adults. Their enlistment into combat-focused military occupation

specialties, e.g., air defense, combat engineers, infantry, intelligence, and special forces

groups, meant that they successfully participated in the military combat indoctrination

process that inculcated the warrior identity in them.

I gave the participants in the individual interviews the choice to participate in the

focus group if they wished. There were five open spots in the focus group, and four

participants from the individual interviews filled them. Before the focus group started one

participant terminated their participation in the study along with an alternate that had

been put on a waiting list, therefore, four participants formed the focus group. It was

optimal for interview participants to take part in the focus group, as they could enhance

their identity transformative narratives in a group setting.

Sample

As this study focused on the ECSV population, the most appropriate sampling

method was purposive, considering that they possessed knowledge about the identity

transformation process. In purposive sampling, "the goal or purpose for selecting the specific instances is to have those that will yield the most relevant and plentiful data—in essence, information rich—given your topic of study" (Yin, 2016, p. 93). The purposive sampling process consisted of me vetting the participants' DD-214 form, where box 11 identifies the participants' military occupations in a combat arms discipline, such as air-defense, combat engineers, infantry, recon, and/or special forces/groups. The other stipulation for participation was that the participants had either already attained a baccalaureate or were within one academic year of completing their baccalaureate studies. This was important so that sufficient time had passed since they had left the military service, enrolled at the university, and participated in enough academic coursework so the scholar identity transformation could have taken root.

Location of the Study

This study took place at the University of New Mexico, located in Albuquerque, New Mexico in the southwestern United States. UNM is recognized as a Carnegie Research 1 institution and is highly ranked as a Hispanic-serving and military-friendly institution. I conducted the study data collection processes during the COVID-19 pandemic; therefore, the data collection phase took place via Zoom. I made no other arrangements, as the participants had good internet access, their own laptops, and were encouraged to participate from a secure location to protect their identity.

Rigor

The verification process in qualitative research refers to how I intended to build rigor into the study. Rigor is a construct comprised of credibility, reliability, and validity. Creswell and Poth (2018) defined rigor as, "the means through which the researcher

validates the accuracy of the account using one or more of the procedures for validation,

such as member checking, triangulating sources of data, or using a peer or external

auditor of the account" (p. 48). I established rigor by validating the data collection

processes for the individual interviews and the focus group. Then triangulated the data

analysis through open, thematic, and values coding.

Credibility

I established credibility through a systematic evaluation of the study instruments

that built accuracy into the findings: "Credibility study is one that provides assurance that

you have properly collected and interpreted the data, so that the findings and conclusions

accurately reflect and represent the world that was studied" (Yin, 2016, p. 85).

In this study, I created the interview and focus group instruments with the input of

the dissertation committee chair. With the permission of the study participants, I sent the

audio recorded transcripts to a third-party transcription service that produced and

returned the written transcripts. I conducted member-checking by providing the

participants with a copy of their transcripts in order for them to confirm their accuracy or

to correct any errors. The participants then sent me an email declaring the transcripts to

be accurate or attaching a copy of the corrected transcripts.

Reliability

Reliability is the process of ensuring consistency in the data coding process that

leads to the validation of the findings: "Reliability indicates that the researcher's

approach is consistent across different researchers and different projects" (Creswell,

2014, p. 201). A researcher can use various activities to provide solid reliability for a

study, including an external auditor, intercoder team, member checking, triangulation,

peer briefing and rich thick description. In the present study, I used five individual semi-structured interviews and a focus group in the data collection process, triangulation of the data analysis, and member-checking. My implementation of these procedures yielded thick, rich, and reliable data derived from the participants' own words to inform the findings.

Validity

Establishing validity was complex within the research design. I used a variety of strategies to communicate a high level of validity: "Validity determines whether the research truly measures what it was intended to measure or how truthful the research results are" (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013, p. 5). I began by outlining my positionality and the impact this may have had on the study and the research design. For example, my positionality was as an insider to the student veteran body as an ECSV. Therefore, it was important that I limited myself or refrained from influencing the participants in the data collection process. I was judicious in asking the questions and immediately ceasing to speak, reducing the chance that they would add their narratives. In the focus group, I allowed the conversation between the participants to flow, only stopping it to redirect it back to the main topic, especially if the participants deviated off-topic into potential trigger areas regarding combat deployments.

I was also an outsider as a researcher and employed multiple verification strategies to ensure the accuracy of the data collected, such as member checking (participant verification) of the transcribed audio-recorded materials. This allowed the participants to correct any discrepancies and give their input in the data collection process. I designed the focus group session to produce data that enhanced the individual

semi-structure interviews and increased validity. The triangulation of the data collection

and analysis processes led to rich thick descriptive findings by quoting the participants

verbatim. I used a streamlined research design to ensure what was intended to be

measured was and clearly communicated these processes used in the study.

Ethics

It was important to recognize that the study participants were ECSVs who might

suffer from mental and physical problems. Therefore, I strictly followed the Institutional

Review Board (IRB) ethical standards and guidance, i.e., attained the participants'

permission prior to audio-recording the interviews and focus group sessions. Being aware

and vigilant of potential triggers for the participants helped limit the harm to them;

keeping their safety in mind was key. I informed the participants of their right to

terminate their participation in the study and told them about community resources that

could help them if they were triggered. These included on-campus counseling services

like Student Health and Counseling (SHAC), AGORA, and veteran health organizations

like the VA Hospital and the Vet-Centers. Finally, I informed the participants of the

reporting procedures and mandatory reporters for any violation done by me.

Protection of Human Subjects

The participants in this study were military combat veterans who might suffer

from a variety of physical and psychological disabilities. For example, I asked the

participants to talk about their identity transformation experiences in the military, which

could trigger a PTSD episode. The best way to limit the possibility of the participant

being triggered was to guide the conversation to remain on topic and help the participant

tell their story. If the participant deviated from the topic of identity transformation to a

combat experience, I stopped the interview or focus group session to allow them to either

recompose themselves or end the session which did not occur. I further protected the

participants by discussing counseling and other support entities. None of the participants

needed help or stated that they were triggered.

I collected minimal identifiable data from the participants. They did verify their

qualification to participate by verifying their DD-214 form at the beginning of the

interview session and through Zoom. The verification data was limited to the

participants' emails, names, and their military occupation specialty. Participants needed

to be qualified as ECSVs in order to participate in the study, which could only be done

with the DD-214 form. I visually verified box 11 of the form and did not collect the data;

the participants remained in possession of this form. I assigned pseudonyms and numbers

to protect the participants and deidentified the data quickly. After the data collection

process was completed, I destroyed any identifiable participant data.

Conclusion

This was a qualitative emergent study that explored the identity transformation

experiences of ECSVs at UNM. The potential identity transformational experiences were

from civilians into warriors and warriors into scholars. The participants were a subgroup

of the student veteran population at UNM and had previously participated in combat roles

within the U.S. military. I used purposive sampling for the study's five participants,

which required the potential participants to show the researcher their Department of

Defense form 214. They also needed to be close to or have completed their baccalaureate

degree. The interviews took place via Zoom due to the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions,

which prevented face-to-face meetings. The data collection process included semi-

structured interviews and a focus group. I asked the participants to provide permission to

be audio-recorded and to verify their statements post-transcription. Since the participants

were former military combat service members that potentially suffered from mental and

physical problems, I provided them with information about community services that

could help them if they were triggered and discussed the procedure for reporting research

violations by me.

Chapter 4

Results

"The pen is mightier than the sword."

—Bulwer-Lytton (1839, p. 39)

I conducted this qualitative emergent study to explore the identity transformation experiences of ECSVs, a sub-group of the student veteran population at UNM. The conceptual framework for the study depicted both the military and university environments as sites of identity transformation. Neither the military nor the university has a formal identity transformation program to enable ECSVs to become scholars. This study sought to identify the social processes ECSVs engaged to transform into warriors or scholars. The problem this study examined was the lack of knowledge regarding ECSVs.

I arrived on the UNM campus in 2013 after experiencing a disorienting dilemma which triggered a deep desire for me to move away from the military warrior identity. At the time, I only knew they could not continue to live with the warrior identity, which clashed with the academic and civilian environments. Enrolling in academic courses provided two opportunities: first, the ability to heal my psychological conditions at the time; second, to engage in an informal transformative learning process. As an undergraduate my major was in Business Administration but took classes on a wide range of subjects to inform new habits of minds, including women in religion, the history of Islam, yoga, and even participated in a Student Veteran Retreat. I then became the Assistant Director of the Student Veteran Retreat for 4 years as part of my leadership roles on campus.

In graduate school, I began to craft a new identity as the maverick scholar in the learning sciences. As an ECSV, I could identify with some of the experiences that this study's participants lived through, such as arriving at UNM and being left alone to figure out what becoming a student meant. By becoming a leader in the Student Veteran Association and the Graduate and Professional Student Association, I discovered that I needed to be a situational- and transformative-type leader that promoted equality in resource distribution and that was open to dialogue in order to solve campus problems. My tuition was funded by federal Department of Veterans Affairs education programs and the New Mexico Department of Veteran Services Wartime Veteran Scholarship. Therefore, I expected the university to provide a high-quality education, the resources to support my learning, and events to increase my professional and social skills. I believe the university fulfilled these expectations and helped me completely transform my identity from warrior into scholar.

The pertinent literature included themes related to identity, identity transformation, military indoctrination, transformative learning, the scholar identity, and the warrior identity. Scholars have also drawn attention to the marginalization that can exist within higher education and the lack of knowledge about ECSVs. There was a gap in the literature with a lack of knowledge of the warrior-to-scholar identity transformation and of ECSVs. The study's theoretical framework combined psychosocial development, transformative learning, and veteran critical theories linked through the identity construct. This framework helped narrow and focus the study at the individual participant level exploring the individual identity transformation experiences of each participant.

Research Questions

Main Question

How do enlisted combat student veterans describe their experiences transforming their identity from warriors into scholars at the University of New Mexico?

Sub-Question

1. What are the experiences of enlisted combat student veterans as they adjust to their role as students at the University of New Mexico?

2. How do their narratives inform the ongoing process of identity development and transformation?

Methods

To answer these questions, I used two data collection instruments: semi-structured individual interviews of five participants, and a focus group with four of the five participants after one terminated their participation in the study. To recruit study participants, I sent a recruitment flyer (see Appendix C) out through the Military and Veteran Resource Center twice.

I gave pseudonyms to each participant to protect their identity and data. These names were Benny, Peter, Tom, Terry, and Victor. The participants gave permission for the individual interviews and focus group to be audio-recorded and transcribed by the same third-party as the individual interviews.

The five interviewees were talkative and easily answered each question in the individual interviews. There were small interruptions during the interviews, as one participant had to answer a phone call, another was interrupted by people speaking to them, and the final participant was interrupted by his daughter who he was watching.

These interruptions made a couple of the sessions exceed the 60-minute target by roughly five or six minutes.

Tom and the waitlisted participant terminated their participation in the study, stating that they did not want to take part in the focus group. Therefore, four participants took part in the focus group session, which lasted 60 minutes. The process that I followed in the focus group was to ask a question and call on each person to respond while allowing for some dialogue to happen organically between the participants. On two occasions, I needed to bring the discussion back on topic as the participants shifted the discussion to their war stories. For example, during the discussion on campus resources, the participants began speaking about beans and bullets during deployments. I quickly brought the conversation back on topic.

After receiving the written transcriptions, I conducted member checking via email. Each participant clarified their statements or stated that their transcribed portions were accurate. I contacted two participants, whose statements that were not clear, by emailing each separately. Once they clarified their statements, I closed the focus group data collection process.

The data analysis included open, thematic, and values coding processes, first by hand and then transferred into Excel spreadsheets. In the hand coding process, I used varying color highlighters to code the five interview and focus transcripts. Then put the open codes into an Excel spreadsheet. I analyzed the transcripts three times to ensure that I had thoroughly identified and recorded all the codes. Once I had organized the codes, I reviewed the spreadsheet for duplicate codes, which ended the open coding process. Then I conducted the thematic coding by grouping similar codes together and refining the

themes into a short list. The values coding process required me to analyze the themes and

refer back to the transcripts to identify the participants' stated beliefs, norms, schemas,

and values. For example, on the theme on indoctrination vigilance, the question was: "do

the participants believe that they can be indoctrinated through academic education?" The

participants voiced that they were aware of the military indoctrination they had

experienced and were cautious about becoming indoctrinated through the liberal ideology

they saw at the university. Therefore, the analysis process became a flowing systemized

identify-check-verify repetitive exercise. The analysis ended when the codes repeated

themselves. More participants were needed to reach saturation, with only five participants

I did not reach saturation, therefore, the findings are not transferable.

I used the transformative learning model in the analysis process, as the

participants informally used it in becoming warriors in the military and professionals or

scholars at UNM. Mezirow's (1990) in Taylor & Cranton (2012) transformative learning

steps were:

> Transformations often follow some variation of the following phases of meaning
> becoming clarified: 1. A disorienting dilemma, 2. Self-examination with feelings
> of fear, anger, guilt, or shame, 3. A critical assessment of assumptions, 4.
> Reconciliation that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared,
> 5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions, 6. Planning a
> course of action, 7. Acquiring new knowledge and skills for implementing one's
> plan, 8. Provisional trying of new roles, 9. Building competence and self-
> confidence in new roles and relationships, 10. A reintegration into one's life on
> the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective. (p. 86)

A final point of clarification: a disorienting dilemma is a difficult life experience that

triggers a person to engage in the transformative learning process. Each participant

identified a different disorienting dilemma that led them to enroll in university courses,

such as health problems and professional career changes. The rest of the transformative

learning model is easy to understand.

Findings Structure

The individual profiles presented the participants' narratives of their identity transformation from warriors into scholars or into their chosen professional identities. The cumulative findings established and validated both the individual identity transformation process through the university's learning growth path and the university's status as a transformative space. The finding present the participants' perspectives about the UNM environment, its resources and materials, and support systems. As stated in Chapter 1, UNM has been proactive in developing the Military and Veteran Resource Center, staffing it, and promoting veteran initiatives. In discussing these findings, it is important to use a systemic improvement lens to understand the participants' beliefs and schemas with regard to their lived experiences on campus. This section discusses the following themes: the participant profiles, identity transformation and UNM as a transformative space, the warrior identity brought to campus, identity acquisition as a ceremonial experience, becoming students, face-to-face versus online learning, andragogy versus pedagogy, the imposter syndrome, help-seeking, socializing, and indoctrination vigilance.

The pattern that emerged was that the participants enrolled in university academic programs after they encountered some sort of disorienting dilemma in their personal or professional lives. They brought their warrior identity with them, and it clashed with the university's academic, critical thinking, and social norms. The disoriented dilemma was the first step in Mezirow's (1997) transformative learning model and led the participants to question themselves, their new roles, and if or how they fit into a new system. Tom said, "once you get removed from the machine, you're just like this wandering cog, like,

'What happened?' Is there another machine I belong to now or I just do my own thing?"

This statement speaks to two points: the continuation of the warrior identity on campus

and the challenge of assimilating or finding a sense of belonging on campus. In the midst

of these transformative experiences, the participants began to forge new ways of being

and new roles as students. The participants stated that they were left on their own to

figure out campus life as the university did not have any veteran-specific orientation or

veteran-centric academic courses to help guide them. The lack of such programs may

contribute to the continued perceived marginalization of the participants and student

veterans, or at the very least hinder the participants' assimilation into campus life. The

participants voiced their frustration in experiencing difficulties but persisted in their

programs due to their ambition to build a better life for themselves and their families.

Participants' Profiles

The section first presents the findings in individual participant profiles with

identity transformation graphs to show their journey, a demographics paragraph, and then

sections on the warrior identity and scholar identity before an identity transformation

analysis. Additional findings are presented as shared themes or values that the

participants brought to light.

The profiles are presented in alphabetical order by pseudonyms as follows:

Benny, Peter, Terry, Tom, and Victor. The demographics section includes a motivation

statement by the participants regarding being students at UNM. Experiencing change is

not easy, especially when it relates to identity transformations and shifting behaviors,

beliefs, habits of mind, morals, schemas, and values. Each participant noted that having a

clear motivational force pulling them towards their goals was important to them; they

wanted to be clear on why they were enduring the warrior-to-scholar transformation.

Benny's Profile

Benny was a married Hispanic male in his thirties with a strong veteran persona,

which meant that he had a beard, long hair, wore a military-style shirt, and had a very

alpha-male presence. His mannerisms and talk were still grounded in military culture, but

he was making progress to becoming an ambassador or State Department professional.

He was motivated to become a scholar and then an ambassador because he wanted to

serve his nation again and to be a role model for his nephews: "I feel like serving again

somehow somewhere. I am a role model for younger kids now and my nephews."

Figure 4

Benny's Path
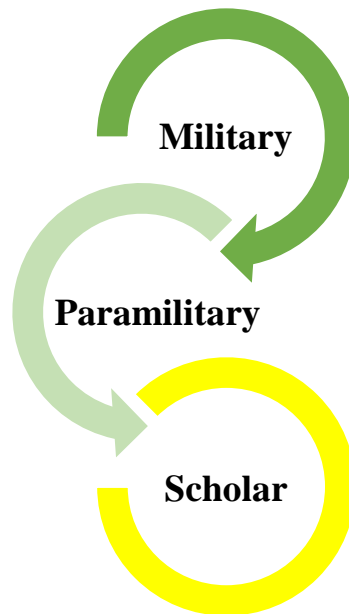
Warrior Identity. Benny described himself as such: "I am going to say I was kind of a stoner loser kind of guy" before enlisting in the Army as an infantryman (11B). He became a warrior at the end of basic training: "I remember we had this big, huge ceremony with bonfire and drill sergeants squared up, punched our class rifles into our chest. It's part of the whole brainwashing ceremony type. I loved it." His reference to brainwashing relates to the indoctrination processes of becoming a warrior. He further described his military career as a love-hate relationship after multiple deployments and a stop-loss, which is the process that the military uses to keep essential soldiers from leaving the military in times of war. Yet, Benny loved being an infantryman and combat life: "I was an M240 machine gunner, and I love that thing, but then I hated being stop-loss, having my personal choice of getting out of the military taken away from me." Benny served at the height of both Afghanistan and Iraq wars, when combat warriors were essential to the Department of Defense's war effort.

After leaving the active-duty Army, he enlisted in the New Mexico National Guard, which was his transition into a paramilitary occupation with military-style jobs, such as policing and first responders. His motivation for joining the National Guard was, "I can't just wean myself off of active duty. I remember feeling the separation anxiety. You feel alone, I guess. You feel separated." He further described the separation from the military as, "you no longer can depend on your battle buddies to your left or to your right. Now you are supposed to go out into the world. You're on your own and by yourself." There was a double-edge sword, he observed: "when you were in the military, you know you have people who have your back, but you have no freedom. But when you go to the civilian world, you're free but you're on your own. Nobody's got your back." These

feelings of isolation or separation anxiety drove him to mitigate his return to civilian life

by seeking paramilitary work. This delayed his disorienting dilemma until after his last

deployment, which led him to decide to leave the National Guard and military-based

employment for good.

Benny started and operated a restaurant business with his brother and then

decided to enroll in school. First, he completed a program at Central New Mexico

Community College and then transferred to UNM to pursue his Political Science degree.

The professional dissatisfaction of leaving the National Guard and operating the

restaurant business became the disorienting dilemma that ignited his transformative

learning processes.

Scholar Identity. Like several participants in this study, Benny described being

"a little bit lost in the sauce. I'm older, I'm 37 years old. I'm surrounded by a bunch of

18- and 19-year-old kids. I feel a little bit isolated I guess." Being on campus during the

COVID-19 pandemic further generated feelings of isolation in Benny: "I was starting to

meet people and then 2020 came and it all just went away with COVID." Another

negative impact of the pandemic was that learning was constrained to distance-learning

through online platforms. Benny found that he "hates online learning courses. I'm the

kind of guy who wants to be in class face-to-face talking with somebody. Online, it's

very unpersonal; you are talking to a screen." Beyond his dislike of online learning, he

was thriving in his Political Science program and particularly liked history courses: "The

classes that I'm taking are stimulating, like I'm taking U.S. military history class right

now." Part of transformative learning is changing habits of mind by acquiring new

knowledge, which leads to trying new roles: "I'm trying to get a career in the State

Department, and my degree is in Political Science and History. I guess that's as much of

a scholar." It was clear that he was on a mission to become an ambassador and that being

a scholar was a secondary identity to him. In the process of becoming a diplomat, he

viewed the transformation process as "trading in the sword for the pen."

During the interview, Benny reflected on different periods of his life and how

people perceived him. He said: "I remember when I first went to basic training, they go,

'you used to smoke a lot of pot, didn't you?' Now I feel like people talk to me for

example, that they go, 'you sound like a lawyer or scholar. Even a politician.'" By

critically reflecting, he was able to see his growth as a person from a self-described loser

pot-smoker into a diplomatic type of professional. In seeking to become a scholar, he had

to change his interaction approach with his peers and began to differentiate between the

military and the university: "In the military, I could be more direct with my peers and not

fear any sort of judgement. At school, there is like this air that you have to be a little bit

more sensitive. I can't just curse like I used to in the military." This was a source of

dynamic psychosocial interactive friction as he enrolled at the university, participated in

courses, and had to change his behavior to become more sensitive and engage with his

peers by altering his speech.

Peter's Profile

Peter was a White male in his early forties from California. He was studying

Engineering and hoped to graduate in the spring of 2022. He was married and had a

daughter. He described himself as an introvert and as a quiet person who was forced to

become an extrovert in the Marine Corps. His motivation was his young family and being

challenged both professionally and at a personal level. This need to be challenged

previously led him to re-enlist in the Marine Corps. Professional dissatisfaction with

multiple jobs became his disorienting dilemma that resulted in his enrollment at this

university. His pursuit of a degree in Engineering and engaging with his peers and the

learning processes presented enough of a challenge to keep him focused throughout his

academic career.

Figure 5

Peter's Path

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┌──────────┐      ┌──────────┐
│ Civilian │      │ Scholar  │
└──────────┘      └──────────┘
      │                 │
┌──────────┐      ┌──────────┐
│ Marine 1 │      │ Civilian │
└──────────┘      └──────────┘
      │                 │
┌──────────┐      ┌──────────┐
│ Civilian │──────│ Marine 2 │
└──────────┘      └──────────┘
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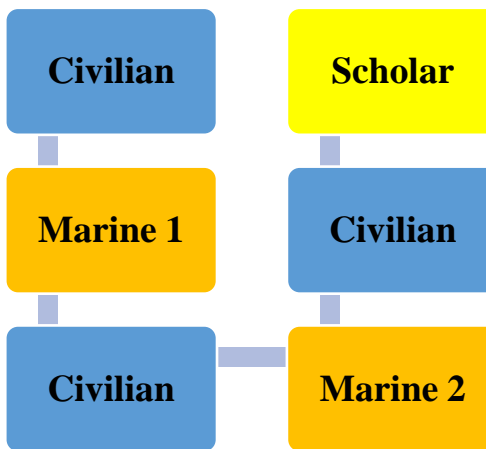
Warrior Identity. Peter entered the Marines at the age of 18 and attended Marine

Corps basic training, which lasted 13 weeks. He stated that he became a warrior at the

graduation ceremony:

> You get there, the whole company gathers around the freight deck around the Iwo
> Jima Monument. You're excited and still tired and beat down, but all this emotion
> comes through. Then you see everybody getting their eagle, globe, and anchor,
> and then it just comes down to you, it's overwhelming. Then your sense of
> belonging starts right then, at least it did for me.

His warrior identity was further engrained in the combat units where he served. He spoke

about how the Marine Corps forced him to transform from introvert to an extrovert

leader:

> I'm a quiet person. Then going into the military was a different shift. I wasn't
> always confident in school either. I always had that, it's hard for me to talk to

people. Going into the military started to bust me out of that shell a little bit
because you have to talk to people. Definitely changed me as far as making me a
little more outgoing and increased my confidence. I did well; I applied myself.

He admitted that he did not fully buy into the warrior identity: "Well, may be like 70/30."

This statement is important because it shows that he tried to limit the impact of the

military indoctrination process.

Peter's warrior experience was unique amongst the participants because he left

the Marine Corps after 4 years and returned to civilian life. He described being a civilian

as being "bored": "I was struggling to find something. I was looking for a challenge. I

wasn't being challenged with the jobs that I had." After 31 months in civilian life, he

decided to re-enlist in the Marine Corps. After another 4 years of the Marine Corps, he

left for good. He returned to California and then moved to New Mexico because "I was

single, dating which is why I came to Albuquerque. It was new, like get out of California.

I'll start up here, see if I like this area." He worked in multiple jobs but found them

unsatisfying and lacking the structure he wanted: "It just wasn't a fit for me. Maybe I was

looking for more structure, more—what the word I'm looking for? More follow through."

This dissatisfaction with his life was the disorienting dilemma that led him to use his

veteran benefits to enroll at UNM.

Scholar Identity. Peter's transformative learning process started pre-enrollment

by dealing with his disorienting dilemma through self-reflection:

> I started thinking more about school and my GI Bill. Okay, I'll start thinking
> about this. I still have some time, but it's good to start getting a plan together of
> what do I want to do? What do I want to go to school for? What do I want to
> study? Where do I want to go after that, perhaps? What kind of jobs are out there
> that could take me to some other interesting area of the country, or maybe still
> right here?

This is the critical reflection that is the second transformative learning step. He described becoming a student as "just strange. I definitely felt more like an outsider. I try to blend in as much as I can." He described his classroom and campus experience in a positive manner: "my personal experience with other students and professors have actually only been positive." He was open to the new student role and adapted well into the student veteran identity which validated tenet six of VCT.

Peter supported his learning through a variety of means, such as by using the Center for Academic Program Support (CAPS), a tutoring service, and by engaging with his peers, teacher assistants, and professors. Of CAPS, he stated, "for me it was a good experience there. They were very helpful." He discussed reaching out to others as: "I didn't reach out as much early on, and as I went through my junior and senior years, I was reaching out to those students and assistants, and professors more and more because I valued it more and more as a resource."

Peter discussed, in both the interview and focus group, experiencing the negative effects of imposter syndrome. In class discussions, professors brought up the imposter syndrome: "that imposter syndrome, it's just like an innocent question. They ask who has ever felt they've been an imposter and each time, I'm just like 'right here.'" Other participants also mentioned this problem of the imposter syndrome, which is discussed in the additional findings below.

Peter stated that he was not currently a scholar but would become one at his graduation ceremony. He said: "No, for me, right now I'm about 90% Marine, 10% student." And about becoming a scholar he stated, "I'd say my academic warrior side is

rising up. I think it's overtaking the warrior side; I think I'll be more of a scholar. I'll feel

more like a scholar at the end of the semester once I've actually attained my Bachelor's."

For him, the graduation ceremony served as a validating event that cemented the

warrior identity in the Marine Corps and would do the same as he transformed into a

scholar. It was interesting hearing him weave the warrior and scholar identity together,

demonstrating his understanding that past identities leave residual attachments that

continue to inform new identities. His academic warrior construct was a great example of

this because he recognized that he was attaining the scholar identity and moving away

from the warrior identity but maintained an emotional connection to being a Marine.

Terry's Profile

Terry was a Hispanic Marine Corps student veteran from New Mexico and was in

his late twenties. He had a light skin tone and dark hair. He had a very direct speaking

approach and presented a tough alpha-male persona. He was single and dating, which a

positive social behavior for him as he did not like the isolation that stemmed from the

COVID-19 pandemic. He told his experiences in a detailed and deliberate manner,

demonstrating a high level of critical reflection about his past experiences and path to

accomplishing his future goals. He had a vision for himself and was being methodical in

crafting a new identity and life. This was important because it allowed him to be open to

new experiences, making changes to his behavior, beliefs, schemas, and values.

However, he was vigilant to threats he perceived to the new life he wanted for himself.

For example, he talked about college and university education as possibly indoctrinating

students and leading them to become liberals, a construct he did not want for himself.

Figure 6

Terry's Path

Warrior Identity. Terry described his home life prior to enlisting in the Marine

Corps as, "I grew up in a privileged house, kind of spoiled." This may have generated a

sense of shock when he went to basic training. He stated: "When I went to boot camp and

they took away my identity, you can't call yourself anything. They call you this recruit

and they're screaming at you, cursing at you, and you don't have connection to the world.

It's hard because you are 18 and this is you first experience outside of your comfort

zone."

He further described the Marine warrior identity as "tactically competent in the

act of killing people." When he became a warrior through a basic training ceremony, he

had a conflicted view of himself and his service. He felt that he did not live up to the

warrior identity or infantry identity in his 4 years because his unit did not deploy to a

combat zone. Prior to his arrival at his unit, the unit committed some murders in Iraq. He

said, "I never lived up to that expectation. It was so disconnected from Iraq and

Afghanistan because my unit got banned from Iraq because they massacred a village of

civilians." For the purpose of this study, Terry met the ECSV criteria by serving in a

combat unit; deployment was not a requirement. For many warriors, deployment into a

battlefield is the purpose of training diligently on a daily basis and being combat-ready at

all times. Within Terry's warrior identity, there was conflict as he was a warrior by being

a combat Marine but also questioned his "warrior-ness" because he did not deploy into a

combat zone.

He described the Marine infantry environment as, "it's like a cult of the infantry

that actually want to take life, granted it's the life of bad people, but taking a life none the

less." This killing brainwashed state caused him many problems in personal and romantic

relationships. He told a story of dating a girl at UNM which ended because "she got very,

very uncomfortable with the things I would say. I was two or three months out the

Marine Corps and I'm talking to her about the necessity to kill people. She thought I was

a psychopath."

Terry served 4 years and left the Marine Corps with good and bad experiences.

He then worked loss prevention and security jobs that fit into the paramilitary

employment category. He described his paramilitary experience as, "at Walmart, it was a

chance for me to still maintain that aggressive spirit. You just bring in shoplifters and

help cops subdue them." For a year and a half, he worked different jobs. This

professional wandering led him to experience a disorienting dilemma that led him to

enroll at UNM.

Scholar Identity. Almost 5 years have passed since Terry left the Marine Corps,

and he spent the last 3 years on campus. He described this experience as, "I'm slowly

becoming more and more disconnected from that violent kind of culture environment

pretty much." About becoming an ECSV and having to informally engage the

transformative learning processes, he critically reflected: "I had to actively watch what I

was saying, I wasn't with the boys anymore. We can't just fucking joke about some

horrible humor, sexist, or suicide, and stuff like that." He further questioned a male's

ability to retain his masculinity as he stated, "you can't even be as masculine sometimes

because now it's being criminalized." He remained vigilant not to become indoctrinated

within the university culture: "I did have to tone it down and not be indoctrinated from

one culture into another." On university indoctrination, his perspective was that "any kind

of public education is a form of indoctrination because when you take a fucking history

class, what the fuck is the perspective from? The liberal fucking college as well as the

nation." He welcomed the movement away from his warrior identity but cautiously

approached the learning processes so not to become indoctrinated a second time.

He did credit the university for helping him craft a new identity: "college really

helped me find a new identity." He discovered his love for "photography and philosophy,

especially the stoics like Marcus Aurelius and Socrates; college is a good avenue to self-

discovery." He pointed to learning new things and transforming his beliefs, habits of

mind, or schemas: "Helping you explore, yes. Explore new things that you didn't realize

you would've like if you would've stayed in the Marines." He was pursuing a business

degree with the purpose of seeking employment opportunities in the film industry. Things

that were important to him as a student were film, learning new things, and networking.

Of the scholar identity in the interview, he said, "a scholar is just a title man.

Same with being an actor, they're just titles." In the focus group, he shared, "there's

really no big revelation or transformation from a warrior into a scholar. It gradually

happens. You gradually change and are a product of your environment." He did not

describe himself as a scholar but acknowledged that he was changing through the

university learning growth process and saw himself as a film director with a Business

Bachelor's degree. I expected that participants might state they had not yet transformed

their identities into scholars. In Terry's case, he did not believe in the scholar identity

beyond it being a title. He was simply meeting the scholar status requirements of

attaining a baccalaureate in order to become a film director. He may never become a

scholar at all.

Tom's Profile

Tom was a native New Mexican with ties to Albuquerque and the Cloudcroft area

in south-central New Mexico. His parents owned property in Cloudcroft. He was a

Caucasian male in his late thirties. As a 15-year-old, his parents enrolled him in the New

Mexico Military Institute (NMMI) for high school and community college in Roswell,

New Mexico. NMMI has their own version of basic training that cadets must complete,

which distinguished Tom from the other interviewees. His military indoctrination began 2

to 3 years earlier than most ECSVs, which further engrained the warrior identity within

him. He had 15 years of military combat arms and education experience; therefore, his

indoctrination levels may have been higher than the other participants. This could also

account for the difficulties he was experiencing as an ECSV on campus and as a civilian.

He was motivated to become a health professional due to his own health problems,

desiring to improve his healthcare and advocate for family and friends who he saw as

getting substandard healthcare.

Figure 7

Tom's Path

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┌──────────┐      ┌──────────┐      ┌──────────┐
│ Civilian │ ──▶  │   NMMI   │ ──▶  │ Warrior  │
└──────────┘      └──────────┘      └──────────┘
                                          │
                                          ▼
              ┌────────────┐      ┌──────────┐
              │ Healthcare │ ◀──  │ Civilian │
              │   worker   │      └──────────┘
              └────────────┘
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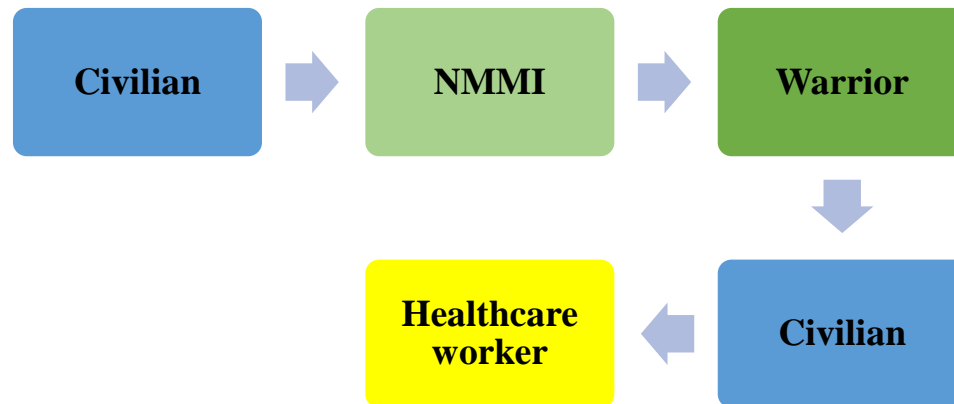
Warrior Identity. After completing his high school studies, Tom attended Army

basic training at the age of 17. Having the NMMI basic training experience prepared him

for the rigors of the Army life:

> It was basically the practical application of everything I was doing at school.
> When I went into the military, I was really good at it. When we had to do physical
> training (PT) and stuff, they always would pull me out. I was like a private. They
> pulled me out and I was singing cadence for miles. I was well prepared for it.
> NMMI gave me the military advantage.

In using the "they" pronoun, he was referring to the drill sergeants who called him

out to sign cadence during marches or running sessions: "I knew how to play the game. I

just made sure that I blended in and stayed in the herd. I didn't stick out at all." He then

attended advanced individual training as a combat medic in San Antonio, Texas at Fort

Sam Houston, and then he went to his combat unit.

He described attaining the warrior identity as an assimilation process into his

combat unit that took months: "I started to feel like a soldier once I was accepted in my

actual unit, and that took months, maybe three or four months. I had to earn the respect of

all of the grunts and stuff." He further described himself as a highly task-oriented person

and did not care for the ceremonial military stuff. He said, "you can pin all kinds of stuff

on people, but it's the experience of being integrated and doing your work. To me, that's

the gratifying part."

Tom talked about his perspective on how he fit into the combat unit scheme: "I

was a cog in a machine, and I was glad that I fit into the machine. I felt like I was part of

the machine and not a stand-alone cog." He demonstrated a solid understanding that he

was not an individual person operating out of free will but instead a single cog in a great

organizational culture. That was something that attracted him about the military: the loss

of individuality and blending into the combat unit.

After suffering injuries during the last few years of his enlistment, he endured the

medical outboarding process that lasted multiple years. His described these experiences

as such: "my last couple of years in the military were an absolute hell because of the med

board." After getting out, he was glad to be out of the military but disoriented as he did

not know what being a free man meant. He stated, "I was glad to be free of the torment

that was going on this past two years with my unit but the prospect of being a free man, I

mean, I was injured. I was depressed. I've just gone through the worst time of my life. It

was horrible. Then, I got divorced almost immediately."

His return back to Cloudcroft was difficult as he sought to heal his injuries but

was overwhelmed by his life situation. He isolated in his parents' house, living there rent-

free. He reflected over the past 2 years that he had been feeling disoriented, lost, and

struggled to find life meaning. In his words, "I've been suicidal and homicidal for the

past two years; trying to think of something to do with the rest of my life seemed

pointless. It was about a year after getting out that I started doing positive things." Saying

that this period of his life was difficult was an understatement; he contemplated suicide, as many veterans do who struggle with mental health.

Scholar Identity. Tom's disorientating dilemma that led him to move to Albuquerque and pursue a healthcare degree was enduring the medical boarding process out of the military, getting divorced, and dealing with depression. He said, "I got divorced, but it wasn't until I left that area [Cloudcroft] that I formulated a plan that kind of move forward my life."

He enrolled at Central New Mexico Community College and then at UNM. Now in his mid-thirties, he described himself as a student: "I'm quite a bit different that the student body. I'm just a non-standard student and because of that, I feel I stick out a little bit. I know deep inside I don't really fit in." His school experience had been difficult: "I don't like the school experience. No, I hate it. We come from a lot of messed up places to end up in a college." He further pointed to his own personal drive and resilience: "I got a lot of reasons why I want to become a healthcare worker. The knowledge, I'm in bad health, and they [the military] had to medical retire me." He saw himself as a medical advocate for other people, stating, "I can advocate for friends and family better because I see them get trampled in hospitals all the time." The medical field has problems that need to be addressed and Tom had a vision that he could bring to fruition through advocacy processes.

Campus life proved difficult on multiple fronts for Tom. First, academic life was challenging: "I'm taking super hard classes that I need to do really well in." Then, socially, he was struggling to connect with his classmates: "none of my classmates are inviting me for beers after class or anything; I just keep to myself and just do my thing."

He acknowledged that he did not get out into social environments, stating "I haven't

actually reached out and gone into the communities. Maybe I don't care, maybe I don't

want to be a part of it." He went further in describing students as, "they're brainwashed,

they're given overconfidence for an education that's not worth as much as they think." A

combination of his personal views, perspectives of others, and self-imposed isolation

might have contributed to his negative social experiences on campus.

Another belief that influenced his negative perspective of the university and

professional credentialling was that the medical skills he developed in the military were

not acknowledged. The university did not recognize his medical military training, and

this was a sore spot. He said:

> I would like to try to, at some point, create a program within some universities
> near bases where we could grab medics coming out and push them through some
> kind of fast track for either a physician's assistance (PA) school or through
> medical school, so they don't have to go through all the bull that I've had to go
> through. You don't need it. We can't blow eight years of school. I can because
> I'm single and they medically retired me.

About becoming a scholar, he was vague but stated that "I am here. I'm going to

sit through a decade of it to do what I want, so that should tell you that I'm pretty

motivated." As a scholar, he looked forward to being a healthcare worker, advocating for

friends and family, and improving his own medical conditions. He did not see himself as

a scholar and might never be one; therefore, his transformation was from a warrior into a

scholar healthcare worker. One cannot be a high-level healthcare worker without having

graduate-level degrees.

Victor's Profile

Victor was a White male from a small town in Oklahoma that enlisted in the Air

Force at 18 years of age. He was now a single father with a son and was 38 years old. He

was studying to become a biologist and hoped to attend graduate school to get his Ph.D. He had a great sense of humor in reflecting on his life path and the difficult environments that he had been in, which made both the individual interview and focus group sessions enjoyable. His main motivating factor was the desire to craft a new life for himself and to be a good provider for his son.

Figure 8

Victor's Path
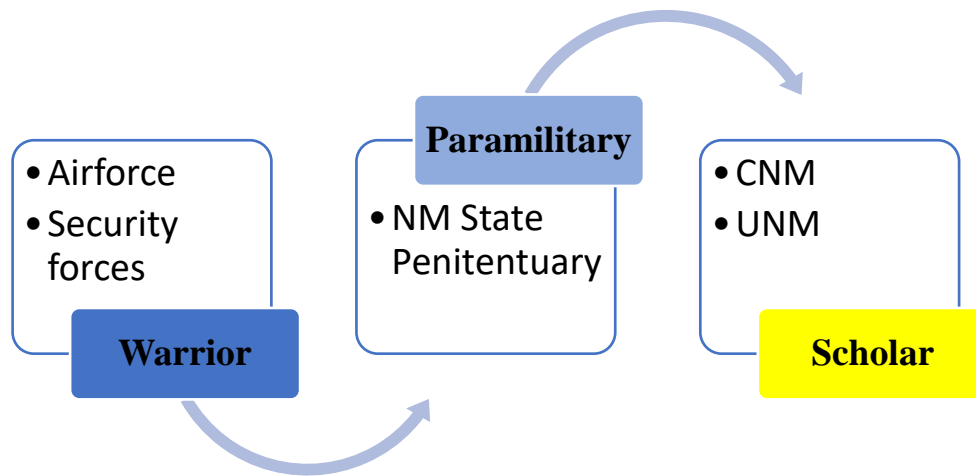
Warrior Identity. Victor left his parents and small-town life to attend Air Force basic training in San Antonio, Texas. Things that stood out to him during basic training were his drill sergeants' instruction to his cohort: "if you have a God that you pray to, you pray to him now because you no longer belong to them, you belong to me." This statement made an impact on him, which he described as "maybe I was just so young and inexperienced that it felt so jarring." Another experience that stood out was being put in charge and learning leadership as an 18-year-old. He recalled his drill sergeant telling him, "'Guess what? Now you're in charge. If anyone messes up, it's your problem.' That's the way it went. I always took that responsibility very seriously." At the end of

basic training, the security forces warriors get a beret, which, for him, validated the

warrior identity.

While attending advanced individual training, the September 11, 2001, attacks

increased Victor's resolve to defend the nation: "I think the cops, the MP's, the security

forces, and the defense side all recognized that we had to carry ourselves differently. We

were always training." At the age of 20, he found himself having to write out his living

will and sign everything over to his parents because he was deploying: "That was

impactful that I did a do not resuscitate [DNR]. I made those decisions at 20 years old."

He was referring to both signing the DNR and a living will. Most people at that age may

not be aware of these documents or what they are used for.

Two years later, he left the Air Force and took part in the Transitions Assistance

Program (TAP), which he viewed negatively. TAP was administered by Air Force

people, and it was an out-processing service that left him feeling like, "we were definitely

an afterthought." Since he was stationed at Kirtland Air Force Base, he decided to stay in

New Mexico and took a job at the state penitentiary in Santa Fe. Being a prison guard is a

policing job which fits the paramilitary employment category. He described this

experience as, "I got out and pretty much right after got a job up at the state penitentiary.

I transitioned from combat into combat." He further explained the similarities between

the military and paramilitary employment as, "I got up every day and I strapped my stab

vest on. I put on my gear, and I went in. A lot of days I went to battle, so it felt really

comfortable for me." He worked at the prison system for the next 10 years and was

successful professionally. His personal life, on the other hand, was "a mess, it was a

mess." This led him to seek help at the Department of Veterans Affair, which gave him

the opportunity to attend college or university. Victor's messy personal life experience also qualified as a disorienting dilemma that led him to enroll at UNM.

Scholar Identity. Using his Department of Veterans Affairs educational benefits to enroll in school allowed him to become a student, a new role for him. He enrolled in a Computer Science program. After a few semesters, he decided that he did not like the program and advocated to transfer to the biology program. This academic shift indicated learning growth, transforming schemas, and his desire to try different programs, which exposed him to new knowledge. About becoming a student, he stated, "It's so difficult. I'm used to speaking to people a certain way, and I've never had to be so fluffy. I never had to be so kind and gentle, and really thing about things before I say them or before I do them and really be strategic in the way I interact with people." In the classroom, he felt that he did not fit in well: "like it's extreme imposter syndrome, not so much in my classes. Well, yes now in my higher up classes, in my 400 level classes, I feel that way." He distinguished between his perspective of his peers and himself as he said, "all these kids are rock stars, a bunch of studs. They came into academia right away and this was their chosen path and they're set on what they're doing and I'm in there on a second chance, finding a new way in life."

He further explained that he did not fit in even with other student veterans because he did not want to have competitive storytelling of combat experiences. He stated, "I don't want big-dick contests. I'm not into it, it's just not who I am." About the scholar identity he said, "I feel like a transitioning scholar. I can sit in a room full of scholars and I can have a scholarly conversation." About being in the university, his experience had been that of a butterfly, which he described as, "I went from that

caterpillar phase and I'm in the cocoon, and hopefully within the next two years, I'll

emerge into what I want to be." He thus validated the view of the university as a site of

identity transformation.

Victor stated that he would become a scholar at the graduation ceremony, which

coincided with similar statements other participants made. Attaining the warrior identity

by receiving his beret was important to him in the Air Force, and participating in the

bachelor's graduation ceremony was too. His ability to clearly tell his story from the

military to the state penitentiary and finally to the university with great detail stood out.

He made statements that showed the closeness between military and paramilitary work

like, "I transitioned from combat into combat" and then told of his paradigm shift of

seeing people as threats to recognizing that students at the university were totally

different, as he observed from a campus bench.

Cumulative Findings

The participants revealed a series of cumulative themes, including that they

brought the warrior identity with them to campus, as the military does not have a second

identity transformation post-military service. The participants recognized the university

as an identity transformative space and remarked upon their shift away from the warrior

identity. As they engaged the academic learning process, they discovered new roles, ways

of being, and interests, such as a love for biology, the health sciences, history,

photography, and more. Terry demonstrated a high level of understanding of the impact

that the university had on him, both positive and negative. He stated that he had changed

because of the academic environment and was no longer just a trained killer. Similarly,

the other participants talked about having to change their behaviors in order to meet

university expectations.

Four of the five participants stated that they attained the warrior identity through

the graduation ceremony at the end of basic training. Only Tom stated that he became a

warrior once he had been accepted into his unit. Three of the five participants (Benny,

Peter, Victor) stated that they would also become scholars at the university's graduation

ceremony. Terry saw the scholar not as an identity but just as a title; he was really

looking forward to becoming a film director. Tom differed in multiple ways from his

fellow participants in that he endured the longest time in the military-indoctrinated

warrior identity and combat environment. He left the military through the medical board,

which retired him due to injuries he sustained, which further complicated the

psychological and physical challenges he was dealing with. He was also the only one to

state that he did not attain the warrior identity through a graduation ceremony, but rather

attained it when his peers accepted him into his combat unit. This may have been six

months after graduating basic training and in the early stages of combat unit life. This is

important, as he did not state that he would transform into a scholar but that he might do

so at a later point as he engaged the healthcare industry as a professional. The

participants' new identities as scholars or professionals were an amalgamation of their

other identities as fathers, husbands, males, members of racial or ethnic groups, and as

warriors and students.

The participants experienced assimilation problems at UNM, as they were on their

own to figure out how to function in the school setting. They often felt like outsiders and

differentiated between traditional students and themselves. Benny saw the process as

"trading in the sword for the pen." Peter lamented not having engaged his peers and

professors in the first years but rectified it during his junior and senior years. He also

brought up the incredible amount of stress he experienced as he became a student: "being

at school is the most stressed out I have ever been in my life ever, bullets flying over your

head, RPGs just zipping past, but not as stressful as school." Terry and Victor shared

similar experiences and had to adjust their behaviors, learn skills, and develop new social

lives. Terry reflected back to his childhood and early adolescent life prior to the military,

when he watched movies of college life that informed his desired experiences of the

university. He joined a fraternity in his field of study and learned to network while

socializing with his peers. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, he was not allowed to attend

parties but was looking forward to doing so soon. The fraternity, networking, partying,

and socializing were important for Terry in gaining a sense of belonging on campus as he

became a student.

On the other hand, Victor used humor to express how he changed his approach as

he engaged his peers and professors on campus by using different language than before

he attended UNM: "There is like this air that you have to be a little more sensitive. I can't

just curse like in the military." As he became a student, a new activity emerged for him,

which was to observe people from the comfort of campus benches. He admired his peers

and others on campus because, to him, they did not show malice or violent tendencies as

they went about their business. In his previous professional environments in the military

and the state penitentiary, most people were perceived as threats. He engaged in an

observational exercise that transformed his schema regarding differences in people in

various environments. In combat and prison, he was in constant hypervigilant mode as a

survival mechanism, while on campus he observed people as non-violent beings and, therefore, could relax.

Tom had a difficult time in the assimilation process as he shared his hatred for school, his feelings of isolation from his peers, and his alienation because the academic system failed to recognize his previous medical experience. He understood that his own intrapersonal and physical conditions contributed to his frustration, which hindered his progress toward gaining a sense of belonging or perceiving himself as a student. He expressed that he was not taking initiative in talking with his peers, professors, and others on campus. He observed that his peers were not reaching out to him either. Tom described his student experiences as very negative and only endured the process of becoming a healthcare professional through shear willpower.

Summary

The participants brought their warrior identity to campus, engaged in informal transformative learning practices, and interacted with their peers and professors. They retained a valued connection to their warrior identity but acknowledged that they were moving away from it. They participated in UNM scholarly departmental events, which helped them move closer to the scholar identity or their own chosen professional identity. They validated the transformative learning model and tenet six of VCT by experiencing various identities on campus and envisioning UNM as an identity transformative space. The participants' engagement with UNM academic, campus, and social life validated their psychosocial development processes, which allowed four of them to become students assuming a new identity. Assimilating into campus life was extremely stressful for all five participants; Peter went as far as stating that it was tougher than being in a

combat zone. Modifying their behaviors and language allowed four of the five

participants to transition into the student role more easily. Tom had negative experiences

and was highly stressed, isolated, and struggled to gain a sense of belonging as a student.

Identity Transformation Narratives

The participants understood that their identities were changing or transforming

away from the indoctrinated warrior identity. Peter stated that he would always be a

marine but was now moving away from it. He stated that "I am a marine, but I am a

student." Terry said, "I'm not just a killing machine anymore." Benny had a unique

perspective of this transformative process, calling it "trading in the sword for the pen."

Tom told his story with a negative perspective, focusing on the challenges he faced,

isolating himself, and pointing to systemic problems and obstacles that must be

overcome. Victor presented his version from an outsider perspective, calling traditional

students "superstars and a bunch of rock stars" while he was here on a "second chance."

The participants' manner of telling their narratives showed the subjective nature of their

experiences based on their outlook. Those with successful outcomes had more positive

perspectives, while those who were more negative in their stories showed signs of

maladjustment, which presented themselves in the form of the imposter syndrome and

indoctrination vigilance. The participants had experienced military indoctrination and did

not want to experience it again through academic processes.

The participants brought up the topic of "imposter syndrome" multiple times. This

surprised me, as it had not emerged in the literature review. I had heard of this syndrome

in my undergraduate studies at UNM but had not considered it when developing this

research study. In a similar manner, the participants learned about the imposter syndrome

in their own coursework and brought it up in both the individual interviews and the focus group.

The imposter syndrome phenomenon stems from a study by Clance and Imes (1978) in which high-achieving women scholars experienced feelings of not being competent or worthy of their achievements. They trivialized their achievements and feared being discovered or labelled as phonies: "The term impostor phenomenon is used to designate an internal experience of intellectual phoniness which appears to be particularly prevalent and intense among a select sample of high achieving women" (p. 241). Hutchinson (2015) provided further evidence of the imposter phenomenon or syndrome from the faculty standpoint: "Imposter tendencies are alive and well among higher education faculty and associate with reports of work stress, their use of coping skills, and the perceived impact of mentors" (p. 10). Imposter syndrome seems to be a communally shared negative experience amongst many stakeholders in higher education, including administrators, faculty, staff, and students.

The factors that contribute to this syndrome include culture, family life, gender, nationality or origins, and perspectives on education or personal intelligence. These become a schema that a person lives with. Three of the five participants (Peter, Tom, Victor) mentioned imposter syndrome as a barrier in adopting the student role. This led them to point to all the differences between themselves as ECSVs and the traditional student body. Peter placed a positive spin on some of the differences between traditional and non-traditional students as "having different priorities, it could be time-management, sometimes give us non-traditional students the edge over the traditional students." The values the participants shared in relation to their roles as students, and which they

believed they brought with them to the university, included discipline, learning abilities, resilience, a sense of responsibility, work ethic. They saw these values as positive, but also identified the negative attitudes, beliefs, and values they had to relinquish, such as anger, direct communication styles, and interpersonal militant behaviors. Benny stated, "younger people and professors, you're not dealing with the First Sergeant. It makes you a bit more professional, you want to articulate your words and your thoughts better than just blurting them out, giving out all these orders." He recognized his student role by stating "different environment, different rules; you have to have a different sort of respect."

Finally, recognizing that overcoming the effects of military indoctrination was part of becoming a good student, Terry stated, "I did have to tone it down and not just to be indoctrinated from one culture to another culture, but just because that's some of those tendencies and habits from the Marine Corps, that indoctrination was kind of bad." Peter further stated about the imposter syndrome that, "it's an honest feeling, and you have to be honest with yourself if you're going to get anywhere. That's part of that and that's like admitting your faults." Peter highlighted the self-honesty in validating what he felt and accepted as part of his experience. The participants showed a high level of vulnerability in sharing their experiences with imposter syndrome, which added an emotional depth to these findings. Imposter syndrome jeopardized the participants' ability to apply transformative learning Step 9, "building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships" and Step 10, "reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective."

The participants stated that their indoctrination vigilance derived from their previous experiences being indoctrinated in the military as warriors. They did not want to continue to live indoctrinated lives: "Indoctrination masked as education does exist, and it is a process present in all cultures which choose to expose their people to a single worldview, set in a reverberating circuit" (Ioana & Cracsner, 2016, p. 573). The view of education from a political lens of conservative versus liberal informed their awareness. They viewed the military and the warrior identity as a conservative, indoctrinated state of being, which relates to Pavlov's classical conditioning materials. Terry stated that the university produced liberals, which for him was another type of indoctrination. Terry used language or rhetoric that is found in many of the Right-wing media organizations like Fox News.

The participants felt a disconnect between themselves and the university environment. The statements ranged from simply saying that "this is their environment," referring to traditional students, to hostile statements like, "I hate school, and university education is another form of indoctrination." Tom went further with the criticism of UNM and what he saw it producing in students: "They're brainwashed; they're given overconfidence for an education that's not worth as much as they think it is and are told it is." He spoke about the university overselling the value of a degree to students. Terry saw education as another form of indoctrination: "Any fucking public kind of education is a form of indoctrination." Therefore, since he had been indoctrinated as a Marine, he wanted to make sure that he did not go to the leftist or liberal extreme of indoctrination in the university system. He said, "I am just saying that the bias is generally at universities or public colleges. These kids are liberal. It's indoctrination in both ways, whether it's

killing people or stupid shit." He clarified the value origin of a college degree as, "the

only reason why it has value is because employers put value on it." The valuation of a

degree that is sold to students may be based on economic needs of employers or the labor

market. This seemed to be a sore point with Terry.

This indoctrination vigilance the participants voiced tied to transformative

learning in the same steps as socializing. Being aware of what an individual is becoming

is important because of the new roles they are open to trying. Ideally, the scholar identity

would be the center point of an indoctrination continuum, based on the participant's

statements. The scholar center point is like Freire's (2000) liberation education, where the

learner reaches the *conscientização* or conscious awareness level and can decide for

themselves who they want to be. In this case, the left limit would equate to education or

liberal indoctrination and the right limit would signal conservative views or military

indoctrination (see Figure 9).

Figure 9

Indoctrination Emancipation Learning Model
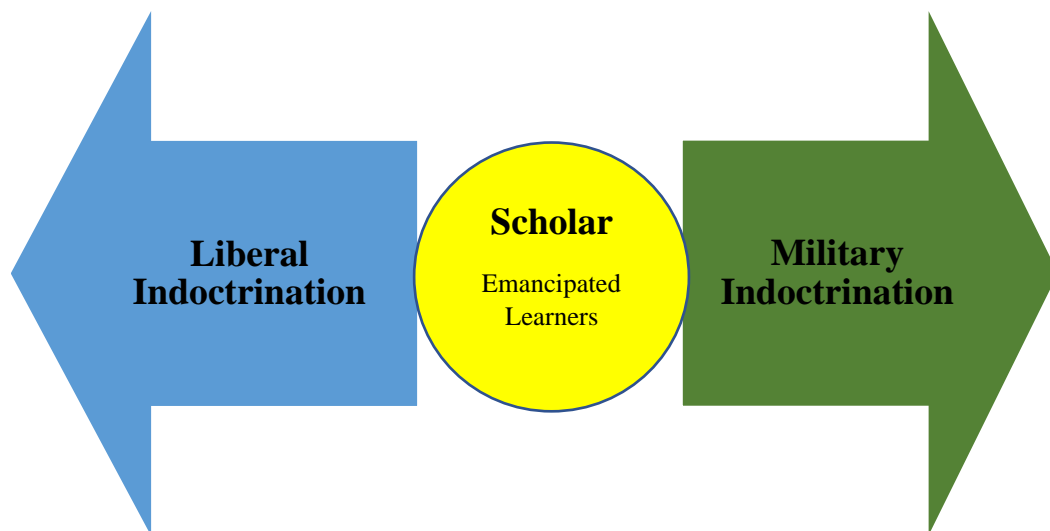
The participants identified their military warrior identity as being highly indoctrinated, represented above on the far right of the green arrow. The participants understood the fluidity of the identity transformation processes and that they were actively transforming their identities. They recognized that they were moving away from the indoctrinated warrior identity while being cautious of not becoming liberally indoctrinated by the university, which is the far-left point of the blue arrow. This means that they were aware of their identity transformation as a psychosocial interaction process between themselves and the university environment. Terry stated that identity transformation occurs slowly as we are products of our environments.

Summary

The participants stated that they valued socializing with peers to help them learn and gain a sense of belonging on campus. Two participants who were not as social experienced difficulties and described their experiences as negative; both desired to engage more with their peers. Terry wanted to join his business program fraternity, party with his peers, and have the full university experience but was conflicted as he saw his peers as liberally indoctrinated. Tom took responsibility for not engaging more with his peers. The participants contextualized the theme of indoctrination vigilance as a product of liberal education; they had experienced the indoctrinated warrior identity and did not want to be indoctrinated again.

Additional Significant Findings

These findings were significant and unique because the participants experienced maladjustment issues due to circumstances beyond their control. Their identity transformation process from warrior to scholar was impacted by the COVID-19

pandemic, which forced everyone in higher education onto online learning platforms. In the military, the participants had developed their learning skills face-to-face and applied the learned materials in real-world hostile situations. Up until the pandemic, the participants took in-person academic courses and were not familiar with online learning. Benny stated, "2020 separated people from each other and we lost some social skills. The mask doesn't help when looking at someone face-to-face." While he acknowledged that his professors provided good support for his online learning, including after-class support, he elaborated: "I hate online learning courses. I'm the kind of guy who wants to be in class face-to-face talking with somebody, maybe just talking to my classmates or give a comment. Online is very unpersonal." The other participants said similar things about their online learning experiences and preference for in-person courses. This may change in the future as they increase their exposure to online learning formats and competency in their fields of study.

The participants differentiated between their learning needs and those of their traditional peers. Victor highlighted those academic courses were designed for traditional students and not for him, which reiterated the need to continue the debate between andragogical and pedagogical practices: "classes are very much geared towards what it should be people who are coming out of high school with fresh knowledge." It had been over a decade since he took a math class, and he struggled to relearn the material in an algebra course, calling it a "huge hurdle." The course design and materials were not the only focus of the participants' complaints; they also struggled to overcome the classroom learning gap or years outside of the classroom. All five participants had at least a 4-year classroom gap, and Peter expressed, "I had a 16-year gap between high school and the

time that I started at UNM. Sixteen years of no school, and then, BAM, here you are.

Let's hit the ground running again." For the participants, this time gap between classroom

experiences challenged them not only to assimilate into the classroom but to readjust

their learning skills.

The learning pace in the classroom was a lot slower than the participants were

used to in the military, as Tom stated: "I think the pace is slow. The pace is too slow to

keep my interest. When you compare it to military training, think of all the stuff they fit

into basic training and that's just a couple of months." He was reflecting on the high-

paced learning processes of the military, where learned materials are applied quickly in

real-world combat situations. Basic training, depending on the service, may last eight to

13 weeks, and many skills are taught quickly. University courses at UNM last 16 weeks,

and the learning pace is slower. However, the slower-paced identity transformation in the

university's learning growth process allowed the participants to decompress and engage

their peers to socialize and support their learning.

The participants stated that they did not use many resources on campus. They did

highlight their use of the Center for Academic Program Support (CAPS), a tutoring

support tool, and the Accessibility Resource Center (ARC) to help them with classroom

performance needs, like more time during exams, language accommodations (hearing-

impaired translators), and many other services. They mentioned the Veterans Resource

Center in certifying their VA benefits each semester. Two participants said that they were

punished in the military or viewed as weak if they sought help outside their combat units.

This military stigma of weakness when seeking help hindered their resource use on

campus, which had the potential of slowing down their assimilation into campus life.

Peter identified the stigma of "weakness" in the military, where asking for help is discouraged at best and punished at worst. For him, this stigma delayed his engagement with his peers and his professors until his third or fourth years, when he saw them as resources to support his learning. The other participants stated that they did not ask for help or sought out resources only on a limited basis. They used the program certification service of the Veteran Resource Center but did not want to socialize with other veterans or take part in what Victor called "dick-measuring contests" regarding war stories.

Warriors leave the military and suffer in silence for many years because they have been conditioned to think that seeking help is a true sign of weakness. The Department of Defense (DoD) and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) promote many campaigns seeking to mitigate the idea that seeking help is a weakness and spend a lot of money marketing their services to veterans, with a focus on normalizing help-seeking within the veteran community. For example, the DoD has the Real Warriors Campaign (n.d.), which "the creation of the RWC, focusing on a need to embed training about mental health and psychological well-being throughout military life." (Acosta, et. al., 2012, p. 8). The VA has rolled out similar programs in the past to get veterans to seek help and to engage in educational and healthcare benefits or services. The lack of support for this process is a well-researched area for student veterans, and the participants acknowledged that they did not use many resources on campus.

Summary

Becoming students and assimilating into university campus life was challenging for the participants, and it was made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced everyone shift to online learning platforms, which the participants hated. This does not mean that the participants may not continue to take online courses in the future as they become more competent in their learning abilities, fields of study, and continue their education. In fact, three of the five participants stated that graduate school was in their future as they wanted to pursue doctorates in biology, healthcare, and political or social sciences. Additional obstacles were course design (andragogy versus pedagogy), the gap between classroom time, the learning pace, and help-seeking, which is a stigma that derives from being punished in the military.

Limitations

The COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted this study because of the government and university restrictions which required the use of the Zoom platform. This was the first time I conducted semi-structured individual interviews and a focus group using this online platform. The result was good because it yielded data to analyze, but there was a disconnection between the participants and me, making it harder to pick up on non-verbal cues. I was also managing the recording, asking questions, listening intently, and worried about sustaining the internet connection. Some of these issues may dissipate or be minimized with more experience using the Zoom platform.

Saturation and Transferability

I did not reach data saturation because there were not enough participants to fulfill the theoretical saturation requirements; hence, the findings are not transferable to the whole enlisted combat student veteran population.

Technical Limitations

Conducting this study via Zoom presented a few problems, including: 1) scheduling issues with the participants, 2) interruption of an interview due to the Wi-Fi system, 3) the impersonal feel of the Zoom platform, which was not the same as conducting in-person interviews or focus groups. This matched with the participants' stated preference of face-to-face learning over online learning. This platform may improve over time or may continue to pose challenges.

Conclusion

This chapter incorporated the participants' profiles, cumulative findings, and limitations to present the data in a cohesive manner. The participants shared their narratives of identity transformation from civilians into warriors and then from warriors into scholars at UNM. The military and higher education do not have identity transformation programs that help ECSVs become scholars. Erickson's (1980) theory of psychosocial development, Mezirow's (1997) theory of transformative learning, and Phillips and Lincoln's (2017) veteran critical theory provided a useful theoretical framework for this study. The participants transformed their identity by engaging the 10 transformative learning steps. Tenet six of the veteran critical theory held true, as the participants experienced multiple identities on campus, such as being ECSVs, fathers, males, and more. The cumulative finding produced the following themes: indoctrination

vigilance, warrior identity was brought to campus, face-to-face versus online learning, the

imposter syndrome, help-seeking, and socializing.

Chapter 5

Discussion

"We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them."

—Einstein, in Talerngsri (2017, online)

I chose the qualitative emergent approach to conduct this research study as there was a knowledge gap in the literature regarding ECSVs' Warrior to Scholar identity transformation at the University of New Mexico. This approach was flexible and allowed me to use a range of instruments, coding processes, and presentations of data compared to other qualitative approaches involving case studies, ethnography, ground theory, and phenomenology. ECSVs are former military combat arms warriors who have enrolled in colleges and universities seeking to become scholars by attaining an academic degree (Dr. Coleman, personal communication, November 7, 2019). The emergent approach is useful when little is known about a phenomenon, in this case, the identity transformation experiences of the ECSV population.

The theoretical framework of this study incorporated the theory of psychosocial development of Erickson (1980), the transformative learning theory and its psychological habits of mind from Mezirow (1997), and the veteran critical theory of Phillips and Lincoln (2017). The conceptual framework depicted the two social environments that ECSVs encounter in becoming scholars. Chapter 4 presented the five identity transformation profiles of this study participants and the cumulative findings, which answered the research questions below.

Research Questions

Main Question

How do enlisted combat student veterans describe their experiences transforming their identity from warriors into scholars at the University of New Mexico?

Sub-Questions

1. What are the experiences of enlisted combat student veterans as they adjust to their role as students at the University of New Mexico?

2. How do their narratives inform the ongoing process of identity development and transformation?

The findings answered the research questions, suggesting that the ECSVs did experience a real identity transformation and struggled with it, as there were left to navigate the shifts on their own. They brought the warrior identity to campus and found it difficult to become students and to undergo the identity transformation through the learning growth process at UNM, a transformative space. Their assimilation onto campus life and the classroom were complicated by imposter syndrome, feeling isolated or like outsiders, remote learning due to COVID-19, and the lack of socialization over the last 2 years, all of which led them to experience a sense of marginalization.

Both the individual ECSVs and the university environment have a responsibility to find new ways of engaging the learning growth processes to ensure that ECSVs successfully attain the scholar identity or their desired self-directed professional identity. UNM's mission statement establishes the desire to help students transform their habits of mind, a construct tied to Mesirow's (1997) psychological habit of mind, transformative learning theory, and practice. This study may serve as a foundation for future research, or

at least facilitate the creation of an inclusive dialogue between ECSVs, student veterans, and university stakeholders, including administrators, faculty, staff, and students.

Discussion

Identity Transformation

I made some assumptions about the identity transformation processes at UNM, such as the fact that ECSVs brought their warrior identity to campus, which all of the participants validated. They had acquired this warrior identity during their military service as they endured the indoctrination training, recalling Pavlov's (1906) notion of "classical conditioning." Four of the participants stated that they had acquired the warrior identity at the ceremonial graduation at the end of basic training. The fifth stated that he had attained the warrior identity when he was accepted into a combat unit. Three participants affirmed that they would acquire their scholar identity at their graduation ceremony, while one stated that "scholar" was just a title and nothing more. He was looking forward to crafting a civilian identity in his professional career in the film industry as a film director, and he acknowledged that being at the university had allowed him to change and explore new ways of being while discovering new interests in history, philosophy, and photography. The fifth participant endured the rigors of academia as a means to becoming a health professional. He may become a scholar later in his graduate studies. This means that, at the time of the study, the participants had not yet completely transformed from warriors into scholars or their self-directed professional identity.

The participants affirmed that the university was an identity transformational space, and they identified the learning growth process. The military combat arms field is also an identity transformation space with a violent indoctrination process that at times

overwhelmed the participants. The participants compared these two transformational

spaces and justified the military indoctrination process as they recognized the importance

of inculcating the warrior identity on adolescents as a national defense tool. The warrior-

to-scholar identity transformation was slower, less violent, and required more than the 13

weeks for the civilian-to-warrior identity transformation. The warrior identity was further

inculcated on the participants throughout their military career in advanced individual

training programs and combat unit life. Since graduation from a university baccalaureate

program was the threshold for acquiring the scholar identity, which took roughly 4 years,

the participants were correct in their comparison.

I was surprised by the participants' dialogue and engagement in informal

transformative learning practices. For example, Terry acknowledged that he was

changing or transforming by learning new things. He knew that he was becoming or

transforming his identity and that the social environment he engaged in impacted who he

would become. It demonstrated that he, and the other participants, had critically reflected

upon their military experiences as enlisted combat warriors and on their current paths to

become scholars or other professionals. In my previous work with student veterans, social

encounters resulted in their belief or schema that many veterans are stuck with the

warrior identity as no formal program exists in the military or civilian systems to help

them transition out of the identity. Although the participants were left on their own to

navigate this process, they did informally engage transformative learning processes.

At the beginning of the individual interviews, the participants asked me about my

previous military experiences, wanting to vet me as an ECSV. For example, they asked

about my military service branch, military occupational specialty (MOS), and if I had any

combat deployments. They also inquired about my experiences at UNM as a student and as a professional researcher at the doctoral level. I was completely honest with them, even showing my own DD-214 to one of the participants. Box 11 showed my MOS as 14S20, which signifies an air defense specialist. I described my military service, including deployments, and the disorienting dilemma that led me to enroll at UNM. Openly sharing my previous experiences built a sense of camaraderie between the participants and myself, making them more likely to be honest in their responses. At times, their expression of honesty may have extended too far, as they used unprofessional language to describe their experiences, thoughts about the university, and their political views. Some of them held political Right-wing views that led them to perceive the university as educating or indoctrinating students in a liberal manner. It is good for students to develop critical thinking skills by engaging with a range of beliefs, morals, schemas, and values, thereby fulfilling the UNM's (2021) mission of instilling critical thinking and good habits of mind into students, based on their mission statement: "UNM will provide students the values, habits of mind, knowledge, and skills that they need to be enlightened citizens, to contribute to the state and national economies, and to lead satisfying lives." The last statement regarding leading satisfying lives is intriguing, as the literature on student veterans and veterans in general indicates that they do not lead satisfying lives. This may be a subjective concept that differs among people but is possibly an interesting topic to explore.

Overcoming an indoctrinated warrior identity is not easy, particularly as this identity may clash with the university culture and be difficult to navigate alone. Three of the five participants had positive tones to their stories and expressed that they

experienced difficulties but chose to be proactive in working through them. The other two

had negative tones but emphasized that they were committed to completing their studies.

All five participants had differing motivating factors, ranging from personal

accomplishments to being familial role models for their young children. One spoke about

changing his family's trajectory from heavy laborers into educated white-collar careers in

future generations. This was an unexpected benefit of the scholar identity for the

participant. This study previously cited literature on higher wages, healthier lifestyles,

and longer life expectancy as primary benefits of higher education degrees.

The identity transformation process begins with a disorienting dilemma, and

becoming a scholar means that a person is committing themself to undergo a growth

learning process. Kidwell (2005) traced traditional students' disorienting dilemmas as

they transitioned from novice dependent learners arriving on campus from high school

into independent critical thinkers or scholars at the university. Many live at home with

their parents, but some live on their own, which means they are also engaging self-

efficacy processes while being students. It is important to recognize that they must also

deal with life outside the classroom and not minimize traditional students' challenges in

becoming scholars. For the participants in this study, the disorienting dilemmas included

poor health experiences, life crises due to identity incongruences with civilian life, and

professional dissatisfaction. Tom was medically discharged from the Army, while Peter,

Terry, and Victor were not thriving in their professional lives and sought a change using

their GI Bill benefits. All five participants expressed frustration in attempting to

assimilate back to civilian life and living with the warrior identity, which led them to

have negative results. These included a loss of romantic partners, difficult relationships

within their families, and being single fathers. Added to that are the ECSVs' challenging

mental and physical conditions. The identity transformation process to become scholars

seems overwhelming but, by letting go of military schemas as they engage in the growth

learning process, the latter may serve as the university's transformative learning tool.

       Universities offer an array of resources to support veterans on their educational

journeys on campus. For example, UNM's resources include the Military and Veteran

Resource Center (MVRC), the Student Veteran of UNM association, the Diversity

Council within the Division of Equity and Inclusion, and the Center for Academic

Program Support, the Graduate Resource Center, Lobo Respect, the Office of Equal

Opportunity, student government bodies, Associated Students of UNM, and the Graduate

and Professional Student Association. All of these comprise a comprehensive support

structure. In the classroom, professors provide the academic materials that the

participants stated helped them to transform their schemas. These are similar resources to

the military structure used in the Department of Defense's Training and Doctrine

Command, as discussed in Chapter 1. The participants corroborated Erickson's (1980)

psychosocial development theory. The university had structured programs, resources, and

services that the participants were not aware of, or they were stigmatized in the military

for seeking help, which was interpreted as a sign of weakness. However, the university

lacks a formal identity transformation program, as the participants reiterated that they

were left on their own to figure out how to become students and then scholars.

       Identity transformation is an important topic to explore because little is known

about it, but the findings of this study shed light on the many problems that exist at

universities like UNM. Transforming identities from warriors into students and then into

scholars or professionals was not easy for the participants, who stated that they were left alone to figure it out. However, UNM is an identity transformational space with culturally based academic programs for other student populations: Whites, African Americans, Asians, Chicano/Hispanics, ROTC, and women. UNM has also been innovative and forward thinking in creating new spaces for student veterans to engage in dialogue with key decisionmakers. In my time as President of Student Veterans, I witnessed the support from student government bodies, the OILS department, and the university administrators, which together made UNM rank in the top 10 for national recognition as a military-friendly university in the *Military Times* magazine (2018). The implications for practice for the individual participants, ECSVs, student veterans, and UNM are included below.

Implications for Practice

This study is important for a variety of reasons. First, it explored the lived experiences of ECSVs in transforming their identities from warriors into scholars, which began to fulfill President Lincoln's (1865) promise "to care for those that borne the battle" by further researching and guiding ECSVs in overcoming their indoctrinated warrior identity. The literature and the participants' statements revealed that they brought their warrior identity to campus and were transitioning to the scholar identity. The scholar identity has positive outcomes, such as an increase in earning wages, healthier lifestyles, and longer life expectancy. UNM as an identity transformative space was the learning and social environment that produced the scholar identity or that gave students the opportunity to self-develop new professional identities. The implications for practice pertain to both the ECSV participants and UNM.

Implications for Participants

Even though UNM does not have a formal identity transformation program,

ECSVs may engage informally in transformative learning processes. Mezirow's (1990) in

Taylor & Cranton (2012) transformative learning steps were:

> Transformations often follow some variation of the following phases of meaning becoming clarified: 1. A disorienting dilemma, 2. Self-examination with feelings of fear, anger, guilt, or shame, 3. A critical assessment of assumptions, 4. Reconciliation that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared, 5. Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions, 6. Planning a course of action, 7. Acquiring new knowledge and skills for implementing one's plan, 8. Provisional trying of new roles, 9. Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships, 10. A reintegration into one's life on the basis of conditions dictated by one's new perspective. (p. 86)

All of the participants experienced a disorienting dilemma that led them to enroll in

university programs seeking to become scholars or to assume other professional

identities. Three participants stated that they were looking forward to their graduation

ceremony when they would feel like scholars. Terry wanted to become a film director

and saw the scholar identity only as a title; therefore, he may never become a scholar.

Tom, a future healthcare professional, was having health and social difficulties that

hindered his assimilation as a student. He stated that he valued competence and his peers'

acceptance as he assumed the warrior identity, more than the graduation ceremony. He

was looking forward to graduate school where he might become a scholar once his peers

accepted him. All of the participants would transform their identities from warriors into

scholars or into other professional identities.

Becoming students was a process facilitated by the participants' perspective or

willingness to engage in learning in the classroom and socialize with their peers. Four of

the participants were proactive in changing their beliefs, habits of mind, morals, schemas,

and values to mirror the expectations of UNM more closely. Peter talked about having

positive learning outcomes due to his engagement with his fellow students, professors, and teaching assistants. Tom shared that he was learning in the classroom but hated the university as he was not socializing with his peers or professors. At the same time, the participants were vigilant of being indoctrinated through education into becoming more liberal. I presented an ECSV learning model (see Figure 9) placing the scholar identity as the central point between liberal and military indoctrination. ECSVs have the power to transform their intrapersonal (psychological conditions) as they enroll in university programs (social environment) that facilitate their identity transformation from warriors into scholars. All veterans, not just ECSVs, have resources to heal themselves through the Department of Veterans Affairs healthcare system, UNM has the Military and Veteran Resource Center, and counseling services to include the Student Health and Counseling (SHAC). One huge challenge the participants pointed to was that, because they were punished in the military for asking for help, they were not likely to seek help. They had been stigmatized as "weak," so reconciling this resulted in internal dissonance and impacted their ability to become scholars or to assume their chosen professional identities.

Implications for UNM

UNM does not have a formal identity transformation program for student veterans. This may contribute to some of the marginalization of student veterans described in Chapters 1 and 2. Yet UNM does have programs for other cultural groups who wish to attain their scholar status by pursuing African American, Chicano (a), LGBTQ+, Military Sciences, and Women Studies programs. Further researching the warrior-to-scholar identity transformation, then creating, and offering an academic

studies program to ECSVs and student veterans may increase their likelihood of

becoming scholars. Increasing the academic programs for student veterans may increase

their retention rates, which has positive financial rewards.

Also, veteran-focused researchers may reproduce this study, further corroborating

the need for a formal warrior-to-scholar identity transformation program. Increasing the

number of veteran-focused researchers may increase their professional development

through publishing. Publishing opportunities exists in military and veteran publications,

and the opportunity to present works at conferences can enhance veterans' and scholars'

professional lives. The student veteran field is ripe with research opportunities that are

rewarding as they may result in personal and professional satisfaction, financial benefits,

or contribute to the growth of a potentially underdeveloped student veteran structure in

higher education. The next section makes a call to action for both individual ECSVs and

for UNM so that both can thrive and reach their full potential.

Call to Action

Call to Action for ECSVs

ECSVs and student veterans must proactively engage in transformative learning

to explore their identity transformation as they become scholars. Benny, Peter, and Victor

did so and hoped to feel like scholars at their graduation ceremony. Four of the five

participants stated that their basic training graduation ceremony validated their warrior

identity. The warrior identity beyond the military environment no longer serves veterans

well in civilian life. ECSVs must leave the warrior identity in the past, or, as Victor

shared, "[let] go of the negative portions of the warrior side and [try] to transition into the

scholar identity." The negative attributes of the warrior identity, such as aggressive or

violent attitudes, beliefs, and values, may result in promotions in the military, but they are

detrimental to ECSVs' experiences in civilian life. ECSVs cannot lash out with their

indoctrinated warrior aggressive combat skills and training or use violent action.

Particularly at the university, they must not behave in a manner that betrays others'

confidence on campus or that betrays national ideals of peace and liberty.

Call to Action for UNM

Based on the findings, the participants stated that they felt like outsiders on

campus and in the classroom, struggled with imposter syndrome, disliked the use of

pedagogical principles instead of andragogical principles, and felt that they were left on

their own to navigate the new academic environment. They also could not take a veteran-

focused orientation or veteran-focused courses. This leads ECSVs to be marginalized on

university campuses and courses.

The UNM decision-makers (Board of Regents, executive administrators, Faculty

Senate, and Staff Council) must conduct a comparative assessment of the student veteran

structure in comparison to other cultural academic and support systems. All universities

should take the appropriate actions to reduce the marginalization or exclusion of student

veterans on their campuses. UNM has a Division of Equity and Inclusion, which may be

the starting point for administrators in ensuring a more inclusive campus.

The faculty leadership may want to explore andragogy or adult learning and

transformative learning practices to improve the academic course design to help all

students succeed in the classroom. The participants considered traditional students to be

"rockstars" and diminished their own student roles in the classroom because they

perceived they were there as a "second chance." UNM is a transformative learning space

and a flagship university with great qualities, but it also has room to improve. University leaders at all levels have a responsibility to contribute towards improving it by creating a more inclusive culture for all students.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study produced findings that inform possible research avenues for student veterans and student veteran-focused professionals:

1. Veteran-focused researchers should conduct similar studies investigating the warrior-to-scholar identity transformation experiences of ECSVs and all student veterans at UNM or other higher education institutions, to make their findings transferable, and to increase knowledge about this phenomenon.

2. Other sub-groups within the student veteran population may be of interest to researchers include disabled student veterans, enlisted combat women student veterans, and LGBTQ+ student veterans. The identity transformation construct combined with these unique populations may generate new knowledge to fill gaps in the literature.

3. Further research can focus on imposter syndrome, its negative impact on the identity transformation process, and ECSVs or student veterans.

4. A research project could investigate the learning practices in both the military and university environments.

5. A study to explore the experiences of returning students in comparison to student veterans and ECSVs, to contribute to an innovative learning/teaching approach based on andragogical practices. This could follow the Enlisted Combat Student Veteran Learning Model (ECSVLM) in Figure 10.

Figure 10

Enlisted Combat Student Veteran Learning Model

I was fully aware that more research is needed to create a learning model for ECSVs and student veterans. Findings from only five participants are not transferable to the entire population of ECSVs and other student veterans. I included the ECSVLM as a potential foundation to a future comprehensive study. Crafting an innovative ECSVLM from known learning models like those offered by Knowles (1984) and Mezirow (1991) can potentially put UNM or a research and development organization in a leadership position in higher education.

Concluding Remarks

Conducting this qualitative emergent study that explored the warrior-to-scholar identity transformational experiences of ECSVs at UNM was a positive and life-altering experience. I, the researcher, grew as a professional in a variety of ways. First, I underwent my own warrior-to-scholar identity transformation by healing my own psychological conditions, beliefs, habits of mind, morals, schemas, and values to meet the expectations of UNM. Then, I reconnected with my desire to serve student veterans by becoming President of the Student Veterans of UNM Association, which had positive

results as I operated the Student Veteran Support Building and acquired new funding for

veterans' programs from the New Mexico State Legislature. My competence as a

researcher grew along with my abilities to produce quality knowledge that expands and

enhances what is already known about ECSVs or student veterans.

For this study, I had a positionality as both an insider to the ECSV population and

as an outsider as the researcher. At the start of this study, I considered myself to be a

novice researcher because this was my first major academic work I had produced as a

student. In the span of roughly 2 years, I spent thousands of hours researching content,

organizing, and writing. I rented an office where I could work continuously to produce

knowledge about a unique student veteran sub-population of ECSVs. This allowed me to

prove myself capable of conducting good quality academic research projects. I look

forward to advancing my skillset further in order to become a leader in both the academic

and veteran industries.

Second, the knowledge produced through this study validates that notion that

veterans bring the warrior identity to university campuses. Not enough ECSVs

participated in this study to make the findings transferable to the whole population.

However, the knowledge revealed that the university is an identity transformative place

where the participants were in the process of becoming scholars. Two participants did not

state that they were becoming scholars, and one stated that he viewed the term "scholar"

as a title and less as an identity. I made a call to action to all student veterans to engage

proactively in transformative learning to become scholars or their best versions of

themselves in the university and in civilian life. As veterans, we are no longer serving the

nation's military, and the warrior identity brought outside of the military context can contribute to a range of problems in civilian life.

Finally, ECSVs enrolling at UNM must understand that they will be engaging a diverse learning environment that will challenge their current beliefs, morals, schemas, and values. This challenge provides the resistance they need to help them let go of the warrior identity and fuel their transformative learning processes in becoming scholars. While they may not like the emotional upheaval of this transformative process, they will benefit greatly as scholars. They should not perceive this identity transformative endeavor in a negative manner but instead as a liberating process. The warrior identity is a wonderful experience in the military but not in civilian life. In the process of exiting an indoctrinated life, one lacks the autonomy to be a critical and liberated thinker. The scholar identity belongs in the higher education environment and has positive benefits for students who embrace it. It is not a cure-all in civilian life, but it is a worthwhile starting point in the next phase of a veteran's life.

The university is an identity transformation space or social environment that receives payment for educating student veterans from a variety of sources, such as the GI Bill, the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment Program, New Mexico State's Wartime Veteran Scholarship program, and others. A robust support structure already exists on campus that can be expanded to include ECSVs and all student veterans. Doing so can help ECSVs, student veterans, and potential returning students to view themselves as included students and not outsiders. The university, like all other institutions and organizations worldwide, are not perfect environments and have room to improve. Improvement can be as simple as expanding current services, initiating campaigns

targeted at specific students' populations, or creating new programs, resources, and services.

In making the call to action, I was not singling out either the participants, ECSVs, student veterans, or UNM. Everyone shares a common responsibility in creating an inclusive space that produces the scholar identity. Close to 30,000 people make up the UNM community, and they must all work to be more inclusive, supporting each other in the learning growth processes and transformative learning practices. To do nothing invites apathy, which leads to the ongoing marginalization of vulnerable student populations. All stakeholders at UNM should be able to learn, live, thrive, and teach in a safe transformational space. Also, all student veterans should have the academic opportunity to engage in transformative learning and build their own scholarly or self-directed professional identities. Being a scholar has a range of positive economic, health, and social benefits, all of which veterans deserve.

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Appendix A: Identity Transformation Interview Guide

The same interview questions were asked of each of the five interview participants. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, the interviews were conducted via Zoom. Each session will last 60 minutes and will be audio recorded with consent from the participants prior to the session starting.

Thank the interviewee for participating in this study and giving me the opportunity to interview them. Add "This interview is to discuss how you identified or described yourself, 1) prior to entering military service, 2) during your military service, and 3) now as a university student. I am particularly interested in ways you thought about yourself during these three phases of your life. I know there were many shifts for me, so I'm interested in any changes you experienced for yourself."

Interview questions

1. How old were you when you enlisted in the military?
2. Describe your experiences in becoming a combat warrior (combat trained professional soldier) in basic training, advanced individual training, and in your combat unit?
3. Given your experiences, tell me if you ever felt like a warrior? At what point? What events made you feel like a warrior?
4. What programs or services did the military provide when you left your military life that prepared you for civilian life?
5. Describe your experiences returning to civilian life, transition programs that you participated in, and how you were impacted?
6. Discuss your experiences at this university as you pursued academic life (challenges and successes) in becoming a scholar (academically educated professional or life-long learner)?
7. Given your experiences, tell me if you now feel like a scholar. At what point? What classroom resources or services made you feel like a scholar?
8. Is there anything else that had a major impact in becoming the person you are today?

Member-check:

Member-check was conducted with each of the five participants via email. Four of the five participants agreed with the statement and requested no clarification. The last participant clarified his statements and then, validated his statements as accurate.

Departing comment of appreciation:

Statement to the Interviewees: "I am grateful to you for participating in this study, and your contribution will be recorded in the findings section of this dissertation. If you have any questions for me, please keep my email and I will gladly answer them."

Appendix B: Identity Transformation Focus Group Interview Guide

Statement to focus group participants: "Thank everyone for giving me this opportunity to meet and get together with all of you. I am interested in learning how you thought about yourself as a person prior to enlisting, during your combat experience, and now how you think about yourself as a student at this university. Does this make sense? And do you have any questions before we begin discussing these issues? I would like to audio-record our discussion solely to benefit my efforts to continue my research. Is the okay with everyone? (Yes, continue or if there is a person that does not provide consent; then thank them and return to the group).

Focus group proceedings.

Each participant has been assigned a number to be used during the session which took place via Zoom. I led the discussion of the group and called on each participant to contribute in order to facilitate and track the audio-recorded conversation flow. Questions were asked in a successive manner and participants were called on to answer. In the middle part of the session, participants were encouraged to openly discuss their possible transformational experiences. I served as a guide to keep the conversation on topic. It was important to lay ground rules for participants to follow, such as being courteous, respectful, and not sharing the conversation with others outside of the group.

Confidentiality or privacy importance

Statement to focus group participants: "It is very important that we each protect each other's identity and privacy, and not share anything discussed beyond this group; also, that we remain open to hearing about the experiences of others without judgement. The data collected from this group will be kept secure on an external hard-drive and accessed only on password protected computer (desktop or laptop). Any hard copy data will be shredded post data analysis. No identifiable data will be collected, and my email list will be shredded after the focus group's 2nd meeting in which each participant will be provided a copy of their statements for member-checking purposes."

Questions:

1. Please share your thoughts about yourselves in your combat role. Did you consider yourselves warriors (combat trained professional marines/soldiers)? If yes, describe the processes that contributed to this experience?
2. Having completed or nearly completed a baccalaureate degree, describe any experiences as a result of pursuing academic credentials or becoming scholars (academically educated professionals or lifelong learners) after being warriors?
3. What were your experiences participating in classroom activities that helped you become scholars?
4. What resources does the university make available to students that either help or hinder their efforts to become scholars?
5. How are you different today from the person who arrived on campus that first day?

Member-check:

Member checking was conducted via email copy of transcript or clarification request emails sent to give the four participants a chance to correct or declare that their statement were accurate. Two participants clarified their statements upon my request and the other two participants agreed with their statements.

Statement to the Focus Group Participants: "In order to improve the accuracy of your statements and the rigor of the study, I am requesting you allow me a second meeting where a written transcript of your statements will be provided to you. You will have the opportunity to review, correct, and provide additional feedback on your experience as a participant."

Departing comment of appreciation:

Statement to the Focus Group Participants: "I am grateful to each of you for participating in this study, and your contribution will be recorded in the findings section of this dissertation. If you have any questions for me, please keep my email and I will gladly answer them."

Appendix C: Participant Recruitment Flyer

Recruiting: Enlisted Combat Student Veterans for a warrior to scholar identity transformation study

I am looking for 10 enlisted combat student veterans (participants) to take part in interviews and a focus group.

Requirements are 1. You must be able to show your DD-214 box 11 to verify your combat MOS in the U.S. Armed Forces. 2. have or be near completion a baccalaureate degree program.

Participation is open to enlisted combat student veterans, period. The era of your service does not matter.

If interested in participating, please email:
Eliberto Calderon at Budha14@unm.edu.

No compensation is being offered to participate.

This flyer was emailed to potential participants through the Student Veterans of UNM Association and the Veteran Resource Center email list-serv. The first five enlisted combat student veterans to respond and their DD-214 form box 11 military occupation specialty (job) in combat arms verified will be the study's participants. One additional respondent was put on a list to serve as a backup should participants decide to drop out of the study. A participant email list will be put together for contact purposes and the list will be shredded after the data collection process has been completed.

Appendix D: Coding Sheet

Coding Colors
Warrior
Interpersonal conditions
Scholar
Civilian life
VA benefits
Identify Transformation
Pandemic & it's effects

Warrior	*Interpersonal*	*Scholar*	*Civilian life*	*VA benefits*	*Identify Transformation*
Army	brainwashing	CNM- Central Ne	ambassadors,	Money stipends	Critical reflection
Enlist, enlistment,	alone	UNM- University	State Departm	GI Bill	situational awareness
Military	isolated	graduate, graduati	diplomat, dipl	VocRehabilitatio	warrior
Infantry	friends	clubs, veterans gr	temporary job	Department of Ve	Scholar
Combat unit	fear of judgemen	Political Science	Truck drivers	VRC	military mindset
Deployed, deploy,	skin color	History	Waste mgt. job		ignore everything else
Bradleys (mechan	superficial	Majors	Walmart		uphill battle
Stop-loss, stop-lo	sensitive	Foreign Affairs O	film industry		fight, fight, fought
Love-hate	maturity, I am m	learning, learn,	movies		super ridiculous
Hero, heroic, herc	confidence	full time	movie director		patience
Basic-training	boredom	online	casting		
unit, units, new un	struggle, struggli	professors	dickhead		
amazing stuff	challenge, challe	assignments	business		
brothers, older brc	Positive	extra-time	employers		
good guys	drink	communicate	value		
bad guys	Experience	classes, courses	Society		
patrols, patrolling,	Bad-ass	reading books	facility manager		
combat	alpha	role model	deputy director		
represenatives	violence, violent	first generation A	doctor		
National Guard	stigma	Master's degree	advocate		
peacekeeping ope	crazy	Doctorate	medical		
MFO- multi-natio	frontal lobe	Army, A72:D93A	friends		
rotate, rotation, ro	older	MarineA72:D93-	social life		
Army, Army Rang	anxiety	sense of belongin	society		
camps, North Cam	horrible humor	Leadership, senio	cultural norms		

Serve, service, ser	sexist	intimidating	health
uniform	suicide	elite	public health
diversity	joke, joking, joke	Corporal of the G	medically retire
kill	passionate	Marine	opiods
leave, on-leave, le	indoctrinate, indo	infantry training b	overstep
accountability	tendencies	engineering	influence
MOS 0311, 11B,	habits	chemical engineri	medical community
Riflemen	being	fellow students	hospitals
17, 18, 21	self-discovery	UNM	politicians
Infantrymen	think	CNM- Central New Mexico Community College	
hazing, treating the	driven	Frats, Fraternities	
high-end type Mar	ambitious	networking	
Airforce	group think	socializing	
Security forces	gravitate	online	
responsibility	realize	ALEKS (online tutoring system- CNM)	
Leadership, senior	extreme imposte	fafsa	
Teamwork	imposter syndro	scholarships	
depend	Being	liberal	
Kirtland Airforce	uncomfortable	idiots	
fortified	isolated	Master's degree	
September 11, 200	self-isolate	acting classes	
Military Police (M	learning, learn,	enroll	
invasion	learning disabilit	computers	
Afghanistan	disabilities	science	
Iraq	medical procedu	biology	
Vietnam technique	surgery	administrators	
training	extended time	honors program	
skills	blind student	lab	

skills	blind student	lab
combat skills	braille	medical school
DNR- do not rece	neurology	professors
living will	othro	accessibility resource center (ARC)
berets	chronic pain	senior
BAF- alarm siren	chronic pain doc	first-world problems
paratroopers	understand, unde	barrier, barriers
paramilitary emplo	ketamine treatments	
similarities		
control center		
fight codes		
state pen, state penitentiary		
The Devil's Butcher Shop		
gang units		
sergeant		
Syndicto- prison gang		
Riots		
tours		
big dick contests		
veterans		
Army		
68-W combat medic		
cadet		
NM Military Institute		
blending in		
stay in the herd		
being singled out		
medical board		

Appendix E: Themes

Themes
Identity acquistion is ceremonial process
Warrior identity at the University
Scholar identity (University is a tranformative space)
Indoctrination vigilance
Being students
Face to face vs. Online Learnning
Imposter syndrome
Socializing
Help seeking

Appendix F: Values Coding

Values Coding
Acceptance/belonging
Advocacy
Anti-indoctrination or brainwashing
Becoming
Change
Competence
Conservative perspectives or values
Diversity
Ethics
Discipline
Diversity
Education
Ethics
individuality but part of a group or being part of something bigger than themselves
Healthy lifestyles
Inclusion (they seek to belong or be included in the university culture)
Knowledgable
Learning and applying concepts
Letting go of warrior identity
Masculinity
Maturity
Morality
Opportunities
professional development
Resilience
Scholar identity
Stability
Success
Transformation
Understanding vs being understood
Warrior identity