

FROM COMBAT TO CARE GIVER

by

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## **DEDICATION**

I wish to dedicate this dissertation to my wife, Lisa and son, Jacob. You both stood by me and endured this seemingly endless journey. Forgive me, I again found work that competed for the time I could have spent with you both. When the weight of this task overwhelmed me, your tolerance and love buoyed me and propelled me forward. This dissertation is now complete, and because of you so am I.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This qualitative study was designed to research the lived experiences of post-9/11 veterans, including their service in the military, exiting the military, and transitioning into higher education to become nurses. As these veterans entered the healing profession, their change in career path was of significant interest. Their warzone stories are presented as Burkean (1945, 1950) dramatisms with Schlossberg's (1995) transition theory used to assess their journey through higher education. This study provides a glimpse of the veterans' consequential motivations for seeking new meaning and purpose in their lives by becoming nurses, as told in their own words.

## I. INTRODUCTION

*“What a cruel thing is war: to separate and destroy families and friends, and mar the purest joys and happiness God has granted us in this world; to fill our hearts with hatred instead of love for our neighbors, and to devastate the fair face of this beautiful world.”*

Robert E. Lee, *from a letter to his wife, 1864*

Since October 2001, the United States (U.S.) of America has been committed to the ongoing military campaign known as the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). The GWOT is a compilation of the following conflicts where U.S. service members were and are deployed: Afghanistan - Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), Iraq - Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation New Dawn (OND) and operations elsewhere in the Middle East and Africa (Coll & Weiss, 2015, p. xi). This prolonged war effort incorporates a majority of U.S. military branches: Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and the Coast Guard, and is conducted primarily by the Department of Defense’s (DoD) active duty component with augmentation from the Reserve and National Guard (Feickert, 2005).

The motivation behind the GWOT is primarily linked to the terrorist attacks which occurred on September 11, 2001, involving the World Trade Center in Lower Manhattan and the Pentagon in Washington D.C. (U.S. Department of State Archive website, n.d.). These attacks began at 08:46 a.m. with 3 hijacked planes. At this moment American Airlines flight 11 was deliberately flown into the one trade tower in New York City. The second, American Airlines flight 175, hit the second tower at 09:03 a.m. The third and final airplane, American Airlines flight 77, crashed into the Pentagon at 09:37

a.m. (solemn tribute 9/11, 2006, para. 9; September 11: Timeline of the attacks, 2016, para. 11). On this day over 3000 civilians, 343 firefighters/paramedics and 60 police/port authority officers died (U.S. Department of State Archive website, n.d.). For the first time on American soil four-hijacked aircraft were used as weapons of mass destruction (WMD) (CNN, 2001).

In response to these events, the Bush administration endorsed the argument that in the post-9/11 climate, the U.S. had compelling interests to liberate the Afghan people from Taliban rule and rid Afghanistan of any known terrorist training camps (Hanson, 2013; U.S. Department of State Archive website, n.d.). Consequently, the U.S. nullified the existing 1991 Gulf War cease-fire with Iraqi President Saddam Hussein due to government funding of state-sponsored terrorism and the suspected development of chemical WMD (Hanson, 2013). On October 11, 2001, President George W. Bush held a televised news conference informing the American people of the ongoing military operations in Afghanistan. In his speech he rationalized the launch of the GWOT:

The attack took place on American soil, but it was an attack on the heart and soul of the civilized world. And the world has come together to fight a new and different war, the first, and we hope the only one, of the 21st century. A war against all those who seek to export terror, and a war against those governments that support or shelter them. (State of War, 2001, para. 3)

The DoD reports that since the U.S. went to war in Afghanistan in 2001 and into Iraq in 2003, nearly 7,000 service members have died in combat (Democratic Staff of the Joint Economic Committee, 2015). An estimated 3.7 million individuals have served in

one or both of the above-mentioned military campaigns (Democratic Staff of the Joint Economic Committee, 2015). As of 2014 1.6 million service members of that 3.7 million have transitioned from the military to veteran status (Adams, 2014; Democratic Staff of the Joint Economic Committee, 2015). This growing number of veterans, whether due to expiration of term of service (ETS), retiring from the military, and/or being medically disabled (Service Members Transitioning to Civilian Life, 2016) are now eligible recipients for federal government education tuition assistance (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, 2014). This newly emerging adult learner cohort, termed the post-9/11 GI Bill military veterans are using their education benefits, influencing vocational and higher education systems to rethink their services to best support this new adult learner group (Education: [benefits.va.gov/GIBill](http://benefits.va.gov/GIBill), 2014). For these institutions, this large and expanding consortium of adult learners has created new opportunities and challenges.

### **The Origin of the GI Bill**

Following World War (WW) II President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 into law, now known as the GI Bill (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, 2014). Since U.S. legislators enacted this law, the U.S. Congress has continued to provide educational benefits for military veterans, varying in terms of compensation and assistance throughout the years. Whether the military veteran served during WW II, Korea, Vietnam, Gulf War, Iraq, and/or Afghanistan, members of Congress have made it a bipartisan priority to support the transition of combat veterans back to the civilian workforce through education (Coll & Weiss, 2015).

The current education benefit package offered to military veterans is the post-9/11 GI Bill (Public Law No: 110-252, 06/30/2008). This tuition assistance program is available for all veterans who served in the military after September 2001 for a minimum of three years active duty and/or have sustained a service related disability. The post-9/11 GI Bill provides up to 100% tuition/book reimbursement along with a monthly stipend for veterans attending state or participating (Yellow Ribbon Program) private educational institutions with program offerings of 36 months or longer (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, 2014). Veterans can use the GI Bill financial assistance program for most accredited educational programs to attain either vocational training or higher education degrees (Education: [benefits.va.gov/GIBill](http://benefits.va.gov/GIBill), 2014).

### **Background of the Study**

As a faculty member at a large public university's nursing school located in the U.S. southwest, I work closely with the undergraduate nursing students. Over the past several years, I noticed an atypical group of adult learners emerging in the baccalaureate-nursing program. This new cohort of adult learners is the post-9/11 GI Bill military veterans. This adult learner group includes military service members who were in combat, those in non-combat support roles deployed to the war, and others who served elsewhere after September 2001.

In recent years, I have had a small number of these post-9/11 veteran adult learners as students who enrolled in my course(s). At first, it appeared they entered the nursing program to change or begin a new career path, comparable to that of their non-traditionally aged adult learner peers. However, beyond this commonality, the post-9/11

veteran learners are seemingly different from that of the non-traditional students who enroll in nursing programs (Grabowski, Rush, Ragen, Fayard, & Watkins-Lewis, 2016). Both the military veteran and non-traditional adult learner groups have known barriers and challenges while enrolled at an institution of higher education (Grabowski et al., 2016); however, the post-9/11 combat veteran learners' assets and liabilities are frequently dissimilar from those of their non-traditional peers.

In comparison, the post-9/11 veterans with prior combat experience seeking their degree in nursing are predominately male, differing from that of the current gender demographic in nursing programs. As of 2014, the percentage of males enrolled in a Bachelor of Science in nursing (BSN) program is approximately 15% nationally (<http://www.nln.org/newsroom/nursing-education-statistics/nursing-student-demographics>). In addition, the realization that there are nursing students who served in one or more combat tours in Iraq and/or Afghanistan was of great interest to me.

### **The Problem Statement**

*There is an adult learner cohort of United States military combat veterans from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars who have changed career paths by returning to school to become nurses.* The veterans mentioned in the above problem statement had prior careers that included extensive training in combat arms. Their skill set involved the ability to neutralize and/or kill enemy forces deemed hostile to the U.S., acting within the rules of engagement (ROE) set forth by the DoD (Powers, 2016). By being a military combatant in a war zone, the service member is inherently involved in high stakes situations, sustained and/or protracted military operations. During wartime deployment,



military team members are at risk for sudden injury or death, experiencing events and happenings oft beyond description (Marlantes, 2011).

As discussed above, eligibility for the post-9/11 GI Bill tuition assistance occurs when one successfully meets the terms of her/his service obligation known as ETS, earning an honorable discharge or retirement after 20 years or more of military service (Education: [benefits.va.gov/GIBill](http://benefits.va.gov/GIBill), 2014). In addition, when service members have sustained a significant war-related injury resulting in permanent disability (physical/mental), they are typically medically retired from military service. When one is medically retired, the service member receives post-9/11 GI Bill education benefits and/or other veteran financial and rehabilitative assistance (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.gov, 2015). To change careers after leaving military service, one will likely need a financial vehicle to facilitate this desired lifestyle transition.

In terms of the problem statement, the common denominator concerning these described war-veterans is that they all made a purposeful and cognitive choice to transition from military combat service to that of becoming students in a higher education setting. Specifically, these post-9/11 combat veterans entered higher education as adult learners, seeking a new profession in the healing arts by becoming nurses, accentuating what appears to be a dichotomous career choice of moving from combat to caregiver.

### **Researcher's Relationship to the Problem**

My positionality as it relates to the identified veteran population and the overall problem statement was a necessary component to address when conducting this study. I

personally share the same ethos of military culture with the participants and the like experience of going to war. I have served in the military for nearly three decades.

My primary reason for joining the Army is linked to a traumatic incident that occurred when I was 17 years old. Simply and suddenly, my mother died in front of me as she danced at my brother's wedding reception. This event was a life altering experience for me. The loss of my mother compelled me to reevaluate my formative value system. I wished to do something of significance, in hopes of bringing a new order and meaning to my life. With many questions and few answers, I left my small working-class town to join the Army upon graduating from high school. I was an enlisted soldier who went to basic training, became proficient in core combat skills, and subsequently received additional training to become a preventive medicine specialist and emergency medical technician. I found that providing care for others offered me the solace of making a difference in small but significant ways.

After completing my three-year enlistment in the Army, I became a full-time student at a large Midwest university. With the financial assistance of the Montgomery GI bill, I was able to attend college to study nursing. As a college student, I was also a member of the Army ROTC program, which provided me the needed social support to stay true to my academic trajectory. In 1989, I received my Bachelor of Science in Nursing, got married, was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army Nurse Corps, and returned to active duty.

After being married for less than nine months, I was deployed to the Gulf War as a nurse corps officer, assigned to a 400-bed evacuation tent hospital. Our hospital was

one of the primary units that provided direct life support for over 100 patients injured or killed in the largest mass causality of the conflict, caused by an Iraqi scud missile strike in the closing days of the war. The overall experience of war, the lives saved, and the lives lost has had a lasting effect on me. Developmentally, no doubt I matured and grew from the experience, yet in other ways the war negatively affected how I conceptualized life and death.

My positionality as it relates to the veteran participants is important in terms of conducting this study due to shared experiences. This commonality creates a shared understanding between the researcher and the participants by identifying with most facets of military culture and some aspects of their described experiences. However, to avoid over identifying with the participant the use of bracketing provides a purposive distance from the study participants and their personal stories (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

### **The Purpose of this Study**

Each of the veterans had a story which defined his motivation for the path chosen. This study was designed to investigate the post-9/11 combat veterans' motivations for entering the military, exiting military service, and choosing to use their GI Bill education benefits. This course of inquiry provided a framework to investigate the purposes and motivations behind their initial and subsequent career choice of joining the military during a time of war, working in assigned military roles in the warzone, and the motivation/rationale for becoming an adult learner in a nursing program. I studied the participants' personal narratives and listened to their stories of combat to discover the developmental learning experiences they identified with and to better understand their

personal journeys and transitions from being military combatants to entering an undergraduate nursing program. Finally, I was able to learn about the transition processes of making a career change by entering higher education to become a nurse.

### **Research Questions**

The fundamental aim for this study was to better understand the experiences of the military veterans' career choice of joining the military and motivations for becoming a nurse. Open-ended semi structured questions were asked of the study participants, facilitating in-depth reflection upon the subjective aspect of their narrative. By asking participants, "what something was like... [this gives] them the chance to reconstruct their experience according to their sense of what was important [and] unguided by the interviewer" (Seidman, 2013, p. 88).

The guiding research question for this study is: *What is the experience of the transition of becoming a nurse after having served in military combat?* In investigating this question, I am interested in learning about the participants' initial motivations to join the armed services during a time of war, about the experiences that led to their choices to go to college to become a nurse after having served in military combat, and the learning and developmental experiences they had in becoming a nurse.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The selected theoretical framework for this proposed study is the 4S Integrative Model of the Transition Process (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012; Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). This theoretical framework is an adaptive transition model, accounting for the life experiences of the study participants, which

occurred in an asynchronous manner (Schlossberg, 1981). The concept of the 4S model (including understanding transitions by recognizing the elements of situation, self, support, and strategies) provides a framework to study the military veterans' lived experiences, including volunteering for combat, leaving service, and their transition into higher education to become nurses. This 4S model is a means of support systems, affecting the transition process based on the availability of resources. The veteran's ratio of liabilities and assets can either facilitate and/or delay the transition process for the adult learner moving in, moving through and moving out of transitions of his life (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Schlossberg provides the following commentary, published in the 2011, ASHE Higher Education Report, exclusively reflecting on the post-9/11 veterans' transition into higher education:

Veterans deal with multiple transitions. They are leaving the military... even though there is relief, even excitement about returning home, they are leaving the familiar, their friends, and sense of mission. At the same time, they are dealing with "role exit" matters... reintegrating with their families and starting college. We love to picture the... soldier coming home... getting right into the groove, but that is not reality. (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011, p. 18)

The above remarks segue into the following discussion of the life changes that may occur for the veterans entering higher education to change careers. Schlossberg's (1995) transition model accounts for three types of transitions veterans may experience after leaving the military and that of obtaining their Bachelor's degrees. The most frequent is the anticipated transition, such as an ETS from military service and their

planned attendance in higher education; the other two types are the unanticipated and non-event transitions (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012; Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995). An example of an unanticipated transition occurs if one becomes ill, causing a delay or changes the timing for attending college. A non-event transition occurs when an anticipated event does not transpire, for example, not gaining acceptance into one's expected program of study, altering the expected career path (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012). There is additional discussion of the Schlossberg transition theory provided in the methods chapter of this dissertation.

### **Importance of the Study**

The goal is to investigate the service members' prior military service and deployments to either Iraq and/or Afghanistan in the role of a war fighter. The goal is to investigate the life experiences of post-9/11 veterans, hoping to learn about the phenomenon of serving in the military, exiting service and transitioning into higher education to become nurses. The fact that these veterans changed career paths and specifically entered a healing profession as an adult learner is of significant interest. There is a gap in the literature in terms of understanding how previous combat experience may affect adults' academic performance and subsequent continuing education and career choices. The literature indicates that universities and colleges are in the process of adapting student support systems, improving access, implementing new reporting policies, and fortifying veteran support programs to better accommodate this unique and growing adult learner cohort (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). This study has the potential to contribute to the limited body of knowledge on the post-9/11 veterans transitioning in an

academic higher education environment and provide important insight into ways to support their development processes.

### **Scope of the Study**

Over 3.7 million service members have served in the post-9/11 era with a student cohort of over 1.5 million veterans having already used the post-9/11 GI Bill, a number that will expand over the next 10 years (Democratic Staff of the Joint Economic Committee, 2015). These veterans are, by definition, nontraditional students, usually older, and many are technically considered transfer students because they often have earned college credits from their previous military training (O' Herrin, 2011). This military veteran cohort is demographically complex and often under supported in the university setting, likely due to life adversities, family hardships, post-traumatic stress and deficient academic skills (Stewart, 2014). These circumstances can often make attendance in school difficult since, "veterans' face many of the same challenges as other adult students... often compounded by physical and mental wounds and complicated by bureaucracy," (Line, 2012, para. 3). The actual needs and goals of military veterans in higher education requires further study to better understand this learner cohort and their learning and development needs; including their motivations, their challenges, their resources, and the support required for their academic success. The moral obligation rests with all adult educators in preparing military veterans for success not only in school, but also in the civilian labor force. This study and others like it may help provide insight on how to support the emerging military adult learner cohort in higher education.

## Definition of Terms

The post-9/11 military veteran student experience was the focus of my research question. There is a distinct lexicon associated with U.S. military, operations, and service personnel. The following descriptive terms and/or acronyms often used interchangeably within the literature when referring to the described veteran group:

1. **Active Duty:** These are service members who are assigned to the military on a full-time basis, whereas Reserve or National Guard members are usually not full-time assets (Tanielian et al., 2008).
2. **Armed Forces:** This is a collective term used to describe the U.S. military's branches; including the Army, Army Reserves, Army National Guard, Air Force, Air Force Reserves, Air National Guard, Navy, Navy Reserve, Marine Corps, Marine Corps Reserve, and Coast Guard. The President of the United States is the Commander in Chief of the U.S. armed forces (U.S. Armed Forces Overview, 2017).
3. **Department of Defense (DoD):** The Department of Defense is the federal agency responsible for all activities of the collective U.S. military forces (Tanielian et al., 2008).
4. **Post-9/11 GI Bill:** This is an education benefit program for individuals who served active duty after September 10, 2001, describing the recipients' chronology of military service and educational entitlement package. (<http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/>).



5. ***Global War on Terrorism (GWOT)***: The term *global war on terrorism* became the moniker ascribed to the U.S. and participating allied countries efforts against global terrorism. It began as a result of the attacks on September 11, since a heightened sense of security resulted with concerns reverberating throughout the world.  
  
(<http://www.globalissues.org/issue/245/war-on-terror#MainstreamMedia>)
6. ***Hazlewood Act***: This is a State of Texas education benefit for qualified Veterans, spouses, and dependent children with up to 150 hours of tuition exemption at public institutions of higher education in Texas.  
  
(<https://www.tvc.texas.gov/education/hazlewood-act/>)
7. ***Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)***: This campaign began on October 7, 2001 when allied air strikes were launched on Taliban and al Qaeda targets. The operational goal was to stop the Taliban from providing a safe haven to al Qaeda. The OEF campaign officially ended December 2014 (Operation Enduring Freedom, 2016).
8. ***Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF)***: This campaign began on March 19, 2003, which was an American-led invasion of Iraq to remove Saddam Hussein from power. The Iraq War was known and titled as Operation Iraqi Freedom until September 2010, when it was renamed Operation New Dawn. This official campaign ended December 15, 2011 (Operation Iraqi freedom fast facts, 2016).

9. ***Military Deployment:*** The term "deployment" refers to activities required to move military personnel and materials from a home installation to a specified destination (e.g., Afghanistan and Iraq). The process that service members must go through to prepare at home before, during and after deployment, and is applicable to all active service members and National Guard and Reserve members (<http://www.military.com/deployment/deployment-overview.html>).
10. ***Combat Zone:*** A combat zone is any area the President of the United States designates by Executive Order as an area in which the U.S. Armed Forces are engaging or have engaged in combat (e.g., Executive Order No. 13239, Afghanistan) (<http://www.military.com/benefits/military-pay/special-pay/combat-zone-tax-exclusions.html>).
11. ***Rules of Engagement (ROE):*** The rules of engagement are designed to limit the use of force to military targets and to treat captives with proper care and respect (French, 2015, para. 7).
12. ***Service Members:*** This is a term used to describe members of the military that serve in all branches and components of the DoD (Tanielian et al., 2008).
13. ***Veterans Affairs (VA):*** The U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs is responsible for providing military veteran health care, assistance, and benefits to qualified recipients (<http://www.benefits.va.gov>).
14. ***Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD):*** Title 18 U.S.C. §2332a defines weapons of mass destruction (WMD) as: “Any explosive, incendiary, or poison gas, including the following: a bomb; grenade; rocket having an

explosive or incendiary charge... dangerous to human life, include the 9/11 attacks” (<https://www.fbi.gov/investigate/wmd>).

15. ***Yellow Ribbon Programs:*** These are degree-granting institutions of higher learning that participate in the Post-9/11 GI Bill Yellow Ribbon Program and agree to make additional funds available without an additional charge to the veteran’s GI Bill entitlement. These institutions voluntarily enter into a Yellow Ribbon Agreement with the VA and choose the amount of tuition and fees that will be contributed (<http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/>).

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

Limitations of a study often involve aspects of the research design that are considered unavoidable and require thoughtful acknowledgement (Glesne, 2016).

Whereas this study had a narrow criterion for inclusion and the pool of eligible participants is quite limited. Nevertheless, there was an identified and qualified research population available to investigate. The availability of qualified participants meeting the study criteria was an intricate recruiting process. Additionally, there was limited knowledge in this focused area of study with few comparable studies involving this stated study population in a higher education setting.

A noted delimitation for this study is that it was designed to investigate only combat veteran adult male learners that attended a baccalaureate nursing degree-producing program. The design choice was intentional, I wanted to use higher education as an academic performance litmus test. The assumption was that before the post-9/11 veterans matriculated into their Bachelor’s nursing programs, they would have needed to

complete the required prerequisites, which takes approximately two academic years. Subsequently, in order to be accepted into a baccalaureate nursing school, they would need to have a competitive grade point average (GPA). It was reasoned that if any of the study participants had a service-related disability, their previous academic accomplishments would indicate that they could still perform equally with their academic peers in the nursing program.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This review of literature was developed to provide context for the following proposed research problem statement as introduced in chapter one: *There is an adult learner cohort of United States military combat veterans from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars who have changed career paths by returning to school in order to become nurses.* To facilitate the scholarly understanding of the proposed research topic, the acquired sources were used to examine, support and ultimately identify gaps that may exist in the literature concerning the above problem statement. The structural flow for this chapter involves a broad assessment of the existing and relevant education literature. The initial step in the process is to begin with an overview of fundamental adult development theories and adult learning theories. This review then proceeds with a comprehensive exploration of the development and use of the essential integrative model, which details transition processes (Anderson, Goodman & Schlossberg, 2012), as an important educational theoretical framework central to this dissertation.

Historical literature was used to construct a contextual backdrop for when and why the adult as a learner was first recognized in education. This focused review will assist in constructing a paradigm of the adult learner in general terms and then specifically examining the adult learner in the higher education setting. This foundational analysis will further support the supposition that the military veteran as a post-911 G.I. Bill beneficiary is a unique and emerging subgroup of learners in higher education (Stewart, 2014). These findings support a collective understanding of the post-911 combat veterans' distinctive demographics (<https://www.va.gov/>, 2015) relating to their

lived experience of military service and that of becoming an adult learner in the higher education setting. This review will culminate with the assessment of the current literature regarding post-911 combat veterans in higher education involving the health professions and particularly the field of nursing.

In conducting this literature review multiple databases were accessed (ERIC, Professional Development Collection, OAlster, Google Scholar, EBSCO, PubMed, and ProQuest) through the portals of Texas State University's and the University of Texas Health Science Center's online libraries. Also, the use of original source texts and subsequent sources from educational works were referenced in conducting this review. Boolean search techniques were primarily used in the database query process. To ensure that this inquiry was thorough, truncation/wildcard and proximity operators were used when applicable to differentiate like terms with dissimilar or related definitions.

### **Adult Development and Adult Learning Theories**

The formative research connecting adult development and adult learning theories is central to the practice of adult education (Caffarella & Clark, 1999). The literature reflecting these foundational theories were assessed for significance in the advancement of knowledge and understanding of the adult learner (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). The following section provides an overview of the primary adult developmental theories with an elaboration on core concepts relevant to this dissertation.

In the simplest of terms, "the concept of development is most often equated with change" (Merriam, et al., 2007, p. 298). The theoretical understanding of adult development as it occurs over an adult's lifespan is essential to professional praxis

(Helsing, Drago-Severson, & Kegan, 2004). The following primary adult developmental theories were reviewed in one of four adult development taxonomies: biological, psychological, sociocultural, and integrative (Merriam et al., 2007). The following abridged overview of the stated theories will be used to highlight the key learning concepts with cited exemplars from each category.

### **Biological Developmental Theories**

The literature concerning the biological model involves the natural phenomena of growth and development of an individual over their lifespan, including the aging process (Caffarella & Clark, 1999; Merriam et al., 2007; Patton, Renn, Guido, & Quaye, 2016). These naturalistic progressions influence adult learners' health as they age, which may include potential mobility problems or other chronic illnesses (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 299). The understanding of biological development is important to both the adult educator and adult learner, allowing for adaptive educational strategies to facilitate learning (Knowles, Holton III, & Swanson, 2015). Within the literature, it is reasoned that, "cognitive processes are rooted in our biological structure... [being a] product of an evolutionary process and it is the mechanisms inherent in this process that offer the most probable explanations to how we think and learn" (Fosnot & Perry, 1996, p. 3).

Developmentally the chronologic aging process is certain, yet one must be aware of ageism, stereotypes existing in Western cultures about age both on an individual and societal level (Clark & Caffarella, 1999; Mott, 1999; Pirson, Le, & Langer, 2012). As lifespan expectancy extends and medical science reduces the effects of related chronic health issues, Clark and Caffarella (1999) suggest that gerontological researchers are now

questioning many of the previous held assumptions related to the aging process. Notably, just because one's appearance and body continuously change across the development and life-span continuum, "the effect of these changes on our capacity to learn is largely unknown" (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 301). Evidence suggests that by recognizing the unknowns and assumptions of physical limits related to aging, adult learners should question perceived physical barriers, and can expect to achieve sustainably high levels of academic performance regardless of age (Clark & Caffarella, 1999; Pirson et al., 2012).

**The senses.** Even as one "successfully ages" (Bickley & Szilagyi, 200, p. 840), the literature notes that there are inevitable changes occurring to the senses, involving visual acuity, hearing, touch and taste. The change of the senses may affect the ability to see clearly, hearing of classroom discussions, decreased dexterity which may limit the ability to type and take notes (Mott, 1999, p. 11). The circumstances involving one or more of these described health deficits can become an obstacle for a lifelong learner (Merriam et al., 2007). However, the aging adult can reasonably mitigate some of these proposed physical learning barriers with the proper use of prescriptive lenses and hearing aids, and participation in wellness programs (Jarvis, 2016).

For successful facilitation of learning in the classroom visual input is generally considered a necessary requirement. The eyes are an essential sensory organ and under normal physiological conditions, vision is expected to remain stable through age fifty. However, it is expected after the fifth or sixth decade of life, changes may diminish one's visual capabilities (Bickley & Szilagyi, 2007). The described sensory alterations can be linked to a multitude of age related issues, (e.g., cataracts, glaucoma, dryness) which may



challenge the lifelong learner's ability to see well when reading and viewing classroom material, worsened by poor lighting and small font visual displays (Merriam et al., 2007; Mott, 1999; Pirson et al., 2012).

Within the research literature there are differing opinions on aging and visual changes, challenging the assumption of the inevitability of decline (Langer, Djikic, Pirson, Madenci, & Donohue, 2010). Langer et al., (2010) has demonstrated that positive mindfulness can promote flexible aging and challenged the assumption that vision expectedly and unavoidably deteriorates with age. Through research they tested the hypothesis that vision could improve with the use of positive psychological approaches. Langer et al., suggested "states of mind, particularly those concerning mindless stability versus mindful flexibility of meaning, could directly affect visual perception" (p. 661).

To validate the above supposition, Langer et al. (2010) assessed the visual acuity of 7 women and 13 men to test if mindfulness affects performance. The research team used a within-subjects design to evaluate if the participants read less well as the letters gradually got smaller on the eye chart (Langer et al., 2010). To evaluate the visual acuity, in the control condition all of the participants read a traditional (Snellen) eye chart with large letters getting progressively smaller. The participants also read from a reversed (Snellen) eye chart with the letters beginning from small to progressively larger (p. 664). The prescribed order to each condition was random to best control practice effects.

Langer et al. (2010) affirmed that study results supported their hypothesis. The visual acuity pre-test showed no significant difference between the groups. However, the visual acuity "results of the matched *t* test comparing the reversed and traditional charts

were significant  $t(19) = -4,45, p < .001$ ” (Langer et al., 2010, p. 665). When the participants read the smaller to larger letters on the eye chart, their results were significantly better than the results from the reading of the traditional eye chart. Langer et al. asserts that their results confirm the positive attributes of mindset, supported by the evidence of those reading from the smaller to larger letters because the participants were expecting to see better as they went along. The opposite was true for the participants that read from the traditional eye chart whereas they had the mindset that they would not see as well as they progressed (p. 667). Pierson et al. (2012), theorized that the positive mindset results confirm the, “upward mobility of human visual acuity, which suggests that human visual acuity might actually be better than is typically expected” (p. 63).

The ability to hear well facilitates the adult learner’s ability to participate in discursive exchanges in the classroom (Merriam et al., 200, p. 303). Hearing is essential for most classroom activities (without purposeful adaptations), and it is commonly understood that the aging adult is expected to endure a gradual hearing loss, becoming progressively worse after the fifth decade of life (Jarvis, 2016; Merriam et al., 2007). Additionally, when adult learners have a work history of being exposed to a loud occupational work environment for a sustained period, they are further at risk for developing/having sensorineural hearing loss (Bickley & Szilagyi, 2007; Jarvis, 2016).

Inversely, findings in the literature also indicate that even individuals who are in quiet spaces most of their life, nearly sixty percent after the age of sixty, will also have a noted hearing deficit as well (Jarvis, 2016, p. 328). Other lesser recognized chronic inner ear health problems include chronic tinnitus (ringing in the ear) and vestibular problems

affecting one's balance, which increases an individual's risk for tripping or falling on campus (Bickley & Szilagyi, 2007; Merriam et al., 2007).

Alternatively, Langer et al. (2010), provided an optimistic model on aging, suggesting that the adult learner needs to stay positive in learning endeavors, knowing that attitude can stave off what was once considered a forgone conclusion. However, this established principle of optimal aging does not relieve the adult educator of the responsibility for being responsive to adult learners' classroom environment, ensuring that lighting and sound are in optimal working order (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 304).

**Neurological development of the adult learner.** Brain function and intellect are obvious components for one to be a successful learner throughout their lifespan (Clark & Caffarella, 1999; Mott, 1999). It is anticipated that the aging brain will experience biologic changes involving both micro-anatomical and biochemical changes, potentially diminishing learning capabilities (Bickley & Szilagyi, 2007, p. 846). Cognitive studies have been conducted on adults to measure the time it takes to put a puzzle together; the results indicated that reaction time may diminish as one ages (Merriam et al., 2007). This age-related neurological malady as it relates to the speed of retrieving and processing information can potentially make learning more difficult (Bickley & Szilagyi, 2007; Jarvis, 2016). Even the lay-public's preconceptions concerning cognitive decline permeates through our culture. For example, older adults may seek medical attention complaining about memory loss (e.g., misplaced car keys, checkbook), which is known as "benign forgetfulness" and is considered common at any age. Nevertheless, it can cause undue anxiety for aging adults being fearful of the onset of dementia (Jarvis, 2016).

Conversely, the evolving literature in the neurosciences refutes many of the previously held views on aging and intellect (Casey, Tottenham, Liston, & Durston, 2005; Deng, Aimone, & Gage, 2010; Langer et al., 2010). As this expanding adult population ages, emerging research involving this aggregate offers alternate models on neurological processes as they relate to adult development. For example, in later years brain atrophy is expected, but even with a decrease in brain size cognitive decline is not confirmed. Current scientific evidence suggests brain cells can become more interconnected, thus preserving the brain function of the older adult learner (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 304). Similarly, it has been a common belief that that after adolescence, the adult brain did not have the capacity to generate new neurons (Deng et al., 2010). The current neuroscience research suggests otherwise, “although the idea met with skepticism for a long time, it is now generally accepted that new neurons are continuously added in discrete regions of the brain throughout adult life” (Deng et al., 2010, p. 339). Over the past few years, the understanding of neurogenesis and its effects on learning, cognition and memory has advanced considerably, offering new possibilities and approaches to adult education (Casey et al., 2005).

This review of literature provides additional research that challenges many of the aforementioned assumptions involving aging and cognitive decline over the adult lifespan. In the journal of *Consciousness and Cognition*, Langer (1992) discussed the collective of existing foundational positive psychology literature to explain her theoretical focus on mindfulness and the aging process. Langer suggested that cognition is not defined by age, asserting “mindfulness... [is] a state of conscious awareness in

which the individual is implicitly aware of the context and content of information... [being] a state of openness to novelty in which the individual actively constructs categories and distinctions.” (p. 289). In this same article, Langer (1992) referenced a previous study she and a colleague conducted that supported the positive attributes of mindfulness. The research included 17 adult participants between the ages of 70-75 who agreed to spend five days on a retreat (Alexander & Langer, 1990).

The experimental group and control group were both placed in a living environment that reenacted life 20 years’ prior, supplemented with magazines, movies, and autobiographic accounts from that specific time period. However, while all the participants were asked to live in an era as if it were 20 years earlier, the experimental group had all of their references and discussions delivered in the present tense, whereas the control group’s dialogues were purposely not discussed in the present tense. Langer explained that numerous cognitive tests were used to assess the participants during the study. At the end of the five days, both groups demonstrated significant improvement from their pretest to their posttest in cognitive measures. However, the findings from the “Digit Symbol Substitution subtest of the Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale” (Langer, 1992, p. 297) indicated that the experimental group had the most significant improvement overall. Although Langer (1992) merely summarized the study results in her article supporting her theoretical focus, her study demonstrated the positive influence for fluidity of functional age (Langer, 1992). This fluidity and mindfulness capacity associated with adult development is why Langer is seemingly convinced of the fallacy that expected biological decline is related to chronological aging alone (Mott, 1999, p. 10).

In terms of this study, post-9/11 veteran adult learners may have naturally occurring and/or service related sensory and/or cognitive deficits that can create learning obstacles (Kirchner, 2015). Often, these described disabilities can define the individual's identity, but Langer (1992) recommended viewing the disability as a new capacity and function. As Langer (1992) and other researchers confirm age fluidity, the adult learner need not be looked upon with, "what Foucault (1973) has called the *clinical gaze*... [this refers to when] people are seen and conceptualized as clinical problems" (Estes & Binney, 1989, p. 589). The biologic models, in terms of addressing adult development by incorporating the positive attributes of mindfulness, suggest that age and disability may be little more than a state of mind (Merriam et al., 2007; Mott, 1999).

### **Psychological Developmental Theories**

The available literature regarding adult development has a substantial portion of germane and established research grounded in psychological development theories. These psychological models are designed to provide a premise for understanding how adults develop as individuals through their internal processes while also being influenced by the environment and social settings (Clark & Caffarella, 1999; Merriam et al., 2007). The following paragraphs provide foundational concepts of adult development, including the psychological frame of identity, ego, life events and transitional development (Baumgartner, 2001; Clark & Caffarella, 1999, p. 5). The cited literature supports that, "psychological models of development, which explores the internal experiences of the individual, continues to be a favorite of developmental psychologists" (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 305). Within the literature there are several well-known psychological

development theories used in adult educational research. Two of these established theories are Erikson's model of psychosocial development and Levinson's model of personal development, both of which will be the primary focus of this review (Clark & Caffarella, 1999; Merriam et al., 2007).

**Psychosocial development model.** Erikson's (1963) psychosocial model is considered foundational to the advancement and study of adult development (Clark & Caffarella, 1999; Elkind, 1970; Merriam et al., 2007; Munley, 1976; Patton et al., 2016). This psychosocial development theory has eight described stages of crisis or turning points which are designated in the following binary terms: *basic trust versus mistrust*, *autonomy versus shame and doubt*, *initiative versus guilt*, *industry versus inferiority*, *identity versus identity confusion*, *intimacy versus isolation*, *generativity versus stagnation*, and *ego integrity versus despair* (Erikson, 1963; Munley, 1976; Patton et al., 2016). The first four stages of Erikson's (1950, 1963) model, *basic trust versus mistrust*, *autonomy versus shame and doubt*, *initiative versus guilt*, and *industry versus inferiority*, describe the psychosocial developmental stages of childhood (Patton et al., 2016, p. 289). Stage five bridges childhood/adolescence to becoming an adult, and stages six through eight advance the development model to adulthood (Munley, 1976; Patton et al., 2016).

Erikson (1963) defines stage five as *identity versus identity confusion*, a turning point for an adolescent. Developmentally this stage involves rapid body growth and maturation, as individuals are "primarily concerned with what they appear to be in the eyes of others as compared with what they feel they are" (Erickson, 1963, p. 261). During the *identity crisis*, the integration of the ego provides a sense of identity that allows for

inner sameness, linking how one is viewed by others to the outside world (Erikson, 1963; Munley, 1976). Additionally, this formative period is a time of maturation when one begins to choose a career that is aligned with identity (Erikson 1950, 1963). Conversely, when this crisis is unresolved an individual may suffer role confusion with the inability to settle on an agreeable occupational identity. To resolve this role confusion, one may initially fixate on having an apparent loss of identity all together, delaying resolution of this crisis by immersing themselves into cliques and crowds (Erikson, 1963, p. 262; Patton et al., 2016). Additionally, while moving through the identity crisis stage, social norms are formed, allowing for the development of one's own ideological position on becoming a member of the adult world, which includes political and socioeconomic outlooks (Erikson, 1963; Merriam et al., 2007).

In Erickson's (1963) remaining stages of psychosocial developmental (six thru eight) turning points directly involve the life stages of adulthood which are "transformed in ways relevant to issues related to the particular circumstances of the individual's intimacy, generativity, and ego integrity stages, and in response to the exigencies of the social world" (Cote & Levine, 1987, p. 276). Erikson designates the sixth stage as a crisis of *intimacy versus isolation*, being a developmental period where the adult reaches out to others to establish intimate relationships and expand friendships (Elkind, 1970; Merriam et al., 2007; Patton et al., 2016).

Inversely when a prolonged unresolved intimacy crisis exists one may withdraw into isolation (Elkind, 1970; Merriam et al., 2007; Patton et al., 2016). In succession, the seventh stage is *generativity versus stagnation*. During this time, Erikson defines this



turning point for the adult as being the years associated with middle age. Throughout the generativity stage, this is the designated period for raising children and building a legacy of productivity with a focus on community and society. Nonetheless, a lack of a strong adult identity during this stage could result in *stagnation*, diminishing one's desire for public interaction (Elkind, 1970; Merriam et al., 2007; Patton et al., 2016). Lastly, stage eight is defined by Erikson as *ego integrity versus despair*, this crisis occurs in the later years of adulthood through death, when the individual accepts that his/her own life is finite with this being the one and only life cycle to be lived (Gould, 1972, p. 522). Erikson posited that, "each individual, to become an adult must to a sufficient degree develop all the ego qualities... [for example] the wise Indian... gentleman, and mature peasant... recognize in one another the final stage of integrity" (1968, p. 269). This suggests that after a fully lived life cycle there is a new-found clarity of a common understanding that, "we are more alike... than we are unlike" (Angelou, 1994, p. 125).

Munley's (1976) research study provided evidence of Erikson's (1963) developmental stages and the influence these stages may have on an individual's satisfaction in career choices. Munley investigated the relationship between Erikson's psychological developmental theory on identity and that of vocational selection development. The relevance of the research was intended to affirm Erikson's psychosocial model by demonstrating theoretical significance for those in academic counseling, guidance and vocational development of students (Munley, 1976).

The study empaneled 123 college-aged students, between the ages of 18-21, to assess the psychosocial maturity and vocational development of the participants.

Munley's findings indicated that "students who had made adjusted vocational choices and developed mature career attitudes had also been more successful in positively resolving the first six psychosocial stage crises outlined by Erikson" (p. 314). This research provided evidence of the intimate pairing of one's career with that of personal identity.

**The life-span model of personal development.** Within the domain of adult psychological developmental theory, researchers have further differentiated the life-span models into three conceptually labeled categories (Clark & Caffarella, 1999). The first life-span model discussed is known as *Life Stage* - specific to age with sequential phases; the second model is *Life Events/Transitions*- pertaining to life events that happen outside of sequence without predetermined dwell timelines for these transitions to occur and thirdly, *Life Course Perspectives*- relating to socially constructed perspectives based on societal influences, which then affects an individuals' perceptions of their own roles (Baumgartner, 2001; Caffarella & Clark, 1999; Patton, et al., 2016). To further discuss this topic, a working definition of the term *transition* is required. A transition is a passage from one life phase/status onto another phase/status, linking together the process, time span, and perception of the achieved change. (Chick & Meleis, 1986, p. 239).

The precursory research of Freud, Jung and Erikson influenced the formulation of Levinson's age graded model (Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, & McKee, 1978). Levinson (1986) stated that even, "Freud and Piaget, have assumed that development is largely completed at the end of adolescence" (p. 4). The development of this model evolved from that observed gap in the research literature. Levinson et al. (1978)

discovered that a void existed between the childhood/adolescence years and that of the gerontological period of old age. Levinson's model accounts for the full lifespan by including the adult developmental ages of 20 to 65. Even with the extensive amount of literature available on adults over 65, prior to this model the understanding or explanation of this life stage was also limited.

Levinson's (1986) life cycle model evolved through a sequence of eras lasting approximately twenty-five years, with small overlaps as follows: childhood/adolescence, 0-22; early adulthood, 17-45; middle adulthood, 40-65 and late adulthood, 60 thru end of life (Levinson et al., 1978, p. 18). Levinson et al. (1978) conducted extensive interviews of 40 men, which consisted of 10 executives, 10 blue collar workers, 10 biologists, and 10 novelists. For each participant, an in-depth biography was created by the research team, providing the primary data for studying the complexities of the participants' life stories. The research design focused on what was coined by Levinson as *life structures*, consisting of personalities, careers, marriage, and personal values (Costa & McCrae, 2013, p. 12; Levinson et al., 1978, p. 49). The interview process, data collection and analysis technique for this study, which included an all-male sample, influenced the title of the book, *The Seasons of a Man's Life*, (Levinson et al., 1978).

The stated life structures are considered fixed periods, designated as age-related stages by Levinson (1978) using recognizable Erikson (1963) like terms to explain the importance of career and identity-based transitions. Additionally, each sequence of eras includes an alternating series from *structure-building* to *structure-changing* (transitional) periods (Levinson et al., 1978, Levinson, 1986). The structure building is intended to

elevate or enhance one's life within a defined structure period. The described purpose of the transitional time is for the reevaluation of one's existing life structure with the potential for moving towards a new life structure, taking five to seven years to occur (Levinson et al., 1978, p. 49). For example, a transitional stage in Levinson's (1978, 1986) model identified that when one first enters their early career, within a five to seven-year timespan, an ensuing midlife career evaluation is expected to then take place. The level of perceived career satisfaction, determines if one will then enter a mid-life crisis (transition), usually occurring during ages 40 to 45 (Costa & McCrae, 2013, Levinson 1986). To resolve the midlife crisis, an individual may choose to continue or transition careers by entering a new occupation, seeking further educational development (Levinson, 1986, p. 6), which may account for the motivation for becoming an adult learner. Furthermore, the life cycle stage of the adult at age 60 or older is not portrayed negatively in this model. Instead aging is depicted as an optimistic attribute stating that, "the older man sees the universal rather than the particular and is no longer bound by shortsighted or parochial views... [growing] in rationality and ego strength" (Costa & McCrae, 2013, p. 137).

Similarly, around the same time as Levinson's (1978) model emerged, a self-development life-span model was also introduced by Gould (1972), testing the assumption that people can continue to change during what is considered the stable period of adulthood. Gould (1972) in his earlier work stated that the developmental phases may be found during the adult lifespan, but further clarifies that these sequential changes occur over time rather than during any one stage (p. 521). In terms of life span

development and fluidity, adults, “encounter... transformations... [with] career changes... and are undergoing transformations on an everyday basis” (Gould, 1980, p. 224). The established lifespan theories put forth by both Gould (1972, 1980) and Levinson (1978) are applicable to this study in terms of accounting for one’s ongoing development and career change from military combatant to that of becoming a nurse.

The mentioned life-span theories account for traditional developmental milestones, which are expected to occur in a somewhat congruent manner. However, when nonlinear adult development is studied, researchers should consider using a comparable life-span adaptable model. These types of models can facilitate the understanding of out of sequence growth often experienced by adult learners as they transition into, through, and moving on from higher education (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012; Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989; Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995).

There is a noted increase of application regarding both primary and derivative research surrounding the life event/transition theories. The use of life-span adaptable models is observed often in studies concerning post-9/11 veterans entering higher education. The model employed in this study is the Schlossberg’s transition theory (1966; 1984; 1988), an adaptable life-span model. These statements are further supported with published doctoral dissertations using Schlossberg’s education transition theory, being discussed later in this chapter (Clark, 2014; Davis, 2014; Shea, 2010). In terms of application, the above described psychological developmental models and life-span theories are effective tools for investigating “an individual’s journey through distinct life

phases: [these] models of adult development may help educators to illuminate important... differences in students engaged in age related life tasks” (Helsing, Drago-Severson & Kegan, 2004, p. 160).

### **Sociocultural Developmental Theories**

The spectra of progressive educational literature concerning sociocultural development is comprised of prominent studies paralleling the associated societal issues of the time, upon which they were intended to reflect. For instance, the sociocultural perspective provides context on how age, race, gender and other defining demographics further define an individual or group (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 312). Baumgartner (2001) states that sociocultural theory is based on the idea that a person cannot comprehend self from outside of the sociohistorical context in which his/her experiences occurred (p. 31). Furthermore, Patton et al., (2016) posits that social identity, as a framework, has evolved as a central concept in educational research for understanding the self in society, higher education, and overall facets affecting development (p. 71).

Much of the germane literature as discussed in the psychological developmental theories were essential to the origin of the sociocultural development of social identity, attributed to the foundational research of both Freud and Erikson (1950, 1963), albeit from a white androcentric perspective. Sociocultural theory utilizes a combined conceptual approach for explaining developmental crises which occur as one progresses towards healthy growth (Patton et al., 2016, p. 73). This concept, as introduced in the literature from the 1950s through the 1970s, primarily considers adults enduring change and role loss (life stage or occupation) as a negative event, resulting in a period of

stagnation. However, recent in-depth longitudinal studies have provided mixed results, indicating that adults with unexpected role loss may have either negative or a positive outcomes dependent on available resources and timing (Merriam et al., 2007).

Conceivably, in current times aging adults and their evolving place in society affirms the above statement in terms of resilience and change. For example, Neugarten (1974) introduced and discussed the advent of the *young-old* (55-75 years old), a population markedly different from their stereotypical older adult contemporaries studied in previous decades. Neugarten identified an ongoing trend, “that more middle-aged and older people are returning to education, some because of obsolescence of work skills [to change careers] and others for... self-fulfillment” (p. 196). Within this sociocultural model, Neugarten believed that the *young-old* due to their increasing presence in higher education, healthy aging, and growing numbers will become a positive and politically active aggregate, influencing U.S. society (p. 197). Neugarten’s (1974) article is over 40 years old, being foretelling and valid in terms of the impact that the young-old have contributed to the community at-large. The demographic of age as a factor influencing societal shift is important in terms of understating the phenomena of adult development theory from the perspective of life events (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 314).

However, the available sociocultural developmental literature expands beyond age, including many other demographic attributes associated with one’s identity, influencing life course development (Merriam et al., 2007). In terms of psychosocial development, the events and experiences associated with identity can be further shaped through participation in social action. For example, the critical writings of Chickering

(1969) accounted for much of the combined effect of developmental growth of individuals engaging in the civil rights movement, women's liberation and early gay rights organizing (Patton et al., 2016, p. 73).

Sociocultural theories have become an effective instrument for validating societal issues involving the underserved and/or underrepresented in society. Furthermore, these sociocultural theories offer a differing perspective in which to study adult learners in higher education (Baumgartner, 2001; Merriam, et al., 2007; Patton et al., 2016). For example, the sociocultural literature persuasively creates a venue for open dialogue inviting all students and faculty in higher education to participate in this learning process, facilitating a shared vision of genuine multiculturalism (Baumgartner, 2001; Sleeter & Grant, 1986). The post-9/11 veteran as a student on campus likely feels and is viewed differently from that of her/his peers, perhaps benefiting from the sociocultural theory optics (Coll & Weiss, 2015).

The adult learner entering higher education can face personal conflict and crisis involving sociocultural development. The experiential journey of the adult learner in higher education can be innately threatening, especially if one is outside of the normative scholastic demographic, creating an environment of self-doubt with learning barriers (Baumgartner, 2001). Based on the existing literature, the use of sociocultural theory has application for this study's veteran population (Coll & Weiss, 2015). The sociocultural developmental theory can assist in framing the shared personal narratives of one's previous military culture, combat experiences, and transition from the armed forces into



the classroom by offering a model for the context of the described evolving sense of self (Cleary & Wozniak, 2013; Daly & Fox Garrity, 2013; Shea, 2010).

### **Integrative Developmental Theories**

Caffarella and Clark, (1999), suggest that by observing the adult developmental process, “that adults are far too complex to put in one box or another... to fully understand [adult] development, we need to look at how the biological, psychological, and sociocultural frames... influence each other” (p. 5). The integrative developmental model was primarily influenced by the seminal works of Bronfenbrenner (1994) - bio-ecological model of human development; Dirkx (2001) - modeling the use of feeling and meaning making; Havighurst (1980) – life-span developmental psychology in education, and finally Tisdell’s (2003) – model for incorporating spirituality of the adult learner in higher education. Per the above-mentioned education theorists, the integrative model has potential for broad application in the social sciences for furthering the understanding of adult development (Merriam, et al., 2007).

The integrative development model is best described as being a series of developmental concepts intersecting, which provide a collective approach for describing mind, body, sociocultural perspectives and (intermittently) the use of spirituality (Baumgartner, 2001; Merriam et al., 2007). The construct and source for the integrative model was initially rooted in the life-course and life-span theories. For example, Havighurst (1980) implied that for successive life-span development to occur the individual needs to be a committed life-long learner, an essential element for one’s ongoing enlightenment and growth. He believed that individuals acquired insight for

development through the integration of elements of sociocultural awareness, such as being citizens of a postindustrial society, establishing a sense of community and connectedness (Havighurst, 1980, p. 8). In addition, “Baltes (1982, p.18) introduced one of the earlier comprehensive [integrated] models that emphasized a “*multi-causal interactive view*” of adult development” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 319). This multi-causal interactive perspective, “describes how individuals react to opportunities and limitations that life presents at each point in the lifespan” (Costa & McCrae, 2013, p. 13). This model was influenced by the previous work of Havighurst (1980) and Neugarten (1974), which further evolved life-span development psychology by unfolding the influence of events over a lifetime (Merriam et al., 2007).

As the integrated model emerged as a component of adult developmental theory, multiple viewpoints appeared in the literature with debate on which intersectional concepts should or should not be included. One issue identified within the literature includes the question of suitability of inciting the use of spirituality within the parameters of the integrated model (Tisdell, 2003). These reservations stemmed from the study of spirituality’s impact on the adult learner in higher education within the confines of public universities. As a leading proponent for this type of integrated modeling, Tisdell (2003) explored the intersection of spirituality and cultural identity with the effect on the adult learner participating in higher education. She provided the central precept that the adult learner will directly benefit from identifying his/her own cultural influence and sense of personal spirituality.

In terms of applicability, the following quote parallels themes relevant to this research study, “just as there is growing interest [in]... the role of spirituality in health care workers, researchers and medical educators... there is similar interest among educators in adult and higher education” (Tisdell, 2003, p. 26). This synergistic claim is backed with multiple studies cited in the Tisdell (2003) text, indicating that (in healthcare) through the positive influence of conjoining spirituality with culturalism there are improved patient outcomes (p.27).

It is further suggested that regarding adult development, spirituality has the potential to enhance awareness of self, with positive outcomes for adult learners in higher education. This phenomenon may be achieved through the recognition of one’s own spirituality and sociocultural centeredness, allowing for enriched lived experience to enable one’s ability to construct new knowledge and transformative meaning (Tisdell, 2003). The overarching purpose for utilizing the construct of the integrated development model, to include using spirituality, perhaps offers an innovative lens in which to view the narrative stories of adult learners involved in their educational transition (Clark & Caffarella, 1999).

### **Schlossberg’s Transition Theory- Model of the Transition Process**

The concept of this transition theory is important in terms of offering a construct for this study and explanation of adult development over a lifetime (Levinson, 1986). Based on the research literature, it is known that people face transitions throughout their lives for a variety of different reasons, which may encourage the adult to continuously learn and develop (Merriam, 2005; Sargent & Schlossberg, 1988; Schlossberg et al.,

1989). Hopson (1981) proposed the necessity for broad applicability of transition theory by citing the *College Entrance Examination Study* (1979), “that in any instant, one out of three Americans is in a career transition” (p. 36). Schlossberg suggests transitions can also occur in the face of an event or what is termed a non-event, resulting in a change within self and/or the immediate world around self, necessitating a tangential change in behavior and personal relationships (1981, 1984).

During the development of Schlossberg’s (1981, 1984) transition theory, she explained the rationale for the key components involved in the expansion and/or refinement of her model (Schlossberg et al., 1989). The origins for Schlossberg’s ensuing passion are conceivably captured in a transcript from her presentation at a professional development workshop in 1966. In the seminar she stated, “most development psychology takes us through the 20th to 25th year, then picks us up again at 65... seems as if those of us between say 30 and 60 are... just moving along on a predetermined road” (Schlossberg, 1966, para. 3). This gap in theory furthered her own research, and although she agreed that the developmental theorists’ previous work provided valuable insight, additional study was needed in this lifespan domain (Schlossberg, 1985, p. 7).

In a comprehensive literature review authored by Schlossberg (1985), she discussed multiple foundational adult developmental theorists’ research, including lifespan and transition models (e.g. Levinson and Gould), and Erikson’s (1950) predictable eight stages towards ego development. She then followed with a detailed analysis of the likely limitations related to the sequential, cultural assumptions and age-based chronology of adult development processes (Schlossberg, 1985, p. 3). She also

posited that much of the widely-adopted lifecycle theories are based on male studies in androcentric vocational settings (Schlossberg, 1985; Schlossberg et al., 1989).

Schlossberg discussed the melding of other theoretical concepts to facilitate the understanding of the complexity of adulthood by advancing these perspectives into a collective theoretical framework (Anderson, et al., 2012). These perspectives incorporate the previously examined adult developmental theories, which Schlossberg et al. (1989) posited requires comprehension in order to improve the understanding of the given assumptions on how development theory can and should guide research practice. Schlossberg's transition theory incorporates situational variability while maintaining a structured approach for broad application and study (Anderson et al., 2012).

Schlossberg (1981, 1984, 1985, 1989; Anderson et al., 2012) states that the transition process begins by leaving one set of roles, relationships and routines and then engaging in new roles, relationships, and behaviors. This process can take time and cause personal duress. Transitions occur, "in phases... leaving behind the old, moving on to the new through an emergent growth process" (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 49). Schlossberg asserted that although each transition is unique, and the individuals involved differ, the basic structure provided for understanding transition processes is stable.

Within the education literature, peer reviewed critiques of Schlossberg's (1981) then emerging transition theory were identified. Concerning the reviews, two of the critiques were offered by prominent adult development researchers who provided both shaping and confirmatory observations of her work. One of the reviewers, Roger Gould (1981), offered comments on Schlossberg's transition model that were predominantly

affirming. However, in his critique, he found Schlossberg theory to be more of a descriptive model, suggesting that she add more dynamic links for it to be fully utilized as an interactive transition model (p. 44). Gould commended the Schlossberg (1981) transition model as being the next step in theory development and refinement. Gould also identified the methods Schlossberg used to consolidate the evolving social sciences with the adult developmental theories, providing a refined research tool for the deeper assessment of the adult transition process (p. 46).

Research psychologist and author Hopson (1981) favorably reviewed Schlossberg's (1981) newly defined variables used in describing the types of transition processes. Hopson suggested an additional transition category of "predictable-unpredictable" to be added, of which Schlossberg (1981) adopted in a later revision of the model. Hopson commented positively on Schlossberg's thorough research and application of the existing adult development theories and linking of these precepts to the transition theory (p. 38). The Schlossberg transition model has since become a widely used instrument for the study of adult learners in higher education.

### **The Adult Learner**

There has been a great deal of discussion up to this point in the literature on adult development theories and research concerning the transitioning adult learner. The review of the literature from the early twentieth century up to the present chronicles the rapid expansion of the acquired knowledge and understanding of adults as learners. In under 100 years, the adult learner arose from ambiguity to being identified as a distinctive academic entity with an evolving body of scholarly work connecting adult learning

theory to practice (Clark & Caffarella, 1999; Kolb, 2013). Numerous academic citations confer that adult learners comprise a unique group with attributes requiring alternative educational approaches beyond the scope of traditional teaching methods (Goldberger, 1920; Knowles et al., 2015; Kolb, 2013). Also, “adult learners differ... some are bright... some are knowledgeable... they vary in age, and place in lifespan, and social class” (Schlossberg et al., 1989, p. 2)

Grace (2013), a Canadian academic and educationalist offers the following perspective, “making sense of the history of North American adult education is no easy task” (p. 183). During the start of the twentieth century, the mention of adult learners in terms of adult education was often utilitarianly linked to the circumstance and reasoning for the teaching of adults (Huntington, 2004, para. 10). Early approaches to adult education were usually aligned with societal needs and economic expectations of the time period (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007, p. 5). The following entries will provide a surmised historical perspective of the key processes, policies and developments that advanced the practice of adult education that now define the adult learner of today.

### **The Advent of the Adult Learner**

The 1920's was a pivotal time as the U.S. adjusted to a post-World War I economy, influenced by the growing industrial complex and a rising immigration census (Grace, 2013). During the early twentieth century, scholars and governmental agencies were beginning to shape the future of adult education (Bittner, 1920; Dewey, 1916). The following quote from Herman Richey (1939) describes the fulcrum behind the metamorphic change in the profession of adult education:

Disclosures resulting from the nationwide mobilization of adult males during the World War [I] gave new impetus to the movement that aimed [at] the elimination of illiteracy, the training of the functionally illiterate, the "Americanization" of the foreign-speaking population. This movement to which most persons, before 1925, would have applied the term "adult education" had the term been in general use. (p. 354)

This is the first mention in the literature concerning military veterans regarding their academic levels and the implied need for general literacy teaching in adult education. Beyond this, there is little mentioned concerning veterans in terms of having a distinctive category in adult education during the ascribed timeline.

### **Adult Learning Theory- Andragogy**

The adult learner and the development of adult learning theory are both twentieth century occurrences as evidenced in the education literature (Caffarella & Clark, 1999; Merriam et al., 2007). Lindeman (1945) succinctly stated "one of the chief distinctions between conventional and adult education is to be found in the learning process itself" (p. 10). The literature suggests that it is through this understanding of applied adult learning theory that the educator in collaboration with the adult learner achieves optimal outcomes (Merriam et al., 2007). Educators in higher education need to be fully acquainted with adult learners, knowing there are unique requisites that differ from that of the traditionally aged learner. To deny that fact is to overlook the learning needs of this special population (Schlossberg et al., 1989). The following passage is an insightful



offering of the early juxtaposition involving adult education and the development of adult learning theory:

Until recently, there has been relatively little thinking, and writing about adult learning. This is a curious fact considering that the education of adults has been a concern of the human race for such a long time. Yet, for many years, the adult learner was indeed a neglected species. (Knowles et al., 2015, p. 18)

This statement affirms the relatively swift progress that has occurred in linking adult learning theory to that of the practice of adult educational activities (Knowles, 1980; Merriam, et al, 2007).

Regarding the selection of foundational adult learning theories, the work of Malcolm S. Knowles's adult learning theory is a primary source of which is a commonly accepted model used in the teaching of adult learners (Merriam et al., 2007; Rachal, 2014). The term andragogy was first noted in the education literature in 1833, attributed to a German grammar school teacher named Alexander Kapp, who used the term to describe Plato's educational paradigm (Knowles et al., 2015; Ozuah, 2005). From that point forward the mention of the term andragogy was recurrently used in the European education literature to define adult teaching methods. However, the term did not become well known in the U.S. until Lindeman (1926) wrote of andragogy in "The Meaning of Adult Education" in which he described and defined the characteristic profile of the adult learner (Ozuah, 2005). In addressing the needs of the adult learner through best practices, andragogy as a theory is fitting, since, "Knowles may have been the last, and possibly the

only, adult educator to attempt the ever elusive and probably chimerical Grand Unifying Theory of adult education” (Rachal, 2014, p. 81).

In the formation of the andragogic theoretical framework, Knowles (1968) developed and organized a series of four adult learner assumptions. In 1984, he then appended two more assumptions, which became assumption one and the last was number six with additional refinements through 1989, these six assumptions were then used to describe the tenets of the andragogy model (Elias & Merriam, 2005; Knowles et al., 2015). The six stated assumptions of andragogy are as follows:

1. Adults as they mature their self-concept moves from a dependent personality toward being a self-directing human being.
2. Adults accumulate life experiences and knowledge, which is rich learning resource
3. Adults willingness to learn is related to developmental tasks associated to his/her social role.
4. Adults are relevancy oriented, being more problem centered than subject centered.
5. Adults motivations are mostly internal not externally motivated
6. Adult learners like to be respected and need to know why they need to learn something (Knowles et al., 2015, p. 224-228)

Knowles openly affirmed his allegiance to humanism, as he made evident in his andragogic assumptions by incorporating five primary humanistic values; firstly, andragogy as theory places the learner in the center of the education process, endorsing

the learner as being good and capable with the ability to strive towards self-actualization, autonomy, and self-directedness (Elias & Merriam, 2005, p. 134).

As an emerging theory, andragogy needed to have application in the teaching of adults. Knowles (1980) wrote in the “Modern Practice of Adult Education” that the half-life for adult teaching methods is less than ten years and prophetically asserted that the term *modern* is a temporary state (p. 18). Knowles (1980) further discussed the needed implementation of andragogic concepts into adult education, as he encouraged educators to change their traditional teaching mission from content-transmission to performance-based education and offer self-paced opportunities for adult learning.

He foresaw the educational opportunities surrounding the technological shift in the 1980s, taking note of this powerful change 30 years before what has now become the practice of adult online learning programs (Knowles, 1980). Furthermore, Knowles disliked the concept of academic hierarchy. He hoped that adult educators’ embracement of the tenets of andragogy would help level the classroom environment on behalf of the adult learner; this approach was attributed to his sense of democracy instilled in him through Lindeman’s (1926) influential writings (Knowles, 1980; Rachal, 2014).

Criticisms were quickly offered in response to andragogy; many of his contemporaries did not consider andragogy a theory of adult learning (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 85). The collective of arguments is consolidated in the Merriam et al. (2007) text with noted dissent from well-respected learning theorists, including the progressive adult educator Stephen Brookfield (p. 85-90). Much of the debate centers on andragogic assumptions that have been interpreted as outcomes rather stated conditions that uphold

the tenets of a learning theory structure, lacking a true testable hypothesis (Knowles, 1980; Knowles et al., 2015; Merriam et al., 2007; Rachal, 2014).

Knowles (1980) answered his critics with an apparent touch of sarcasm, “this kind of question arises from a curious disease that seems to be endemic in the world of learning theory... panacea addiction... either-or thinking... a compulsion for neat simple solutions to complex problems” (p. 59). He then went on to state that this seemingly ideological attachment other theorists had to pedagogy is extreme; however, in return he did not share the same compulsion concerning andragogy, actually he insisted that andragogy even legitimized pedagogical teaching strategies (Knowles, 1980, p. 59). In response, Knowles (1980) revised his earlier work that previously stated *andragogy versus pedagogy*, to now state *from pedagogy to andragogy*, in an effort to appease his critics (Elias & Merriam, 2005, p. 136). Knowles (1980) accepted the critique that little empirical work has been done to research the assumptions made in andragogy, although it had been embraced as a primary adult learning model for decades (Merriam et al., 2007; Rachal, 2014). Knowles (1980) in his own text cites over 60 studies and subsequently the body of literature is sizeable with ongoing relevant andragogic based submissions.

### **The Adult Learner in Higher Education**

The available topics and categories concerning the “adult learner in higher education” genre is expansive and rich concerning qualitative outcomes. The literature provides insight into the adult students’ journeys and challenges faced in higher education programs. However, there is a recognized need for more quantitative research since data are limited, specific to adult learners’ higher education profile in terms of

academic outcomes involving funding sources, course completion and degree attainment (Sandmann, 2010, p. 228).

Hardin (2008) speaks to the transitions that adult learners can go through while in higher education. These transitions may have pauses or barriers that exist entering college, as follows: delaying enrollment into higher education until adulthood, enrolling part time, working full time, being financially independent, being financially responsible for others, having family responsibilities, and having academic deficiencies (Hardin, 2008, p. 50). In this research article, Hardin addressed the aforementioned learning barriers using Knowles' (1980) theory of andragogy to recommend approaches students can use to overcome these obstacles and the need to access existing university learning resources. Hardin (2008) suggests, "for many adult students, returning to college and fulfilling their goals is much like building a house of cards... to be successful, each part of their lives must be in place and carefully balanced" (p. 56).

Hamill (2012) asserts that early into the twenty-first century more than half of the U.S. population reports having at least some form of college education (p. 315). The adult learner participating in formal education represents a growing population in the shifting terrain of higher education (Kasworm, 2003). In the past 50 years, adult students (ages 25 years or older) have increased their presence dramatically in both absolute number and in the proportion of the student population, now representing over 40% of the higher education for-credit students (Kasworm, Sandmann, & Sissel, 2000, p. 450).

The current data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) confirms that since 2003, adult enrollment in higher education has remained statistically

similar from 2003 thru 2013. Currently the total number of all students enrolled in a four-year institution (public or private) nationwide is approximately 13 million (full-time or part-time), of which more than five-million (40 %) of that total are adult learners (25 years and older). Additionally, the adult learner is considered a non-traditional student, enrollment status is carried as either full time or part time, with 55% of the adult learner population listed as full-time and the remaining 45% being part-time (Sandmann, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, NCES, 2014). In the U.S., the adult learner uses higher education as a vehicle for economic opportunity helping guarantee that the middle class can maintain a level of prosperity previously unattainable by most within this social class (Hamill, 2012). The adult learner in a reasonably short period has become a common entity on college campuses across the U.S. (Sandmann, 2010).

### **The Post-9/11 Veteran Entering Higher Education**

Historically prior to World War II, the basic role and, “mission of [higher] education... has been to produce what literature has most often called the educated man... in an era in which education was considered a right and privilege for essentially an elite leisured class” (Knowles, 1980, p. 18). As a post-World War II initiative, in 1944, Congress approved Public Law 346 (Serviceman’s Readjustment Act), which was a benefit designed to manipulate the total number of veterans entering the workforce after the war. The newly instilled education benefits allowed many of the returning veterans to enter directly into higher education instead of the job market, providing the U.S. a grace period to transition back to a peacetime economy and the industrial-base time to retool (Thelin, 2004, p. 262).

Initially, many academic officials in both private and public universities contested this approach. Even so, the universities and colleges were soon partnered through policy with the U.S. government to provide access to higher education for this new middle-class cohort of adult learners (Thelin, 2004). The vast numbers of adult learners that could, did in fact enroll into higher education due to the Serviceman's Readjustment Act; junior colleges (community college) and vocational training programs grew congruently with the private and public post-secondary institutions (Grace, 2013). Due to the governmental assistance for military veterans, 1945 thru the 1970's became what was known as the "golden age" of higher education (Merriam et al., 2007; Thelin, 2004).

The following descriptive terms and/or acronyms are used interchangeably in the literature when referring to the post-9/11 combat veterans, often associated with their named military campaigns: global war on terrorism (GWOT), Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.gov, 2015). It is acknowledged and understood that countless veterans have previously served in the U.S. military prior to the 9/11 terrorist attacks. However, the focus for this section of the literature review is on the post-9/11 veterans with their respective military service and educational entitlement package since the September 11, 2001 (Education: [benefits.va.gov/GIBill](http://benefits.va.gov/GIBill), 2014). For clarity, the term post-9/11 veterans will be used whenever the veteran adult learner is referenced in this study.

### **Who is the Post 9/11 Veteran?**

The U.S. military service members associated with the conflict(s) in Iraq and Afghanistan entered military service by their own volition. The draft was discontinued in

1973, and since then the U.S. military has depended on volunteers to fill their ranks (Kane, 2005). It is reported that over 90% of enlisted recruits have a high school degree, while most do not have college degrees due to joining before entering higher education (Watkins & Sherk, 2008, p. 3). Additionally, Watkins and Sherk (2008) confirm, “the men and women who serve in America’s all volunteer military do not come disproportionately from disadvantaged backgrounds... are highly educated... [with] above-average intelligence and are far more likely than their civilian peers to have a high school degree” (p. 13).

### **The Combat Experience of Those Who Serve**

The deep impact that war has on the combatant warrior as told in the Greek Tragedy Homer’s Iliad, theoretically remains unchanged, (Shay, 2002). For example, during the twentieth century, Elkind (1970) cites Erikson’s (1950, 1968) observational study of military veterans that were admitted to a veterans’ hospital during World War II (WWII). In this account, Erikson recognized that WWII veteran soldiers were suffering from a perceptible dissonance involving their military wartime experience(s) and they were unable to resume their previous lives prior to the war, feeling different than they did before; suffering from what Erikson coined as “identity confusion” (Elkind, 1970, p. 84).

As established, the historical impact of war is significant for those who have served to include the more recent conflicts in Vietnam, Operation Desert Storm, and the ongoing asymmetrical operations in the Middle East where the conduct of waging war is ever changing, making the rules of conflict nearly undefinable (Dufort, 2012; Marlantes, 2011; Kane, 2005, p. 15). Marlantes (2011) writes of his concern of the impact on the



soldier due to the changing dynamics of this current war zone, bringing with it even greater stressors for today's military combatant. Dufort (2012) reported on the changes in the global conflicts of twenty-first century wars and the nonconventional ways in which these conflicts are now fought, involving the emergence of non-state actors and self-declared vigilantes. These volunteer militias repeatedly engage in primitive fighting tactics with the absence of doctrinal principles and are often financed by outside entities, equating to the privatization of war (Dufort, 2012).

When a U.S. soldier finally leaves the battlefield, the transition from combat to that of returning home can be further complicated by the time distance equation, including the speed of travel and easy access to video communitive technology, which can create a surreal construct by seeing family one moment and in battle in the next moment (Nakashima-Brock & Lettini, 2012). With these given conditions, "death becomes an abstraction...we must come to grips with consciously trying to set straight this imbalance of modern warfare. What is at stake is not only the psyche of each young fighter but our humanity" (Marlantes, 2011, p. 19). The following discussion involves the primary psychosocial issues mentioned in literature, focusing on the manner in which military members' transition from the warzone to home. The post-9/11 combat veterans' transitional outcomes are individual journeys, which may or may not be maladaptive, with either short or long-term effects (Junger, 2016).

**Post-traumatic stress disorder.** There is an abundance of available reports and research exclusive to the post-9/11 veteran in the medical literature. It is noted that over 25% of the subject matter involves the high frequency of diagnosed cases of Post-

Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) occurring within the post-9/11 veteran population. PTSD is a potentially debilitating psychological injury and is a well-documented consequence of war (Toblin et al., 2012). Fredundlich (2015), sourcing the Department of Veterans Affairs (2013), estimated that the PTSD rates to be as high as 11-20% for previously deployed post-9/11 veterans, including all service member occupations, even those without direct combat roles. There are known comorbid factors that may contribute to the post-9/11 veteran's long-term mental health. The Institute of Medicines and National Research Council's 2007 report, as cited by Junger (2016), identifies that the risk for developing chronic PTSD is also greatly influenced by an individual's previous lived experiences before going to war.

It is noted that one of the most traumatic events that a soldier experiences in a warzone is the viewing of harm and death to others, including the described enemy (Junger, 2016). By far, the most traumatic event a soldier can experience, as cited in Marlowe's (2001) Gulf War study, is witnessing a close friend getting killed in combat, inducing emotional reactions worse than being injured themselves (Junger, 2016). There is a known, "relationship between the prevalence of PTSD and the number of firefights in which a soldier had been engaged... a function of the greater frequency and intensity of combat in Iraq. (Hoge et al., 2004, p. 17). Naphan and Elliot (2015) conducted a qualitative study of 11 combat veterans, using narratives from the participants in order to analyze their transition into higher education. The following provides a salient example of the lived experiences of two of the study participants diagnosed with PTSD:

Sam said that his hyper-vigilance during combat rewired his brain... [at home] he misinterpreted stimuli as more threatening than they really were resulting in “a number of good scrapes.” Their combat experiences left both of them traumatized and in need of escape, such that Dennis used alcohol to deal with his night terrors and Sam used methamphetamine to avoid sleep altogether. (Naphan & Elliot, 2015, p. 43)

**Moral injury.** The literature also provides insight on a lesser known psychological condition, which is described as moral injury (Litz et al., 2009), an emerging clinical construct related to negative consequences related to the war-zone (Currier, Holland, Drescher, & Foy, 2013, p. 52). Shay (2014) describes the effects of combat on service members, stating, “it deteriorates their character; their ideals, ambitions, and attachments begin to change and shrink... moral injury [can] impair and sometimes destroy the capacity for trust” (p. 186). The occurrence of “moral injury results when soldiers violate their core moral beliefs, and evaluating their behavior negatively, they feel they no longer live in a reliable, meaningful world and can no longer be regarded as decent human beings” (Nakashima-Brock & Lettini, 2012, p. xiv). Naphan and Elliot (2015) found that the veterans’ narratives provided unsolicited but meaningful commentary involving combat and their interpretation of those experiences. The following statement is from a veteran discussing his combat role and then later transitioning into higher education. He stated, “it's like being a sanctioned criminal... I know that sounds crazy but...if you did what we were trained to do, [here] you'd be a criminal” (Naphan & Elliot, 2015, p. 42). As discussed, post-9/11 military veterans may

be forced to deal with a wide-ranging array of ethical/moral concerns in the context of being in warzone deployments that may fundamentally alter their beliefs and values about themselves, humanity, and the larger world (Currier, Holland, & Mallot, 2015).

**Post trauma growth.** Alternatively, there are documented incidents when a combat veteran experiences a traumatic event in war, yet, he/she can recover from that trauma and may go on to experience emotional growth (Church, 2009; Harbin, 2015). This phenomenon is known in medical literature as *post trauma growth* (PTG) and is associated with positive psychological outcomes. Harbin (2015) cites Tedeschi and Calhoun's (2012) study, in which they evaluated traits associated with PTG by using the research tool, Post Trauma Growth Inventory (PTGI). The PTGI tool consists of five domains of growth: "greater appreciation of life and changed sense of priorities; warmer, more intimate relationships with others; a greater sense of personal strength; recognition of new possibilities or paths for one's life; and spiritual development" (p. 674).

Harbin provides an exemplar using the PTGI domain, recognition of new possibilities or paths for one's life, with this description: "[one may] come to reconsider career paths... for example, one woman who experienced the loss of a loved one [to cancer]... recognized alternative career possibilities and decided to become an oncology nurse" (p. 674). This described action is discerned as positive post trauma growth after experiencing a negative painful event (Harbin, 2015). Overall, individuals will respond to their own experience uniquely, meaning "the [military] veterans' reaction will range from high levels of PTSD and functional impairment to those who [simply] grow and mature from the experiences," (Church, 2009 p. 43).

## **Post-9/11 Veterans Career Transitions**

The current literature regarding the post-9/11 veterans' transitions from combat into college or vocational training to seek a new career is sparse (Ghosh & Fouad, 2016). Based on the review of literature there is an identifiable gap regarding qualitative and quantitative research specific to the post-9/11 veteran student learners' career transitions. With that said, there is substantial literature available on the post-9/11 veterans in academic settings, but the subject matter primarily focuses on academic policies, admission procedures, student support programs, and their associated military disabilities (Ghosh & Fouad, 2016). For instance, Gilbert and Griffin (2015) used Schlossberg's theoretical framework to study academic support systems in higher education. This qualitative study used narrative interviews of post-9/11 veterans in a focus group, designed to evaluate the effectiveness of macro-level academic support systems rather than their personal transitions into higher education.

The following discussion comprises of two research articles concerning post-9/11 veterans' career transitions, illuminating the limitations of the existing evidence. The first is a quantitative study where Ghosh and Fouad (2016) examined career transitions of student veterans by attempting to measure career adaptability and occupational engagement. They empaneled 100 military veterans (n=65 male, n=35 female) were from a single large mid-western university. The primary research question was, "what factors influence student veterans' career transitions from military to college?" (Ghosh & Fouad, 2016, p. 103).

The study's theoretical framework incorporated Savickas' (2005) career construction theory (Ghosh & Fouad, 2016). Savickas (2005) described that his "theory... explains the interpretive and interpersonal processes through which individuals impose meaning and direction on their vocational behavior" (p. 42). Following the framework's premise, Ghosh and Fouad collected supporting demographic data by means of a questionnaire and then employed three career/occupational based scales to measure the participants' career transitions: 1. Occupational Engagement Scale for Students (OES-S), 2. Career Adapt-Abilities Scale – U.S. (CASS-U.S. version), and 3. Career Transitions Inventory (CTI) (p. 106).

A multiple regression analysis was conducted on the data to assess the level that career transition readiness aspects of career adaptability had on the study participants. Results indicate that there was a significant amount of readiness variability, " $R^2 = .213$ ,  $F(4, 95) = 6.414$ ,  $p < .01$ " (Ghosh & Fouad, 2016, p. 106). Based on those results, a second analysis was conducted to test occupational engagement, it too was found to be a significant contributor to career transition readiness, " $R^2$  change = .025,  $F(5, 94) = 5.845$ ,  $p < .01$ " (p. 106). However, the authors' state that even with the occupational readiness being significant in  $R^2$  change, the practicality of the matter had only a small effect on the difference in the study results. The authors were unable to quantify a career/occupational readiness difference in the veteran students' transitions from that of their civilian counterparts. However, Ghosh and Fouad did find that the veterans often reported feeling more detached from their academic campuses when compared to their non-military peers. The authors suggested that admission programs need to be developed or restructured to

better support the transitioning veteran student groups. In their closing remarks, Ghosh and Fouad called for additional research initiatives to study military veteran students' transitions from military service to their new careers in the civilian sector.

In the second article, Haynie and Shepherd (2011) used a multiple case study method to investigate the traumatic life events of soldiers and Marines injured in combat, necessitating a discontinuous career transition (p. 501). This case study involved 10 participants, each being a U.S. military member that sustained combat trauma; all had been discharged from service after being deemed unable to perform their previous military role. This study sample was all male, average age was 29.2 years with 40% being officers and 60% enlisted soldiers or Marines. The authors employed a multiple case study methodology (Haynie & Shepherd, 2011, p. 506).

Haynie and Shepherd (2011) stated for each participant the following life events were captured: life course prior to transition, the impetus for the transition, and the ongoing transition (p. 502). Each study participant was selected to participate in a 14-month career-retraining program designed for military members being educated on entrepreneurship. The initial analysis confirmed the close linkage between career and identity (Erikson, 1963; Munley, 1976) for the study participants. Their discontinuous transition was considered very complex, as illustrated in the following comment, "I didn't care about life anymore. What now if not the Marines? I saw the evil side of humanity, and I didn't need it—I didn't want to live anymore" (Haynie & Shepherd, 2011, p. 509). Haynie and Shepherd found the greatest personal growth occurred when "individuals rebuilt a macronarrative—a salient set of internalized... assumptions... [to] reconstruct

their conceptions of the world and self... [to then] engage in the role and personal development necessary for their discontinuous career transitions” (p. 520).

The study results indicated that the greatest progress occurred with those veterans that were future minded, abled to move beyond the past and embrace a new career. Seeing that the transitions may have been incomplete, Haynie and Shepherd (2001) called for further research to conduct extended longitudinal studies, seeking a deeper understanding of the discontinuous career transitions of the military veterans brought on by traumatic events causing long-term disability (p. 522). The post-9/11 veterans that either exited the military after meeting their service obligation or because they experienced a combat related disability, all have unique career transitional support requirements (Ghosh & Fouad, 2016; Haynie & Shepherd, 2011)

### **Post 9/11- Veterans in Higher Education**

The above discourse of post-9/11 veterans’ career transitions facilitates the need to address their transition into higher education. There is a considerable segment of U.S. military service members transitioning from active duty after having been assigned to combat zones in Iraq and/or Afghanistan that are entering higher education (Lemos & Lumadue, 2013, p. 3). This post-9/11 military veteran group is a newly emerging cohort of over 1.6 million adult learners. These veterans by definition, are nontraditional students, usually older and many are technically considered transfer students since they often have earned credits from their previous military training (O’ Herrin, 2011). Most post-9/11 veteran college undergraduates are male and more likely married (Radford, 2011, p. 3). This described cohort is both large and complex with existing barriers to



success in college settings due to life adversities, family hardships, and deficient academic skills (Stewart, 2014). These circumstances can often make academic success difficult for the veteran since they “face many of the same challenges as other adult students... often compounded by physical and mental wounds... [oft] complicated by bureaucracy” (Line, 2012, para. 3). It is estimated that these unseen mental wounds involve one in three post-9/11 veteran adult learners, who may struggle with the effects related to PTSD, traumatic brain injury and/or depressive mood disorders; all pose serious barriers to learning if not adequately supported at institutions of higher education (Barry, 2015, p. 415)

The following discussion will focus on four research dissertations that concentrated on the post-9/11 veteran’s narrative and life experience. These studies cited the same transition theoretical framework planned for this dissertation, Schlossberg’s transition theory (1995). These dissertations focused on post-9/11 veterans as adult learners and investigated how their previous combat experiences may have affected their ability to interface and learn in an academic or professional work setting.

Shea’s (2010) dissertation study was designed to investigate the outcomes of a military cohort of adult learners that recently returned from the war in Afghanistan and/or Iraq. Shea utilized a qualitative case study methodology and identified the described cohort through the use of purposive sampling. The study participants were specifically enrolled in a military officer career course being delivered in a formal academic setting.

Shea’s (2010) methods included interviews focusing on described transitions as they entered into the officer course, moved through the course and finally moved out of

the course as they neared completion or graduated (Schlossberg et al., 1989; Schlossberg et al., 1995). Shea used the 4S model to better understand the participants' available resources involving the assets to liabilities ratio. They used an indirect approach of questioning to estimate the four categories of the model, which are situation, self, support, and strategies (Schlossberg et al., 1995). Shea embedded within the interview questions the topics concerning assets and liabilities, using a semi-structured technique. During the interview process, he was able to collect relevant data demonstrating the military officers' ability to adapt or transition based on their given assets and liabilities discussed in the results below.

Shea (2010) investigated the residual stress from the lived combat experience by exploring how the military officers coped and transitioned in the classroom environment. Shea concluded that the research outcomes successfully identified the impact of unfolding life events (e.g., such as dual enrollment in the assigned military course and elective graduate studies, social functioning, interacting with family) during the combat veteran's transition to higher education. Shea further suggested in his dissertation conclusion, that the Schlossberg et al. (1995) model successfully accounted for the ratio of assets to liability formulation as discussed. The remnants of the combat experience affected some of the participants' ability to fully adapt to their classroom environment. Shea's results infer that there is a distinct variance in the veterans' responses (positive or negative) to similar exposures that they all encountered during the "Command and General Staff Course". Their outcomes indicated that the officers had mixed responses to the academic rigor in the classroom, which led to an increased level of stress for most,

whereas a few of the participants did not describe a negative effect. The individuals reporting an adverse response to the stressors consequently escalated their personal liability and inversely lowered their own personal assets, ultimately making the transitions in the classroom and home more difficult (Shea, 2010).

Clark's (2014) mixed methods research study dovetails with Shea's (2010) dissertation in terms of the veterans' experience. However, Clark (2014) delved deeper into the veterans' lived experience. She did so by attempting to "gain insight into how combat experience influences the learning experience for the combat veterans who participate in an adult educational learning environment... [and] explore types of combat experiences these students bring into that learning environment" (Clark, 2014, p. 6). Clark used a mixed methods design for their study. For the first portion of the study she collected quantitative data by means of an established survey instrument using three separate scales to measure combat stress and/or the presence of PTSD.

The second portion of the study provided open-ended questions seeking further explanation from the participants using narrative methods (p. 57-59). Frequently the participants' responses were very insightful, as in Clark's (2014) fourth narrative study question, "how much time is required to return to normal functioning when a triggering event is experienced?" (p. 174). She found that many of the participants reported vivid memories of combat with associated ongoing stressful event triggers. In the questionnaire, 23% of the participants agreed with the following statement, "There are times when it feels like I am watching my life from the inside rather than fully

participating in it” ... [and] 21% marked true for “sometimes I feel like I will never be normal again.” (Clark, 2014, p. 175)

Although the above statements may be deemed concerning, Clark emphasized that the study was not designed to establish if participants have symptoms of PTSD. However, Clark does agree that one could infer that some do. Clark further posits, that these statements offer insight on memory-induced stressors and “the amount of time students may need to recover... [bringing] awareness to educators that sometimes a student may need more than a break to fully function again (p. 175). The overall results of the study indicated that the residual effects of stress related to the combat experience continues to affect soldiers well after returning from deployment. Clark stated that the effect was further amplified by multiple deployments which substantially interfered with the participants’ academic performance and daily activities.

Ureno’s (2014) dissertation research employed a critical hermeneutic participatory approach using the “concept of identity” associated with the theorist and philosopher, Paul Ricoeur (1984). The following quote discusses the veteran’s self-identity and academic life transition:

The significant life changing experiences of veteran students play an important role in the students’ social interactions and academic performance. Every stage of their military career including combat training and war experiences have the possibility of influencing their narrative, which in turn, may change the perception and comprehension of their educational horizon. (Ureno, 2014, p. 28)

Ureno found in the study's results that military veterans voiced an acceptance that their concept of identity and combat experiences set them apart from their non-military peers on campus. He realized that this belief and/or realization held by the veterans could further diminish their willingness to share their military identity with others in the academic setting (p. 101). This sense of self-imposed isolation could delay or prevent the transition of becoming a student and fully immersing into collegiate life.

Ureno's (2014) results indicate that the veteran learner in higher education required more professorial face to face meetings than traditional students. This finding for the veteran learner was attributed to the seemingly unstructured collegiate atmosphere being markedly different from the previous structured military lifestyle. The results imply that veteran learners may benefit from team or group work involving other classmates, which can guide their understanding of the existing socio-collegiate norms, shaping their acceptance of their newly perceived identity as college students (Ureno, 2014).

Davis' (2014) dissertation was a qualitative phenomenological study of physically disabled combat veterans that achieved a transformative learning experience. In preparing for the study, Davis conveyed that most of the current professional literature regarding the topic of the disabled veteran focused extensively on the negative aspects of that disability (p. 52). Davis conducted this phenomenological study using purposeful sampling; through this method, she identified six post-9/11 veteran participants. The selected military veterans were responsive and willing to discuss their service-connected disability and the transition process of becoming self-reliant business operators. Davis conducted two in-depth interviews for each participant, one at the time of entering the

business environment and the second six months after the fact, using prepared questions facilitating descriptive narrative responses. Data analysis of the transcript dialogue provided codes and thematic schemes indicating a phenomenological event had occurred for the veterans in their professional journey.

Davis (2014) reported the veterans' transformation occurred through embracing their current physical capacities, allowing them to successfully enter and thrive in the private industrial sector. The basis of this research was from a humanitarian perspective as Davis could account for the successful assimilation of disabled post-9/11 combat veteran and potential transformative change in their lives. This study illustrated a positive transition from being a wounded veteran to that of becoming a successful business leader with new prospects ahead.

The research results discussed in the above dissertations suggest that individuals who experience traumatic events experience the effects of those events in different ways (Russell, 2013).

### **Post 9/11 Veteran's Career Choice to Become a Nurse**

Available citations within the literature indicate that when veterans leave the military to begin a second career they often seek altruistic professions in healthcare and education. In terms of education, a study conducted by Robertson and Brott (2013) surveyed 102 male veterans that became teachers. The researchers found that the veterans reported rewards from their new teaching career to include life satisfaction derived from helping and serving others, with a sense of accomplishment, and contentment (Robertson & Brott, 2013, p. 74). Likewise, the motivation behind the post-9/11 veteran's choice to

become a nurse is the crux of this dissertation. The literature review provides discussion on current research and theories that factor into why a combat military veteran chooses to be a nurse. Within the research literature there are compelling possibilities as to how or why the nursing profession could be a beneficial choice for a second career. Here I offer a review of relevant literature regarding perspectives about nursing as a career and motives to become a nurse.

The literature supports that individuals may choose nursing as a career based on public or personal perceptions of what they expected the profession of nursing to be and whom they desire to become. Grainger and Bolan (2006) studied the perceptions of college students regarding nursing as a career, the findings confirm that both nursing students and non-nursing students held a positive image of nursing as a profession (p. 39). When specifically interviewing the first-year nursing students, they had an idyllic view of the profession, seeing nursing as a kind, compassionate, and exciting career with the satisfaction of having a greater purpose (Grainger & Bolan, 2006, p. 42).

This perspective of the first semester nursing student is reflective of the overall U.S. public's view of the profession. Riffkin (2014) citing from the Gallup Poll, that nursing topped the list as a respected profession for honesty and ethical behavior. Since 2005, over 80% of those polled see nurses as having high ethics and honesty (Riffkin, 2014). Nurses are rated in the poll at "15 percentage points above any other profession... Americans' rate nurse honesty and ethical standards as very high or high," (Zimlich, 2015, p. 1). Nursing has been the first public choice in both honesty and ethics in the Gallup Poll every year since 1999, except 2001 when firefighters were chosen due to their

efforts following the 9/11 attacks (Riffkin, 2014; Zimlich, 2015). The methods used for the 2014 Gallop Poll were based on telephone interviews using a random sample of 805 adults aged 18 and older, representative of all 50 states, +/- 0.4% with 95% reliability (Riffkin, 2014).

The nursing literature confers that the intrinsic feedback cycle facilitated through the act of caring can provide a positive therapeutic attribute for both the patient and the care provider. Jean Watson's (1988) transpersonal caring theory affirms that, "perspective attends to the human center for both the one caring and the one being cared for... it is concerned with preserving human dignity and restoring... dignity" (p. 177). Watson's research coupled with the bio-researcher neuroscientist, James Doty (2014) further validates the positive outcomes of caring acts for both the recipient and provider of care. Doty (2014) offers empirical data on the positive physiologic and psychological benefits for the care provider (nurse) embracing a therapeutic caring environment for their patients. These findings are consistent with Maslow's (1965) humanistic approach, in that an individual's transition into nursing may lead to self-healing, career satisfaction and personal growth, moving towards the goal of achieving self-actualization (Sanders, Munro, & Bore, 1999).

Post 9/11 war-veterans seeking a new career path as nurses are likely to be embarking on a significant departure from their previous vocation. Other similar adult career change choices can have deep personal meaning (Mezirow, 1981, Mezirow & Taylor 2009). Within the medical literature, it is understood that "individuals often transform the appraised meaning of a [trauma] event, rendering it less noxious and more



consistent with their preexisting global beliefs and desires” (Park, 2010, p. 261).

Literature suggests that to transform the noxious trauma event, respite may be achieved by entering a healing and service-oriented industry, potentially resulting in post-trauma growth or as an effort to mitigate moral injury (Church, 2009; Nash & Litz, 2013; Shay, 2014). Perhaps the post-9/11 veteran may pursue a nursing career to make “amends for one’s own share of blame, however small, [which] may be necessary for self-forgiveness... and... [will] only work if they are meaningful to the morally injured person” (Nash & Litz, 2013, para. 31). The tenets of Mezirow and Taylor’s (2009) transformative learning theory hypothetically describes the conditions for the military veteran’s motivation for becoming a baccalaureate prepared nurse. They state that, “there can be little doubt that transformative learning occurs as the result of an adult gaining insight into unresolved traumatic experience” (Mezirow & Taylor, 2009, p. 26).

### **Summary**

This review of literature began by identifying the character and makeup of the adult learner. This was accomplished through the review of adult developmental theories, proposed educational transition theories, learning theories and the path to higher education. This approach provided a baseline for understanding the distinctiveness of this adult learner group. Once the adult learners’ profile in higher education was established, it was then necessary to refine the literature review to identify post 9/11 veterans as an emerging cohort in higher education. It was during this juncture in the review that a gap within the education research was identified concerning the transition of the post 9/11 veteran into higher education. The complexity of issues associated with the post 9/11

veteran adult learner especially being in higher education is a recent phenomenon that requires further study and investigation. The experience that the post 9/11 veteran endured prior to entering the classroom will require education researchers time and effort to fully understand and support this specific learner cohort.

One such area needing to be addressed by educational researchers relates to the generalized assumption that combat is theoretically a life-shaping event with latent long-term adult educational implications either positive or negative (Cantrell & Dean, 2005; Junger, 2016). Regardless of the individuals' disposition, when the post-9/11 combat veterans return home and the war has ended, there are clearly residual effects on their lives and on learning. After the experience of combat, veterans often need to make meaning of their previous combat stressors to regain a sense of purpose and direction in life (Currier, Holland, & Mallot, 2015). This is the area of interest and purpose for this dissertation research. The goal is to further understand the post 9/11 veteran adult learner groups' transitions and motivations behind their educational journeys into nursing.

### **III. METHODOLOGY**

In this chapter, I discuss the methodology selected for this research study. The purpose of this study was to investigate U.S. combat veterans from the Iraq and/or Afghanistan Wars, having transitioned from the armed forces and entered into higher education in order to become a Bachelors prepared registered nurse. The following information provides the rationale and impetus for the choice of the qualitative research design. Included is the recruitment process for empaneling the study participants, the data collection methods, and approaches related to the data analysis (Creswell, 2013, 2014). Additionally, clarification is provided on the processes used to verify the data and findings. Furthermore, the investigator's role is reviewed to help ensure that any foreseeable potential ethical concerns are identified regarding this study (Hatch, 2002; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

#### **The Qualitative Research Methods**

This dissertation study was designed to facilitate the investigation of a select group of adult learners that have transitioned through an essential change from one career path to another. These individuals are defined as adult learners; furthermore, these adult learners are military combat veterans from any one of the four-primary uniformed armed services, (e.g., Army, Air Force, Navy and Marines). The veteran adult learners involved in this research study deployed to either Afghanistan and/or Iraq in the exclusive role as a war fighter. All the participants left military service and entered into the healing profession of nursing.

## **Research Perspective**

I approached this research with the epistemological lens of a social constructivist (Creswell, 2014, Crotty, 1998). Crotty (1998) explains that constructionism is the making of meaning, which is founded on the assumption that all knowledge is jointly constructed through interactions between and among individuals providing symbolic meaning to the collective lived experience (p. 42). I align with the perspective of the social constructivist researcher, who should be prepared and able to assign new meaning with, “a radical spirit of openness to its potential for new or richer... reinterpretation” (Crotty, 1998, p. 51). However, Creswell (2013) has advised, for the constructivist investigator to be successful, one must choose a corresponding theoretical framework and research method to stay true to the declared epistemological lens.

## **Theoretical Framework**

In establishing the theoretical framework from a qualitative research perspective, one needs to limit bias and assumptions when embracing a given theory (Glesne, 2016). The following selected theoretical framework became the guidepost for developing the research methodologies for this study. The phenomenon of why combat veterans enter higher education and transitions from their military careers to become nurses was investigated using the *4S integrative model of the transition process* (Anderson et al., 2012; Schlossberg et al., 1995). This framework is an adaptive transition model, allowing for the life experiences of a participant to be studied in an asynchronous manner. Schlossberg (1988) states that, “many excellent researchers of the adult experience try to

demonstrate that adults experience different transitions depending on their age, we have found that... most transitions are not related to age” (p. 59).

Schlossberg’s (1995) model has three central components. The first component is “approaching transitions”. This is where the transition identification begins for the adult to evaluate the extent of the transition occurring. The model suggests individuals can view the transition as anticipated, unanticipated or as a non-event. Also, this transition process accounts for whether the adult learner is moving in, moving through or moving out of the transition. The second component is the “taking stock of coping resources” related to the transition. The 4S aspect of the model, including situation, self, support and strategies are identified to assist in evaluating the individual’s existing support systems. The support systems can affect the individual’s perception of the transition process based on the availability and fortification of the above-mentioned resources. The third and final component is the “taking charge” portion of the model. In this component, the individual’s ongoing transition which may or may not have been planned, hinges on how he/she manages this process by strengthening existing resources to better facilitate the transitional outcome (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 38).

The 4S portion of this transition model (Anderson et al., 2012; Schlossberg et al., 1995) assisted in the understanding of the complexities of the adult learners’ transitional processes, as depicted in *Figure 3.1*. The 4S model four-part system, “Situation, Self, Support, and Strategies – which describes the factors that make a difference in how one copes with change... [these] four sets of variables can be regarded as potential assets and/or liabilities [of the individual]” (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 61). In application, the 4S

model uses a ratio of assets to liabilities, intended to function as a sliding scale; as the individual's circumstances change, the ratio then changes accordingly. For example, when assets outweigh liabilities, adjustments to transitions are relatively easy, but when liabilities outweigh assets, aspects of a transition can become correspondingly more difficult (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 63).

This given framework partially accounts for the variation in why some individuals respond differently to similar transitions (Anderson et al., 2012; Schlossberg, 1985; Schlossberg et al., 1995). In the previously cited Shea (2010) dissertation, the study results illustrate how the described ratio of assets to liabilities can affect the military officers' academic transitions, being directly linked to their individual asset/liability quotients. The use of the *4S integrative model of the transition process* (Schlossberg et al., 1995; Anderson et al., 2012) provides a structural platform for the initial data collection and a basis for data analysis. However, I acknowledge "appropriate use of theories requires tentative use rather than prescriptive application, keeping the potential for individual variations in mind" (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010, p. 28).

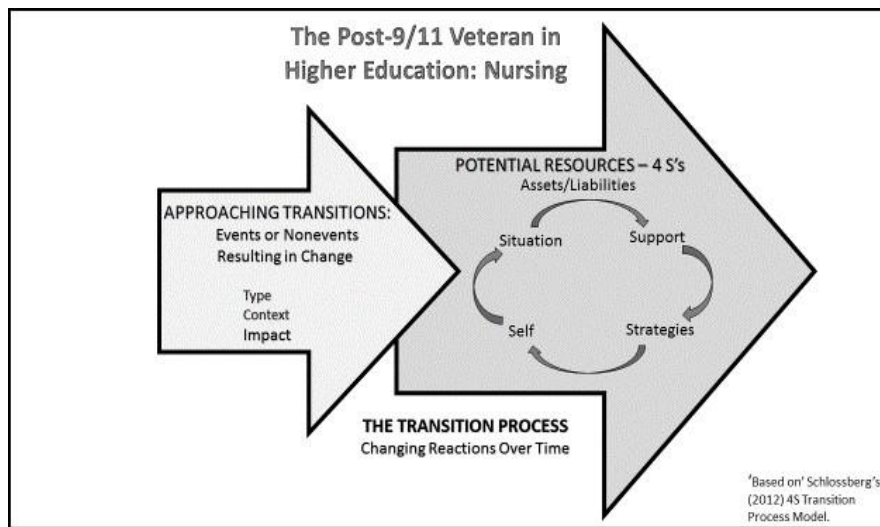


Figure 3.1. 4S Transition Process Model

### Methodological Approach: Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry is a research approach that is congruent with that of the constructivist perspective (Creswell, 2014; Hatch, 2002). Riessman (1993) states that, “there is considerable disagreement about the precise definition of the narrative” (p. 17), thus making this approach more compatible to the social constructivist. The narrative technique as a research tool can be “particularly useful for addressing the unmet challenge for integrating culture, person, and change” (Daiute & Lightfoot, 2004, p. viii). Narrative inquiry in essence is a qualitative form of storytelling, facilitating deeper understanding of one’s lived experience (Boswell & Cannon, 2014, p. 233)

The basic elements of a story are historically and academically linked to Aristotle’s view of the narrative as being a linear process involving a beginning, middle and an end (Ballif, 1992; Riessman, 1993). This classical sequencing of the stories of life is embraced by many within the qualitative research community. However, as the utility of narrative analysis becomes more prominent in qualitative research, so does the varied

application and approach. Regardless, the relevance of narrative inquiry has significantly grown over the past 25 years, being used as an alternate and effective qualitative research tool (Lieblich et al., 1998).

Narrative inquiry as a qualitative approach has been in use since the notable work of Sigmund Freud, who used the patient's narrative stories as a basis for the examination and treatment of his patients (Ballif, 1992, p. 92). In the practice of psychology, the patient's narrative is analyzed in the hopes of providing a glimpse into the patient's social and emotional status (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, Zilber, 1998; Linde, 1993; Riessman, 1993). Similar goals hold true for qualitative researchers using narrative interviews and inquiry in assisting in the development for a better understanding of people and culture in the social sciences.

Likewise, narrative inquiry offers a qualitative structure for investigating the war veteran's lived experience and cultural understandings. In support, Creswell (2013) describes that, "narrative research is best for capturing the detailed stories of life experiences of a single life or lives of a small number of individuals" (p. 55). The use of narrative inquiry will assist in providing a sound platform for obtaining rich description of the combat veteran's transition (Creswell, 2013, 2014; Daiute & Lightfoot 2004; Denzin 1989; Yin, 2009).

### **The Study Participants**

I ascribe to the following J. Amos Hatch (2002) statement, "constructivists think of their participants as co-constructors of the knowledge generated by their studies" (p. 49). The study participants were uncompensated willing volunteers, selected using a



purposeful homogenous sampling technique (Hatch, 2002). The participants were also required to have specific characteristics involving their life experiences. These criteria for empanelment required all participants to have a military occupation specialty (MOS) in combat arms with combat experience in either Iraq and/or Afghanistan, an honorable discharge from the military, and having entered higher education to become baccalaureate prepared nurses. Most importantly, the participant could not be trained in a primary MOS in the medical field.

In addition, the gender for all participants in this study is men thus limiting potential gender specific differences in experiences. To clarify, the issues are complex beyond the binary variable of gender. The vast experiential differences that exist between the two genders in the military specifically pertaining to a combat environment are multifactorial (Harvie, 2013; Heineman, 2016). Logistically, the current percentage of women in uniform (across all services) is estimated to be at 10 to 11%, and they historically have not served in designated combat roles, which does not meet the core criteria of this study. Although military women are under arms (weaponized) in the roles of police and forces protection and are equally exposed to the hazards of combat, they are currently not designated by the Department of Defense as combatants (Heineman, 2016).

Furthermore, the study's participant selection was purposeful to address possible gender biases that may exist within the theoretical framework itself. The noted criticism is that there is an inherent gender bias built into the lifespan developmental models, due to the androcentric constructs that were used in their development. Helsing et al., (2004) substantiates their androcentric bias argument using citations from several prominent

feminist education researchers by stating, “traditional models tend to frame development as a process of increasing independence, psychological separation, and autonomy... qualities commonly expected of men as they mature. In contrast, women are encouraged to define themselves in relation and connection to other people” (p. 161).

In the confines of this study it is appropriate to acknowledge that “gender strongly influences adult development... [and that] there are significant differences in the developmental process” (Ross-Gordon, 1999, p. 34). Given the context of this study, inclusion criteria did not specifically require race, ethnicity, spirituality, sexual orientation, or age limitations. I desired to have a diverse sample; however, the sample size of the cohort was limited so if a participant had the prescribed experiential military and temporal life events previously defined, the individual was then qualified for empanelment. The gender demographic profile of the research participants was all male. The race and/or ethnic background of the members included one Taiwanese, two Latino, a Mexican-American and a Central American (asked by participant not to disclose country of origin) with the remaining four being Caucasians without a self-described ethnicity.

Prior to conducting this research there was a known and existing study population. However, the availability of qualified participants meeting the stated narrow criteria for this type of study is quite limited. Due to the stated circumstance, the utilization of a snowball sampling technique further facilitated additional contacts (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Patten & Bruce, 2014). This method was beneficial for identifying other participants from the subgroup within the larger community of students

(Sadler, 2010, p. 370). Since, “the participants are the ultimate gatekeepers” (Hatch, 2002, p. 51) the snowball referrals helped provide an element of trust for the new contacts since their names and contact information were provided from a known colleague or friend (Atkinson & Flint, 2001).

This identified study population consisted of six known and two referred contacts that share the same specified criteria as described above. The recruitment process was informal and occurred through happenstance. The six known participants were previous students that attended the university in which I am a faculty member. These known participants are now working as nurses in the local community and were responsible for the referral of the additional snowball contacts.

To verify the known or referred contacts, each prospective participant received an e-mail explaining the basic premise of the proposed study. After the research proposal received IRB approval, the eight potential participants then received an e-mail invitation to enroll. All eight of the contacts agreed to join the study and accepted the proposed schedule for the interviews. The data collection began May of 2017.

This participant group, although limited in number, is deemed appropriate in terms of sample size (Creswell, 2013). This empanelment of participants adequately allowed for detailed contrast and variation due to the applied narrative methodology, which generated large amounts of rich, qualitative data helping provide a window into the lived experiences of this unique group (Creswell, 2013; Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, & Zilber, 1998; Riessman, 1993).

### **Data Collection: Interviews and Artifact Submission**

Creswell (2013) recommends that in developing a narrative study the intended questions should be limited to a central theme with sub-questions helping to define the principal concepts being investigated (p. 138). In agreement, the stated research problem served as an overarching theme for the interview's core questions and associated sub-questions. These questions provoked an unrestricted, open and flowing discussion.

Seidman (2013) suggests that "in the first [interview]... ask for concrete details of the participants lived experience before exploring attitudes or opinions about it" (p. 91). This approach facilitated the process for obtaining a rich account of the lived experience.

Bogdan and Biklen (2007) affirm that using deliberate interview questions is desirable since this approach offers structure to the methodology. However, they advised that the interviewer needs to be prepared to forego portions of the preplanned questions for the sake of seizing opportunities that may present during the interview (p. 106). This observation and guidance often held true during the interview process.

The eight study participants had the opportunity to meet for the interviews in locations of their own choosing. However, all agreed to meet in my office, being in a quiet and secure location. The discussed methods required interviewing each participant twice. The first of the interviews began on 2 May 2017 and concluded 30 May 2017. The second series of interviews commenced 16 May 2017, and all were completed by 6 June 2017. The day before the first interview, an email was sent to each participant with general instructions, a request to bring a meaningful artifact and the critical incident technique (CIT) prompt was provided (Appendix A). The purpose of sending the CIT

prompt the day before was to allow the participant time for thoughtful reflection prior to the first interview.

Before starting the interviews, all study participants signed the approved Texas State University IRB research consent form (Appendix D). Additionally, the previously signed consent was reaffirmed at the beginning of the second interview. Two iPads were used concurrently to record the interviews, as to safeguard the data while the discussions were being conducted (Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2011).

In addition, fieldnotes were chronicled in tandem with the recordings during the interviews. The detailed fieldnotes assisted with the data collection by including both the verbal and non-verbal record (Boswell & Cannon, 2014; Glesne, 2016; Van Maanen 2011). Additionally, laughter, changes in speaking crescendo, and voice modulation were noted, which assisted with analysis and interpretation of the data (Boswell & Cannon, 2014; Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Seidman, 2013). Boswell and Cannon (2014) state that “by juxtaposing the non-verbal communication with the verbal statements, clarification related to the meaning of the comments... is improved and facilitated” (p. 278).

Van Maanen (2011) explains that “to reinterpret fieldnotes requires knowing something about what was taken for granted when the notes were written... little wonder that fieldnotes are the secret papers of social research” (p. 124). The interview fieldnotes were handwritten using traditional bound composition notebooks, each was then cataloged and linked to the individual study participant’s interview data. The fieldnotes were valuable resources in the analysis process, often providing additional context to the existing verbal interview transcripts.

## **Interview Protocol**

The choice to use a semi-structured interview protocol with topical, informal, and open-ended questions helped draw out the narrative story through dialogic exchanges (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). Although the questions were semi-structured they were not intended to limit the participant's choice in recalling life events (see Appendix A). Rather, the main purpose was to have a flexible guidepost in obtaining a tangible chronology of the participant's narrative story (Denzin, 1989). Each interview focused on components of the participant's life history, including his entering the military, combat experience, exiting military service and his story of entering higher education to become a nurse (see Appendix A).

The participants' identities and the individuals mentioned in the stories are protected using pseudonyms and non-identifiable military nomenclature concerning specific tours of duty. The interview transcriptions and fieldnotes were cataloged under each participant's pseudonym in the chronological order they were obtained, stored in both hardcopy and electronic file formats. The hardcopy data files are stored in my office, secured and locked in a desk file drawer. The electronic files are stored in a password-protected environment on a cloud-based server.

## **Artifacts**

In conjunction with the in-depth interviews, as stated above, there was also a request for the participants to provide an artifact(s), (e.g. pictures, personal letters, memorabilia) of their choosing (Glesne, 2016, p. 89). When the participant shared pictures or keepsakes, they were asked to describe the importance of the artifact. The

artifacts assisted the participants in telling their stories with rich context, creating deeper meaning of the lived experience with rhetoric and/or symbols (Foss, 2004; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The artifacts were documented in the sequential order they were presented during the interviews, providing additional insight into the participant's motivation for sharing these items of meaning (Maxwell, 2005).

### **Critical Incident Technique (CIT)**

In seeking additional clarification and understanding of the participants' narrative, as previously stated, the CIT was used as a prompt in the interview process. This prompt was employed to elicit reflective recall about their tours of duty in combat but was purposefully left open ended to decrease the risk for emotional injury. Furthermore, this tack was chosen to mitigate the possibility of inadvertently forcing the study participant into a conversation they would rather not discuss. This conservative adaptation slightly deviated from the very specific questions that are typically associated with the CIT (Appendix A).

The origin of the CIT is that it was first developed in the 1940s as a tool for evaluating military behavioral outcomes in combat leadership, pilot errors and training requirements (Flanagan, 1954; Lipu, Williamson, & Lloyd, 2007). After WWII, the CIT was determined to have value as a research instrument in the social sciences, formally introduced by John Flanagan (1954). In the civilian sector, the CIT was initially used as an effective behavioral research tool utilized in primarily vocational work settings.

The CIT was further refined by the American Institute of Research and the University of Pittsburgh (Flanagan, 1954). Their outcomes provided five recommended

procedural steps for using the CIT in research. The first step was to define the *aim* of the stated activity being studied. The second step involved the development of plans and specifics for collecting data, which included instructing participants to report very specific details about their described critical incidents. The third and fourth step was the collection and analysis of the data with the fifth step being the report of the interpreted research findings (p. 355). Flanagan (1954) surmised, “The critical incident technique is very flexible and the underlying principals it have many types of applications” (p. 355). As a research instrument it has become relevant in a variety of behavioral research settings (Lipu, Williamson, & Lloyd, 2007). The CIT has since become widely-adapted for use in psychology and social/educational sciences to include nursing research.

The term critical incident has been further defined by Lipu et al. (2007); they state that “in general usage ‘critical incident’ often implies a major crisis or turning point... [becoming] catalysts for discovery and innovation” (p. 2). The CIT proved to be an adaptable tool, which supported the primary *aim* for this study, and the open-ended questions helped to elicit specific feedback requested (Flanagan, 1954; Nguyenvoges, 2015). By providing the CIT prompt to participants the day before their interviews, this gave them time to recall their experiences and provided the ability to emotionally prepare for the narrative stories they would share. The CIT as a social science tool assisted in the process of collecting data, facilitating the co-creating of a meaningful discourse, offering flexibility for identifying motivations and values from the individual’s perspective (Nguyenvoges, 2015, p. 15).



## **Data Analysis**

The audio recordings and transcription documents were uploaded and stored using a computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) program. The CAQDAS program used in this study was Dedoose, (<http://www.dedoose.com>). This software application was used to help organize data, assist in the coding process and the thematic analysis. This CAQDAS program is a cloud based adjunct research service which can store JPEG files, transcript documents, and MP3 audio files.

The turnaround time for the verbatim transcript was generally 72 hours. Once returned, the process required the reading of the verbatim transcript line by line while listening to the audio file for accuracy and authenticity. Creswell (2013) proposed interview transcription can also stimulate development for a new understanding of the narrative stories. Afterward, the fieldnotes and the authenticated transcripts were combined, further enriching the existing interview data. (Hatch, 2002). In conducting the data analysis, it is understood to be both an inductive and evolving process (Creswell, 2013, 2014; Hatch, 2002). Although this study offers the semblance of structure, the design provided the latitude to develop and apply the appropriate codes as they emerged in the data analysis (Creswell, 2013).

## **Data Preparation**

Once the verbatim transcripts were authenticated, the next step was to evaluate the transcripts for relevant data. Glaser and Laudel (2013) posit, “Collecting qualitative data inevitably includes the creation of large amounts of unnecessary information... [having] nothing to do with the research question” (para. 3.1.1). In total, for the seven

research participants, the verbatim interview transcripts were tallied at over 800 double spaced pages. Careful evaluation of the raw data was conducted, cleaning and organizing (Glaser & Laudel, 2013) the retained data into categories that were deemed relevant to the interview research questions and CIT responses.

### **Coding Methods**

The initial review of the data involved the use of *in vivo* coding of which is derived from the participant's own dialogue, being a suitable technique in applying quotation codes to a swath of a thematically similar transcribed discussions (Saldaña, 2013, p. 23). The use of *in vivo* coding supports annotating narrative information deemed to be thematically significant, where symbols, metaphors and rich categorizations of data derived are from each participant's interview(s) (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Saldaña 2013, p. 94).

The *in vivo coding* methods proposed for this study's first cycle of analysis focused on units of data involving the participants' words and/or the behaviors related to the research questions. Saldaña (2013) cautions that it is imperative to "track codes that are participant inspired rather than researcher generated... always putting *in vivo* codes in quotation marks" (p. 93). It is recommended that the first cycle coding is exclusively conducted using *in vivo* technique (Saldaña, 2013).

However, during the first cycle of the data analysis, the *in vivo* coding was found to be inefficient as a single use method. Reason being, the use of military-based slang produced numerous descriptive words for the same action outcomes, often restated even by the same participant. For example, the word died, could be described as wacked,

crushed, blown up, etc. To improve the data analysis technique in the second round, narrative coding was used in conjunction with *in vivo* coding. Narrative coding reinforced the existing analysis process, augmenting the codification of the detailed narrative stories into smaller units of usable data (Saldaña, 2016). Importantly, the *in vivo* codes were used in the co-construction of the ensuing dramatisms.

In general, as the coding analysis progressed, it included topical descriptions that have expressed meaning as described in the participant's narrative story (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007, Creswell, 2013; Saldaña, 2013). The overarching goal of the data analysis of the transcripts, linking of fieldnotes, and integration of the participants' artifacts led to a newly constructed narrative story with meaning and significance. As a reminder, Riessman (1993) states, "all forms of representation of experience are limited portraits... we are interpreting and creating texts at every juncture, letting symbols stand for or take the place of the primary experience, to which we have no direct access" (p. 15).

### **The Narrative Pentadic Criticism Analysis**

Once initial coding was complete, a narrative analysis methodology was used to center on the pentadic criticism to further deepen the analysis (Burke, 1945, 1950; Foss 1989). Burke (1945) posits that any shared story involving human action needs to involve the five stated elements of his described pentad. The five stated elements of the pentad are, "act, scene, agent, agency, purpose... over the centuries, men have shown great enterprise and inventiveness in pondering matters of human motivation, one can simplify the subject by using this pentad of key terms, which are understandable almost at a glance" (Burke, 1945 p. xv). I chose the pentad analysis to assist me in gaining deeper

insight and understanding of the military veterans' motivations and events behind their transitioning into becoming a nurse.

Burke (1945) suggested that the use of the pentad would be best accomplished once the participant's interview is converted into a verbatim transcript, as stated above. The pentadic elements used in the analysis coined by Burke as the grammar of motives, is a method for obtaining the motivational premise of a participant's textual story by using the five elements of the pentad to formulate a dramatization with the following: "what was done (act), when and where was it done (scene), who did it (agent), how he did it (agency), and why (purpose)" (p. xv). The temporal or rearranged narrative story of the military veteran as an adult learner in higher education was analyzed and developed through the application of the pentadic analysis.

Foss (1989), who has expounded upon the use of the Burkean (1945, 1950) pentadic rhetorical analysis tools, describes the motivational studies and the intent of the purposeful naming of this methodology as dramatization. This term, dramatization, depicts action rather than motion, which Foss refers to the latter as a mere biological process that is not symbolic (p. 335). This distinction is important since action is symbolic and reflects higher order human-based thought processes. Foss assumes, "once we have a symbol system, everything we do is interpreted through that system" (p. 336).

Foss (1989) adds to the Burkean analysis with the use of ratios. This process involves conjoining the previously stated pentad elements into a combination of varied ratios, "scene-act, scene-agent, scene-agency, scene-agent, scene-agency [etc.]... there is no right order with which to begin this process, since all of the terms point to aspects of

the act” (p. 339). The ratios can then be analyzed for thematic relations, evaluating if the impact of the relationship of the terms is strong or weak. Depending on the interpretation, the analyst may see more value in reversing the ratio sequencing. Regardless, the end goal of the analysis is to be able to name a motive for the act being studied.

As previously described, the Schlosberg (1995) 4S model has four described components, being situations, self, support, and strategies, which merged nicely into Burke’s (1945) five pentadic elements of act, scene, agent, agency, and purpose. This analytical approach of the interview data assisted in constructing the dramatization of the narrative story by demonstrating the participants’ ratio of support systems, stated motivations and means’ impelling the desired transition. The stated theoretical framework and pentadic analysis together helped obtain meaningful rich description of the participants’ transitions of moving in, moving through and moving out (Schlossberg 1995). By design actionable items of the transition model, supported by the pentadic sequencing of act, agent, agency and purpose, the constructed a platform explain the motivations behind participants’ career changes (Burke, 1945; Foss, 1989).

### **Trustworthiness**

Lincoln and Guba (1985) posit that determining the trustworthiness of a study is quite simple; if the findings are significant, others will pay attention to the results. In the arena of qualitative research there are those who disagree with these methods and analytical outcomes. The qualitative opponents assert that the post-positivist quantitative concept of measure is the only outcome considered valid (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). However, in the field of qualitative research this methodology is the considered the best

approach to obtain trustworthiness in the data used to answer a research problem (Marshall & Rossman, 2011; Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

This study was designed to focus primarily on the use of textual data rather than observational field reporting, the former provided an increased level of validity over the latter (Silverman, 2006). It is common practice in narrative analysis to ensure that the study participants have access to the data at some point in the research process (Maxwell, 2005). Access was provided in the form of a *member check*, the dramatizations were reviewed by each study participant for trustworthiness (Creswell, 2013; Hatch, 2002).

I sent the document via email to the participants for input, of which they affirmed or asked for clarification (See Appendix B). Three of the study participants chose to review their narratives face to face and four reviewed using telephonic communication; all provided an email response that validated their narrative data as representative of their interviews. I also triangulated the data, which involved comparison of the transcripts, fieldnotes and artifacts. This approach further added to the trustworthiness of this study.

In terms of qualitative protocol, it is deemed important for the researcher to self-evaluate and define one's own position and experiences as they relate to the research problem under investigation (Hatch, 2002). During the research analysis, self-awareness and accountability brought an additional element of trustworthiness to the study. To ensure my bias was accounted for during the data collection and analysis, I bracketed my personal motivations for becoming a nurse, to include my military war zone deployment experience and evolved perspective after being in war (Moustakas, 1994). I documented my narrative (see chapter 1, researcher positionality) as it applied to the research study

questions. I also revisited my narrative before I started the coding process for each cycle of analysis. This bracketing technique helped provide a professional distance from the participants individual accounts and narratives (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

### **The Role of the Investigator and Ethical Considerations**

In preparation for conducting this narrative research study, the required Texas State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) paperwork was properly submitted and approved. The approved IRB submission addressed the described population, ethical concerns and potential participant harm that may have occur during the execution of the study (McGuire-Dunn & Chadwick, 2004).

By using a purposeful recruitment method, it was important to maintain an active relationship with the military veteran cohort during the study and analysis process. I fully acknowledged and embraced the ethos of a qualitative researcher, which is to be truthful, legitimate, and respectful of your study participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). The relationship and camaraderie with the participants helped me gain access to their confidence and trust. This effort occurred at all phases of the study: prior to, during and after the interviews had taken place (Creswell, 2013, Maxwell, 2005). The trusting relationships I maintained with the participants along with their shared understanding of the study provided an enriched setting for their interviews (Creswell, 2013).

The in-depth interview strategy combined with the narrative methodology essentially transformed the study participant and myself as the researcher into the role of narrator and listener (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011, p. 423). This euphemistic transformation assisted me as the researcher to essentially become an instrument within the study design

(Maxwell 2005; Marshall& Rossman, 2011, Creswell, 2013). In being the instrument, ethical and respectful motives guided my research techniques for obtaining interview data (McGuire-Dunn & Chadwick, 2004). This study design was conservatively scripted to avoid potential ethical issues concerning the research methods (Maxwell, 2005). I embraced the stance that the best appeasement of critics comes through transparency of a rigorous IRB process with documented self-regulated procedural safeguards.

### **Informed Consent**

The study participants were provided with a hard copy of the research informed consent document. The consent form used complied with the Texas State University Institutional Review Board policies and procedures. The participants had the study explained to their satisfaction, understood the expectations of their participation and my obligation to their wellbeing throughout the research process. I offered a question and answer period to ensure that they were fully aware of their rights and ability to exit the study at any time, request any or all data be expunged from the study if they withdrew.

### **Confidentiality**

To ensure the participants' confidentiality was protected, the electronic data components with their names was removed and pseudonyms were assigned. Also, the raw and coded data was maintained as password protected documents. All electronic files are maintained on a password encrypted hard-drive and cloud/virtual space as a back-up. The printed or hard copy of data is preserved and stored in a locked file cabinet in my office.



## **Study Safeguards**

As the researcher, I made every ethical attempt to ensure that the participant was not placed at risk for psychological injury during the telling of his life story. Since all the study participants are combat veterans, they have veteran healthcare benefits available. With that said, I established a consultation agreement with a Veteran's Hospital liaison that would have helped provide access to the appropriate mental health care providers if needed. The veteran participants' wellbeing and mental health was paramount concern while the interviews were being conducted and afterward (see Appendix C).

## **IV. FINDINGS**

### **Overview of the Study**

The resultant data presented in this chapter is constructed from narrative stories told by seven participants empaneled in this qualitative research study. Per the stated study protocol, the participants all agreed to take part in two face-to-face interviews. Each voluntarily shared his personal stories of military service, combat, exiting service, entering higher education and becoming registered nurses. The research findings are presented in an established scholarly format, with the results organized into two main sections. The first section provides an overview of the study participants, their demographical profiles and coinciding attribute codes. The second section is the data findings, which is the corpus of this chapter. The results are the interview data presented as narrative stories, co-constructed with the participants and corresponding data analysis.

### **Demographic Profile of the Study Participants**

The demographical information presented in Table 4.1 catalogs the attribute codes of the participants in this study. These attribute codes include the participants' pseudonym names, ages, ethnicity, military branch, years of military service and number of tours served in Afghanistan and/or Iraq. This attribute schema serves as a centralized reference in the event the data in Table 4.1 is not mentioned in the subsequent narratives.

It is important clarify that all participants empaneled in this research study are men, have served in the military and were directly involved in combat operations. After military service, all participants went into higher education explicitly to earn a baccalaureate degree in nursing science, passed their licensing examinations and are now

registered nurses. However, the participants have varied pre-nursing academic backgrounds. There are participants that earned degrees prior to joining the military, some during, and others earned college degrees after military service prior to entering nursing education, disclosed at the appropriate time in the evolving narratives.

*Table 4.1*

*Combat to Care-Giver Demographic Profiles*

Participant	Age Joined	Age Exited	Ethnicity	Military Branch	Years of Service	Combat Afghan	Combat Iraq
Bret	18	22	C	MA	4.0 years	0	x2
Harvey	28	33	C	AR	5.0 years	0	x2
Franklin	18	22	C	AR	4.5 years	x1	x1
Vince	18	23	A	MA*	5.0 years	0	x1
Lee	18	41	C	AF	23 years	>2	0
Sean	21	28	L	AR*	8.0 years	0	x1
Nate	17	23	L	AR*	6.0 years	x1	x1
<i>Don</i> <i>(removed)</i>	18	28	C	AF	10 years	x2	0

Pseudonyms: Participant names are from the 2017 Hurricane name chart from the World Meteorological Organization. Military Branches- (\* = Reserves or National Guard), Air Force= AF, Army=AR, Marines=MA; Ethnicity- Latino=L, Caucasian=C, Asian=A

## **Research Findings**

The findings are organized and presented in three parts. The initial report is data analysis from the participants' first interview, staged as Burkean pentadic dramatisms (Burke, 1945; Burke, 1950; Foss, 2004). The subsequent findings were based on analysis of data collected from the participants' second interview, which links the analysis to

Schlossberg's transitional theory (Anderson et al., 2012; Schlossberg et al., 1995) and accounts for the participants' progressions as they moved into, through and out of higher education. The focus of the theory as it applies to this study will be further discussed in chapter five. The final unit of data analysis is a compilation of the participants' interviews. The data is presented within the framework of the transition model, establishing the participants' personal resources of situation, support, self and strategies during each step of the process. These findings offer the quintessential insight into the participants' transitions from the warzone to becoming registered nurses.

### **Dramatisms of Military Service, War, and Nursing**

The opening set of narratives were crafted from the data obtained from the participants' responses to the questions asked during the first interview (Appendix A). The following is a summation of the primary questions used, (a) *tell me the story of how you decided to join the military during a time of war*; (b) *tell me the story of why you separated from the military*; (c) The CIT is utilized as question three, *tell me the story of how you decided to go to nursing school to become a nurse*. The CIT portion of the interview asked participants to openly discuss their military experiences, focusing on combat in the warzone. The reported data acquired from their experiences in the warzone ostensibly shaped their decision to become nurses. Additionally, the participants were notified to bring an artifact of meaning to the first interview to assist with the telling of their stories.

The participants responses to the questions and their recollection of their experiences were not necessarily communicated sequentially. However, the following life

stories are co-constructed temporally, advancing the narratives in a linear and logical manner. Each narrative captures qualities of the individual’s linguistic communicative idiosyncrasies, rendering each participant uniquely recognizable. These narrative vignettes are developed and displayed as Burkean (1945; 1950) pentadic dramatisms.

The spirit of Burke’s (1945; 1950) dramatisms are conveyed using the following tenets of the pentad, (a) *Act*, describes what took place; (b) *Agent/Actor*, is who performed the act; (c) *Scene*, the context in which it occurred; (d) *Agency*, depicts how the act was done; and (e) *Purpose*, why the act was done, (Burke, K.,1945, 1950; Foss, S. K.,1989). The ensuing dramatisms are either a four or a five-part drama with pentadic ratios analyzed after each scene. These ratios infer how one pentadic element can influence another pentadic element, offering potential motives behind the direction and movement of the evolving dramatism.

*Bret - The Marine that Becomes a Nurse: Dramatism Scenes Tables 4.2 thru 4.5*

*Table 4.2*

Scene 1	<b>Ignorance is Bliss</b>
<b>Act</b>	Joining and becoming a Marine
<b>Actor</b>	Bret
<b>Scene</b>	Graduating High School 9/11 happens, Marine boot camp
<b>Agency</b>	The Marine recruiter and Marine Corps
<b>Purpose</b>	To serve his country and have a way out of his town

Bret's story begins in the early fall of 2001, as he enters his senior year of high school. He reflects, "I was raised in a really small town [in rural Texas], my family is very simple, parents didn't go college. I needed to do something when I graduate, [but] didn't really apply myself. I didn't see any opportunities after high school; honestly, saw myself probably becoming a drug addict [if I stayed]."

Bret recalls, "[During] my senior year, 9/11 happened. I remember the emotions associated with that, a sense of fear, awakened as far as what the world could be like. I didn't have any direction, [so] why not join the military? [I saw the] Marines being the greater branch. I think there was a glamorization in my decision. I was your sort of cinematic guy, [seeing myself] with some war paint on, holding a big weapon, being force-recon. [My family] was concerned I would join the infantry. Obviously, they had a better understanding of what that meant than I did... ignorance is bliss."

Bret explains, "I went into the Marine Corps recruiter station, I didn't have the wherewithal to think about going to college, or mindset to consider the opportunities the military had to offer. [Recklessly] I said, 'I want to fight'... they said, 'I would be infantry.' I enlisted. The attack on 9/11 was definitely fundamental in my decision to join. Everybody was very proud, if I had gone to Yale or Harvard... same sense of pride. It's just the weird perception the military has in a small, rural farm community... there's an overarching loyalty to patriotism. [This] bears weight in my motivation to join the Marines. [I] graduated high school in May [and] went to boot camp July 7th, 2002."

Bret reflects on his visceral response after arriving at Marine boot camp, "Got off the plane in San Diego, I remember the first drill instructor... I cannot describe the

sensation. Like... the immediate need to evacuate my bowels... just about shit myself, I'm not kidding. Feeling like you'd just done something horrible, being very, very, very scared. They get you on the white buses [and] they make you keep your heads down... that's when all the psychological stuff begins. They scream, 'You're a product of the United States government... you're owned by the Marine Corps.'"

Bret describes, "There's a degree of brain washing that goes on. You're cut off from everything else, [it's like] a psychological experiment. You sing cadence about killing people and daily, you read about Medal of Honor winners that sacrificed themselves in the line of duty. I don't remember thinking like they died, [instead] I remember thinking holy shit, how great it would be to be thought of like that. You believe [that] you go to war, you come home [and] you don't die. Show me an 18-year old Marine that is afraid of death [and] I will call you (pause)... I would challenge your assumption."

The *eagle*, *globe* and *anchor*, are the symbol of the Marine Corps, it is the coveted goal of every recruit. Bret said, "You don't get to wear one on your uniform until you are truly considered a Marine. It's a really good feeling of accomplishment (pausing)... but at the same time it's a crock of shit." His pessimism quickly dissipates, becoming upbeat again as he recounts his graduation from boot camp. He states buoyantly, "Oh, God [I was] jubilant, I felt like I was part of something bigger than myself. For the first time in my life, I was part of this elite fighting force. I loved that, I ate that shit up man. I remember feeling just pretty goddamn cool. I'm thinking...I'm going to hit somebody one time and their head might fall off. I can't help but look back on boot camp, am I a

better person for the experiences? Absolutely. Would I ever want another individual to go through those experiences? No. You can build a man in other ways.”

***Bret, end of scene one, pentadic ratios.*** The two primary ratios noted in the above drama are that of *Scene/Agent*, followed by ratio *Agency/Agent*:

- The above *scene* describes the local and national spirit of being unified after 9/11 occurred. The atmosphere in the above *scene* drives the impressionable *agent's* choice for joining the Marines.
- The *scene* depicts patriotic rhetoric within the community, which allows for the agent's duplicitous motive of justifying his leaving home for new opportunities under the auspices of patriotism.
- The Marine Corps is a dominant and controlling *agency* that functionally compels the *agent* to yield his identity of self and embrace the military culture as his own.
- The *agency* is the Marine Corps, using isolation, physical and psychological duress to convert the *agent's* perception of violence while norming the abstraction of death.



Table 4.3

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<b>Scene 2</b>	<b>The Marine Goes to War</b>
<b>Act</b>	Becoming a member of a Marine infantry unit
<b>Actor</b>	Bret
<b>Scene</b>	First duty assignment and the going to war
<b>Agency</b>	The Marine Corps shapes battle operations in Iraq using military force
<b>Purpose</b>	To become a desensitized Marine that can kill on command

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At this point in Bret's story, he has since graduated from both Marine boot camp and the infantry school. Being a trained Marine, he is eager to go to his first fleet assignment. As he arrives, he becomes very anxious with what awaits him outside the bus.

He speech quickens as he proclaims, "As [you] pull up to the barracks, it's like prison man, your freaking out. These guys are outside screaming and whooping and hollering saying shit like, 'fresh meat,' and making threats. Fuck yes, I'm scared. My fear was justified... some of the most inventive forms of psychological torture you could imagine [awaited me]. I was put in my wall locker by this guy, he was a bear, he was huge. He would lock it [and] I would stay in there. He would leave my room, go drink... [when he returned] I had to open my wall locker and act like a coo-coo clock. It was torture, at the same time it's like holy shit, who thinks of that? I was not scared about going overseas, I was not as worried about that as I was just trying to survive every day [in the barracks], getting fucked with, just getting shit on."

The invasion of Iraq was looming. He explains, “The evolution of what was happening was consistent with the timeline, [the leadership] could definitively speak... we were going to be forward element [in Iraq]. Even then, I don’t think I was afraid, I don’t think I had any idea... I couldn’t grasp it.” Bret and his unit received notification that they were deploying to Iraq. He said, “I remember the last conversation I had with my mother. I called her because it was my last night in the States, I told her, ‘This is the last time I’m going to talk to you.’ I remember really crying, the sense of [being] cut off [and] feeling very sad that night, never scared... just sad, homesick and lonely. The next day I woke up [and] I was okay.”

Bret and his fellow Marines deployed to Kuwait. This is where they would stage with other U.S. ground forces in preparation for the invasion of Iraq. Bret speaks of the impending invasion, “It was February, we were days out from the war... we’re getting told what’s going to happen, even still, it’s like you’re getting excited. I felt safe, a sense of security because of the supervision, as long as I do what [they] tell me to do, I’ll be okay. I trusted my leadership they were good dudes. Our last night as we were rolling out we had a big meal, they brought us in lobster. Then we rolled out under the cover of the night, in the middle of nowhere, can’t see anything. You [can] just see the sky being lit up by artillery and the bombs the aircraft were dropping. That was amazing. I mean they are bombing the shit out of whatever... it’s like fuck yeah! [We’re] just like getting pumped up, Metallica is playing; people were just getting themselves ready. Then we roll... we roll in... and nothing. The objective had already been completed. The mass amount of artillery [was] total overkill, it was very anticlimactic.”

Bret asserts that during their time in Iraq, everything remained relatively under control. He explains, "I never once fired my rifle on the first deployment. I can remember more about my first deployment not being able to bathe for over 30 days and the smell of my balls. I do remember going over this bridge, some other Marines had killed some Iraqi soldiers. We would all drive over the head of the guy on the bridge. It was like a rite of passage, super fucking slowly too, to make sure you do it." Bret looks away for a moment before he continues, "And this [Iraqi] guy was shot by another Marine, who said he had a weapon, he shot and killed him. He basically just killed this civilian because he wanted to kill somebody. There was no investigation for that." Pausing, he slowly moves his head from side to side with the look of displeasure on his face. After a moment, Bret looks up and exposes a warm but seemingly melancholy smile. He continues, "During this time, some new Marines came to our unit. One of the guys would become my best friend. His name was Drake, he and I became best friends while we were in the military."

After nearly nine months in Iraq, Bret and his unit returned home to a celebratory response from the public at large. Bret received two weeks of military leave. He describes his homecoming, "[My] family is in the... (pauses, then smiles) everybody is in the airport, holding a big flag and a banner [with] welcome home. Yeah, you're a freakin' war hero man. You can do anything you want. I go to my brother's school bring in my helmet, being in the [local] paper, people thanking me for my service, [and] getting out of a [speeding] ticket when I show my military ID. All because you fought for your country, it was amazing, man. It's one of the most elating times in my life, I can't describe it. The

war was still very justifiable... the rhetoric was very positive, very powerful. When you wake up [on your last day home], it's like... let's do it all over again!"

**Bret, end of scene two, pentadic ratios.** The two primary ratios noted in the above drama are that of *act/agent*, followed by ratio *scene/agency*:

- The *act* of arriving into a seemingly lawless environment with unabated harassment, the *agent* is forced to submit to the hostile Marine culture.
- The *act* of deploying, being part of a war, the *agent* is a pawn in the unfolding events of combat. Inhumane acts challenge the *agent's* own moral sense.
- The ratio being *scene* over *agency*, as demonstrated in the described buildup of military forces, staged in preparation for the invasion and war with Iraq. The *scene* further intensifies with the *agency's* use of overwhelming force with the ensuing annihilation of the Iraqi forces and government.
- The *scene* depicts the Iraqi militia impotent without the ability to defend, *act* of the US military's occupation of Iraq, projection of military power.

Table 4.4

Scene 3	<b>The Warzone, The Climate Had Shifted Dramatically</b>
<b>Act</b>	Redeploying to warzone and exiting military service
<b>Actor</b>	Bret *Artifact presented: <i>A dog-tag from a friend who was killed in action.</i>
<b>Scene</b>	Political public sentiment shifts, Iraqi's fight back, and coming home again
<b>Agency</b>	Marines attempt hold ground through a show of military presence
<b>Purpose</b>	To support waning political and economic agendas

After two weeks of leave, Bret returned to the fleet. His unit was already preparing for their next deployment. As Bret and Drake trained for their subsequent tour of combat, they became inseparable companions. He states, “We’re hanging out, drinking and partied on weekends... young Marine stuff. We just kind of bonded. He and I are pretty close and I’m not getting shit on as much. I have a friend.

After being home for barely a half year, Bret’s unit again deployed to Iraq. He says, “We know that when we’re going in this time, some things have gone down. In a period of seven months, the climate [in Iraq] had shifted dramatically. Humvee’s have up armor on them, IED’s are occurring. Now, we were more afraid, [it’s] just a different climate. On the second deployment, we [arrive at] our main base, they say, ‘You will engage, if there’s a casualty we won’t be able to evacuate if the conditions aren’t right.’ We’re like fuck... like Marines are dying here... people are dying.”

Bret makes direct eye contact as he expressively speaks, “So, our company commander, company gunny, and a handful of Marines that I knew, went out on this bridge and were scouting out the area... and [then] BOOM! An IED that was planted on the bridge goes off. We lose our company gunny, our company commander, and about nine other Marines. Numerous injured, instantly people are dead. [We’re] fucking scared because nobody was expecting that. We had a memorial for all of them, Kevlar helmet, sandbag, rifle and K-bar... [we’re all] just shell shocked. Now we have to go from [our current base] where these people were just killed to what’s considered to be an even more dangerous [setting].”

Bret leans forward, confessing, “We’re scared shitless, I remember being afraid to patrol these streets. You’re just freaking out. You cannot identify an IED when you’re driving in a vehicle down the street. We were there about two weeks; some guys go out on patrol on Saturday... it was a Saturday. I remember that it was in the morning, down this main thoroughfare, it’s called Market Street, like a bazaar... they were driving around in Humvees. Somebody had mounted Russian artillery...launched it from a point of concealment. And it went, no shit, right through the wheel block, right through the steering column, right into Drake’s chest. I wasn’t there when it happened, they said, he got out... he had broken bones and immediately collapsed. It haunts me to this day, they said Drake kept saying, ‘don’t leave me, don’t leave me, don’t leave me...,’ he just kept on repeating that. They flew him out... he died midflight. He died three days before his 21st birthday; his birthday was on the 17th of September and mine was on the 20th... that was kind of my 21st birthday.”

Bret slowly and rhythmically testifies, “I’m thankful I didn’t see him die. I don’t know if I would have been okay. I don’t know if I would have done something. I don’t know if it would have been worse. I do know... one of my buddies who did see him die [is] still fucked up to this day from it.” Bret implies it is not witnessing the violence and death that left him so traumatized. He describes, “We saw plenty of people die. I remember helping shovel up debris of a suicide bomber, like human remains and not thinking anything of it.” Bret again pauses before continuing, “I wasn’t afraid when it happened. That was a very definitive point, sort of a fundamental changing in my

mindset. It would motivate my aggressions towards the Iraqi population while I was in country. Drake's death would be what motivated my survivor's guilt."

Bret opens his hand, shows a small flat metal object, explaining, "I got his dog tags. I brought them. That was the one thing that I have." Being in a somber reflective state, he describes the personal impact that Drake's death had on him. He reveals, "When Drake died, it sort of made me aware of the finite nature of my existence. Made me think, Drake is not here anymore... but you are. Everything you get to experience from this day forward, he will never get to experience. Because of that, I think you owe him to live a life that is nothing short of giving your best in every possible thing you do. I thought about him probably every day for the first year. I thought it was my obligation to think about him. [The] dog tags I wore around my neck type stuff. I felt this was the best way to honor him. You know what I mean? Something that wasn't immediate but was going to have a profound impact on my life."

Without expression Bret utters, "Of course I had PTSD. Of course, I would lock the lock six times." He stops talking, after a lengthy silence he continues, "I can remember a specific experience, an incident, where we were patrolling. This was after Drake died. An IED went off, it hit the vehicle in front of us, killing and injuring a couple of guys. I got out, and there was this guy laying on the ground, Iraqi. I just walked up and shot him three times, right there. Just like I want to kill that guy kind of attitude... justifying it because of Drake's death. That was the first person I ever killed, I only killed three people directly. I remember thinking, what should I be feeling right now? Should I be feeling remorse? I felt bad... I felt bad because I didn't feel bad. I expected something

unique to come to my head, but no. I didn't think about him having a family, the rhetoric the [Marines] used was basically like they weren't real human beings."

During the remaining tour of duty in Iraq, more of Bret's fellow Marines were killed. He states, "I think five from my platoon alone died, let's say 10 injured. The shit was bad enough to where the [leadership] was like we're not letting you guys go [off compound]." Finally, a fresh group of Marines arrived to take over their mission and Bret's battle-weary unit returned home to the States.

As Bret speaks, his eyes dart back and forth, trying to remember when he went home on leave after the last combat tour. He recalls, "I know, I was back for Easter, back in March [2005]. This time they gave us a month off, it was like unprecedented." Bret compares this homecoming to his first, "I don't know... it just felt different. It just felt very, very raw. [I'm] kind of more shell shocked. Everyone knew [my friend] Drake had died. Everybody was treating you a little bit different because everybody knew the shit was real. It's like you didn't want people... (pause) people knew it was bad, they just didn't know what to say. I don't think there is a right thing to say. You don't want somebody to say it's okay, like treating you with kid-gloves... it made it worse, their whispering like, 'Bret, Bret's home.' [The] being in the spotlight... I didn't like it. The last thing you want to be thinking about is what you just left, (pause)... because you're home [now]."

**Bret, end of scene three, pentadic ratios.** The two primary ratios noted in the above drama are that of *act/scene*, followed by ratio *act/agent*:



- The *act* is powerful in terms of the reversal of circumstances, with the violence now being exacted upon his Marine unit, caused by the Iraqi paramilitary elements. The *scene* is a backdrop where seemingly benign villages and markets become lethal kill boxes in a matter of seconds.
- The *act* of violence and death has an unsettling reversal of fortune concerning the two separate *scenes* of the Marines crossing the bridges. In the previous scene the dead Iraqi forces are disgraced by the *act* of the Marines rolling over their bodies, whereas in the above *scene* the *act* of an IED explosion results in multiple dead Marines on a like bridge, strategized by the Iraqis militia.
- The *act* of Drake being killed had a profound emotional impact on the *agent*, with a noted moral shift and unremitting sense of vengeful thoughts against the Iraqis.
- The *act* of shooting the Iraqi during the second deployment was the *agent's* attempt at exacting revenge for the killing of Drake. The realization being after the commission of the *act*, the *agent* does not receive the sense of vindication he hoped to gain.

Table 4.5

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<b>Scene 4</b>	<b>Leaving the Marines, PTSD, and Life Transitions</b>
<b>Act</b>	Exiting from military service, attempting to find and regain self
<b>Actor</b>	Bret
<b>Scene</b>	Political public sentiment shift, Iraqi's fight back, and then home again
<b>Agency</b>	Inner-city school system, Veteran Hospital
<b>Purpose</b>	To leave the military, to find meaning in a career through transition

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After a month of leave Bret returned to the fleet for what he hoped would be his last time. The terms of his three-year enlistment contract were nearing fulfillment. Instead of reenlisting, he elected to evoke his expiration term of service (ETS) and exit from the Marine Corps. Bret's experiences in Iraq influenced his wanting to get out of the military. Equally, the psychological abuse and unrelenting hazing weighed heavily on his decision to leave. He clarifies, "I lost the taste by the time I [was at my first assignment]. After the first year in the Marine Corps, I was ready to get out. I didn't think there was anything [left that the Marines] could do for me, I just wanted to go to college." However, Bret's pride in being a Marine is apparent as he offers, "I got a presidential citation, global war on terrorism, unit global war on terrorism expeditionary, combat action, and a national defense [ribbon]." These awards help tell his story of valor, validating his service to the country. The painful recall of combat, friends lost, and living with those consequential experiences now define who he has become, shaping his future career choices.

After receiving an honorable discharged from the Marines, Bret returned to his home in Texas. Soon after, he enrolled into a large state university. He voiced his indecision, “I needed to do something that I thought was not driven by monetary gain. In my mind something that contributed [to society] in some way. So, I just go to school and make the best grades that I can, not knowing what I am going to major in. I meet a teacher who makes me feel very motivated, and he’s a political science professor. So, I go into political science [and] ended up with a 4.0, top of my class.” During undergraduate studies, Bret met a special young woman, a fellow student. Their relationship flourished, after dating a short while they were married. Upon graduation, Bret entered straightaway into his graduate program.

Bret immediately became restless and left graduate school after the first semester. He felt compelled to honor his dead fiend Drake. Instead, he decided to join a nonprofit inner-city teaching program. Bret explains, “You’re put in schools that are underserved... [for] those most at risk. I was like, man that sounds like I could make a change. This is helping to make things better!” Bret and his wife moved to Denver. He was excited that he would be teaching in an alternative school. He states, “Alternative meaning expelled kids, teaching seventh and eighth grade social studies. I lost about 15 pounds because I stopped eating... the stress was overwhelming.”

Bret pauses, clasps his hands together, leans forward and looks straight ahead, “I remember coming into school as they are cleaning the floors... it was like August, it was hot. The chemical they were using had the same smell as the chemical used to clean the showers in [Iraq] and that was triggering flashbacks. I can remember the sympathetic

response man, all diaphoretic, tachycardic, loss of appetite... I had a nervous breakdown. I went home... my wife was still at work. I sat down, I just remember being in a shell. She came home, I asked to her sit beside me. I laid my head on her lap and I cried uncontrollably for over 20 minutes. I so respected my wife, [because] she did not know what was going on, she didn't ask me to say anything until I could stop."

Bret reflects on his wife's overall qualities, he explains, "I was attracted to her because to me, after coming out of the military, after doing the things that I've done, the guilt about the person I was and the things... the things I had done. I had these Christian values [and] she represented to me what I thought was antithetical to who I was and wanted to be. She was this pure, innocent person with a good heart. I did not tell her about the shit I did in the military [nor] about the things I had done." Bret further clarifies, "[I] did not let her know about the PTSD, she was 100% caught off guard. I had a diagnosis but never had treatment. I had a 4.0 in college... I thought I was okay. When this happened, she called my family, and they said take him to the VA right now. She was freaked out, but she stood by me... she took me to the VA and stuck with me. I immediately resigned my teaching position."

Once Bret was under the care of a psychiatric therapist at the local VA hospital, he enrolled into an intensive cognitive therapy outpatient program. Bret states, "The therapy is basically Socratic, you take something, break it down to the next level, 'why do you feel this way?' Sort of tracing these steps back to the point where you masked something or had forgotten about, but obviously have emotions. It was an extremely life changing experience, and don't think I'd be who I am now. You also learn to discover

things about yourself. Okay... I'm paraphrasing my therapist, she'd say like, 'why did you become a teacher? You came from the military where people were telling you what to do. You go to college, of course you excel, you have a syllabus... you appreciate the structure. This appeals to you... you feel the need to help people. Have you ever thought about nursing?' I'm like, 'why would I want to do nursing?' She replies to me, 'You don't want to do something that doesn't matter. You don't want to just draw a paycheck, you don't want to be cop. Have you considered going into healthcare?'"

Bret smiles as he reveals, "That was kind of a turning point right there. Based on talking to [my therapist] if I went into nursing, there would be people in positions of authority... just like in the Marines. There would be a charge nurse, there would be a physician... it has this very similar sense. You're working towards this common goal, feeling that sense of significance. It has to matter... it has to have meaning to me. Because of that, I wanted to do nursing. For the first time I was doing something, not because I had a sense of obligation because my best friend died. I feel like I am doing it for myself."

Bret grinned with the satisfaction of knowing that he wanted to be a nurse. He remembered the pressure he placed on himself the first time he went college. He explains, "Just feeling like I have this whole second chance mentality. This is your chance, don't fuck it up... because Drake doesn't have this chance... you know? So, [now] with nursing school... it was not like that at all!" Bret was excited at the prospect of returning to college for his bachelor's degree in nursing (BSN). With Bret having a bachelor's

degree already, he chose to attend a 12-month accelerated nursing program at a Jesuit college in the Midwest, beginning January 2014.

**Bret, end of scene four, pentadic ratios.** The two primary ratios noted in the above drama are that of *agent/agency*, followed by ratio *agent/act*:

- The *agent* attempts to relinquish his guilt, driven by his wartime experiences and the need to honor his dead friend's memory. The agent chooses an *agency*, the inner-city school, to perform altruistic acts of service to the community.
- The *agent* succumbs to the weight of his guilt, through the *agency* of the veteran's hospital; with therapeutic care the *agent* successfully diminishes his perceived moral residue.
- The *agent* attempts to use the *act* of marriage, hoping to mitigate his moral quandary with an enduring commitment to a woman he believes to be both pure and good.
- The *agent* is able thrive once again through the *act* of cognitive therapy, regaining the ability to make independent decisions, being freed from guilt, choosing a new career in nursing.

Table 4.6

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<b>Scene 1</b>	<b>Life Happens</b>
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<b>Act</b>	The impetus for joining the US Army
<b>Actor</b>	Harvey
<b>Scene</b>	Driving to see therapist when 9/11 happens
<b>Agency</b>	Changing of life events
<b>Purpose</b>	To serve a higher calling

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This story begins on the day Harvey was driving to see his mental health counselor for the first time. Harvey had misgivings about seeking help but accepted he may need professional assistance. His previous work with high-risk teens in a special educational setting, along with learning of their stories of abuse, left him with periods of intrusive anxiety. Harvey had earned a dual degree in both physics and philosophy a few years earlier. Post-graduation, Harvey’s career opportunities were limited. As a result, he decided to join a few of his former fraternity brothers who were working in an alternate high school education program.

The relationships Harvey forged with these special students provided him with a sense of purpose. Harvey states, “It is probably the best thing I have ever done in my life.” He explains, “I’ve always been service oriented... wanted to do something you can feel good about, you can look yourself in the mirror... I did that for six years.”

Afterward, Harvey attended graduate school, studying special education when his PTSD

like symptoms manifested and he became disillusioned with school. He found his graduate curriculum unfulfilling, he replies, “I just didn’t feel like I was learning anything [instead] my passion was helping the kids with their personal life... not necessarily their education, it wasn’t working out.” At nearly 29 years of age, Harvey was at an impasse in his life.

That day as he arrived at the counselor’s office, the car radio carried a special report. He was stunned to hear that an aircraft had just hit the World Trade Towers, less than an hour from where he lived. Etched in Harvey’s memory, these events will remain forever linked to 9/11, which in turn would have a lasting impact on the course of his life. Because of this early morning attack on the U.S., his sense of service and need to contribute moved him in a new direction with a renewed sense of purpose and urgency.

**Harvey, end of scene one, pentadic ratios.** The two primary ratios noted in the above drama are that of *agent/purpose*, followed by ratio *agency/act*:

- In scene one, the *agent* is Harvey, who is seeking a higher calling with the intentional *purpose* of selfless service to others.
- The *agency* is the sudden changes in life events, in this ratio becomes the numerator over the denominator *act*, which is Harvey’s awakening, initiating his moving away from his then self-described career stagnation.
- The *agency* is specific to the changes that occurred in everyday life due to 9/11, which influenced the *act* of Harvey entering a new and uncertain life cycle pathway.



**Note:** *This opening scene is an amalgamation, acquired through two interviews. Harvey revealed at the end of the second interview, once the recording had stopped, his need for mental health services related to his civilian teaching position. I scribed this supplementary anecdote in the accompanying field notes.*

Table 4.7

<b>Scene 2</b>	<b>You are in the Army Now</b>
<b>Act</b>	Joining the military and preparing for war
<b>Actor</b>	Harvey
<b>Scene</b>	Basic training, first duty assignment and marriage
<b>Agency</b>	The U.S. Army as a soldier readiness and national defense mechanism
<b>Purpose</b>	To become an infantry airborne soldier

Harvey wanted to join the U.S. Army right after 9/11. He states, “I was working... taking classes, as everything’s going on in the news, we go into Afghanistan, and then Iraq starts.” Harvey had previously earned a bachelor’s degree, qualifying him to enter service as a commissioned officer. However, he clarifies, “At the time I thought I was too old, the age limit [to be an officer] was 29, and I was 29.” Nevertheless, Harvey was adamant about serving. He went to the local military recruiting station, “I was just bullshitting with the recruiter... [realizing then] they needed people to like [age] 42, so at this point I’m thinking I could enlist!”

He accounts, “I thought about it, I talked to my family, it was really like...I’m doing this.” He talked to his dad, who is a Vietnam War veteran, a Marine, Harvey

explained, “He was a little concerned, making sure I knew what I was getting myself into.” Harvey also shared, “My mom put up a strong front, but she didn’t want me to do it, [but] I never knew that... I [only] know that because my sisters told me.” Harvey signed his enlistment contract in October of 2003 at the rank of E-4, standard fare for a soldier entering service with a college degree.

He recalls, “I ended up going to basic in March on St. Patty’s Day. I enjoyed basic training, [but] I was out of shape. Even after basic, I wasn’t in good enough shape... I only had six pull-ups to my name, and that was it.” He pauses, “I washed out [of ranger school], I washed out like at the very beginning... I was pretty down.” Instead, he received orders for airborne school. This time Harvey thrived, the rigors of Airborne training pushed him to a new personal fitness level, earning his jump wings. In under a year he had successfully changed the trajectory of his life. Harvey was now a skilled airborne infantry soldier, deemed fully combat ready.

Harvey’s first assignment was to an airborne infantry unit that had just returned from a combat deployment in Iraq. His unit would redeploy to Iraq within the year. Harvey strategically used this time to rekindle a prior relationship. He admits, “This is the girl that broke my heart.” Now reunited, they married in June 2005, soon after she was pregnant with their first child. Their time together was limited; Harvey was deployed to Iraq that following October. Although, he had entered military service a single man, hungry to go to war, he now found himself with a new and growing family as he boarded a military aircraft bound for Iraq.

**Harvey, end of scene two, pentadic ratios.** The two primary ratios noted in the above drama are that of *agent/scene*, followed by ratio *purpose/act*:

- The *agent* in this *scene* endures the process of becoming a soldier, yearning to serve and fight in combat operations, the war on global terrorism (GWOT).
- The *agent's* life becomes more complex in this *scene* prior to his first deployment. The *agent* is married; his wife is pregnant... burdening his personal GWOT crusade.
- The *purpose* ratio over *act* is the US government's political will is imposed, posturing with a military presence to demonstrate overwhelming power and influence in Iraq.
- The *purpose* ratio manipulates *act*, placing the military member as a component of the strategic plan as a potentially expendable cog in the wheel of national defense.

Table 4.8

Scene 3	<b>The Warzone, It's Not What I Signed Up For</b>
<b>Act</b>	Going to war
<b>Actor</b>	Harvey
<b>Scene</b>	A prison guard tour duty in the Iraqi warzone
<b>Agency</b>	The U.S. Army conducting prison operations in Iraq
<b>Purpose</b>	Enforce national policy of the U.S.

Harvey's unit deployed to Iraq for five months, working in detainee operations. His unit arrived in 2005 as the political climate was changing due to the infamous Abu Grab prison incident. In response, the military senior leadership had become very draconian in their oversight of the ongoing detainee operations. Harvey said, "We were just miserable, everybody was really stressed... the leadership was out to prove that we were going to treat these detainees right. How they proved that is by treating everybody that worked with the detainees like crap... the pecking order was literally the [military] dogs, detainees and then the soldiers."

Harvey cynically accounts, "So I joined to be in the infantry, I was a SAW [machine] gunner. On that deployment I walk in with my SAW, I hung it on my bunk; I put a pillowcase over it [and] didn't touch it for the five months [that] I was working in the prison. It's not what I signed up for, I'm not an MP, it seemed like forever... that was a horrible deployment." He dryly retorts, "I got my CIB, [combat Infantry badge] ... because I stared the enemy in the face every day, who by the way was unarmed [and] behind a locked door." He pauses, "Kind of embarrassing to be honest with you, a bunch of us refused to wear it." Harvey wanted to earn his CIB in combat, but not in the way it was awarded. He reflects, "It's kind of funny because that was the most important thing to me... [the CIB] that's all I wanted as far as when I joined up."

Harvey's unit returns to the US after five months. Two weeks later Harvey's son was born. He was home for six months. In the fall of 2006, combat operations were increasing in Iraq. Harvey explains, "In January of '07, we were [scheduled as] the first battalion out for the surge." He attests, "I'm getting ready to deploy, we know it's

coming, it's all in the news and we know we were first on the hook, I think we [maybe] got a weeks' notice. [That's when I] found out my wife's pregnant with our second child. I joke that I put an anchor baby around her, so she doesn't leave me while I'm off." Although, outwardly kidding, the concern over one's spouse leaving is a daunting fear nearly every soldier faces when deploying to war.

**Harvey, end of scene three, pentadic ratios.** The two primary ratios noted in the above drama are that of *agency/agent*, followed by ratio *purpose/act*:

- The *agency* is the overarching protagonist, controlling the *agent's* described sense of neglect, if not abandonment due to the leadership's priority of reshaping the geopolitical optics at the expense of the soldiers.
- The above narrative, per the *agents* account stresses that that the *agency's* political outcomes outweighed the welfare of the soldiers who served.
- The ratio of *purpose* over *act* is the function of the armed forces, used to project the military presence in Iraq using symbolic rhetoric as a friendly occupying force.
- The *purpose* ratio is a manipulation of *act*, placing the military members in an overt setting to symbolically influence international political views.

Table 4.9

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<b>Scene 4</b>	<b>Combat, Now the Cat's Out of the Bag</b>
<b>Act</b>	Combat, death and dying
<b>Actor</b>	Harvey *Artifact presented: <i>Silver bracelet, names of two KIA friends</i>
<b>Scene</b>	A combat deployment, dirt, dusty and bloody
<b>Agency</b>	The U.S. Army
<b>Purpose</b>	Increased military operations in Iraq, the surge against Al Qaeda

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Harvey received a promotion prior to the deployment. He says, "I'm now a sergeant E-5 [in a] combat deployment. I find myself in a leadership position with no combat experience. I had a good squad. No, I had a great squad. It was a 15-month deployment; it was for the good of the troops... I'm very sarcastic." Harvey then described the challenges his team faced in Iraq, "Our role was market security... I mean our first actual patrol they had blown up one of the main markets... killed 180 people." Harvey said, "at this point I was probably excited to be doing what we were there for, then scared because I had no idea what was going on. So, most of the deployment, I would say 99 percent of it was boredom [and] obviously, the one percent [is] pretty significant. So... I got combat experience... getting shot at on convoys, the markets... checking vehicles coming in and out. We're teaching the [Iraqi] people how to spot car bombs. We ask them what happens if somebody comes in, and their answer was always 'insha'Allah', [means] if God wills it... pretty much their view on life... very different."

Harvey's mood changed, speaking somberly he says, "I lost two buddies when we were [in Iraq]. The first one was in April [and] that was by small arms fire, I was there. We were responding... we had a squad that was detected [and] they were getting surrounded. So, I was in charge... we just wanted to get there because we had guys under contact. We were moving in, we were in an alley... somebody opened up on us... we took cover. My buddy was shot in the head, at this point we don't know the significance of his injuries. Somebody's gotta go back out and get him... because he was still out in the alley exposed. I was the only squad leader there; I can't make anybody else do that, when I got back I had to look myself in the mirror. We set up fire down towards the [enemy]. I thought I was going to die (pausing), I went and grabbed him and hauled him back [to] get him around the corner. We put him on a board, took him to the green zone [military] hospital, he was already gone; we knew he was dead. I had his helmet, and it was full of blood and gave it to the doc, had all his blood in it. Whatever the hell I was thinking... [like] this this is important, he's gonna need this. It's kind of funny, because I don't remember much after that."

He then pauses to reflect, "He was one of my friends, he was like me, a 30-year-old guy [and] I think he had a college degree too... great guy, funny as crap. Five minutes before that we were eating dinner, laughing at the stupid shit our commander was making us do. It may [sound] stupid – but I always feel like at that point... it was too late for him [but] at least I didn't crap out, you know. I did what I supposed to do; you never know if you're gonna be weak or strong until that time comes... well, I know at least I did that." He grasps his wrist with the bracelet, twists it back and forth, then

continues to speak. “I was fortunate in a sense most of our fighting was done from a distance... rooftop to rooftop or down an alley. One case... I definitely hit somebody; it was like 250 yards away. In my head, I’m kinda ambivalent about it. That was 10 April, [I remember] because it was a big fire fight.” He pauses with a look of mild surprise, “I don’t think I ever told anybody that, I don’t think I’ve told my family that, I definitely didn’t tell my wife.” He reveals, “So up to that point I was kinda’ able to tell my wife that I wasn’t in trouble, we were just doing stupid stuff... don’t worry about it, blah, blah, blah.” Harvey stops talking, looking straight ahead, eyes well up with tears as he breaths out saying, “Now the cats out of the bag. You’re constantly aware, and you’re like anxious... she thinks that any day she could get that call.”

He regains his composure and continues, “Two of my guys died, [the other] died in December, we were running a joint security station, pretty peaceful. It’s like one second everything’s calm, and the next second, oh shit! We got hit with an IED, we were literally 100 yards from [our compound] when we got hit. The most dangerous spot in a Humvee is the guy behind the driver in the passenger seat. That’s where my buddy was... he took the brunt of it. We went to my buddy’s door, it was like on fire, somehow we were able to rip it off. He was dripping... blood was dripping out him. He was obviously dead. It’s kinda funny thinking about it now... how much I know about the human body, [being] ignorant we were still trying to save his life.”

Harvey further explains, “[Also] our gunner lost both his legs that day. When they teach you to put on a tourniquet, they say three inches above the wound, right? That’s how they trained us, [but] when you lose both your legs, the muscle doesn’t have any



connection... he was still bleeding out. Our medic was awesome; [he] moved the tourniquets as high as he could... saved his life, saved him from bleeding out.” He shifts in his seat and leans forward, “I was ready to get the hell home. We had been there a year, you’re combat effective for six months, and then after... it’s downhill. [Instead] you have people making poor leadership decisions, not taking care of their guys.”

Harvey’s reflects on his initial memory right after his friend died, “The night before [the IED] we were playing Texas Hold’em poker. What I [first] remember... he owes me a dollar (he laughs aloud). It’s kinda funny the shit you remember, but that’s what I remembered. [Also] he had a son [and] wife.” He then adds, “my daughter was born that [previous] August. I now have other responsibilities, you definitely think about it. You don’t think about it when it’s going on, because you don’t have time to think. But in downtime, sure. I knew I was getting out at that point.”

Harvey holds out his arm, finally sharing the significance of that silver bracelet on his wrist. He states, “I have two names on here... [my buddy] that died that day [and the one in April]. I got it right after I got off active duty... but I couldn’t wear it. People were always like, ‘Hey that’s a nice bracelet, where did you get that?’ It really pissed me off, and they’re just being nice. I couldn’t handle it, it’s pretty much all I got of my buddies. I stopped wearing it for a couple of years. One of the reasons I was able to put it back on... I keep track of the guys from my unit on Facebook. Everybody posts like really cool memorials and have really nice things to say, like, ‘I’ll never forget you... I always think about you.’ I wear this bracelet now because I forgot, I had forgotten so much.

Before it hurt to talk about it... I had forgotten so much about those two guys. That's not okay with me, so I wear it to remember, you know?"

**Harvey, end of scene four, pentadic ratios.** The two primary ratios noted in the above drama are that of *agent/scene*, followed by ratio *act/agent*:

- The *agent* finally experiences the combat mission he romanticized about as frightening yet exhilarating. The *scene* placed the agent in harm's way during a protracted combat mission.
- The *agent's* combat experience in the *scene* depicted is frightening yet exhilarating. The true breadth of the personal impact becomes apparent when the *agent* in this *scene* feels the ravages of war and death on a personal level.
- The *act* and *agent* ratio are at near equilibrium. The unnamed enemies' *act* using force as the *agent* responds in kind, both are killing, as the agent gains evolving introspections on what has occurred in the warzone.
- The *act* shapes the *agent's* overall sense of duty, loss and noted displays of courage. The *acts* of violence in the warzone cause the *agent* emotional pain, leading the *agent* to the conclusion of wanting to leave military service.

Table 4.10

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<b>Scene 5</b>	<b>Transition from the Military to Nursing</b>
<b>Act</b>	A difficult and protracted career transition from the military to nursing
<b>Actor</b>	Harvey
<b>Scene</b>	A combat deployment, dirt, dusty and bloody
<b>Agency</b>	US military and family
<b>Purpose</b>	To earn educational benefits, financial assistance for a new career in nursing

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After Harvey returned from his 15-month deployment in the spring of 2008, he and his wife decided the time had come to leave the Army after five years of military service. Harvey explains, “When we went in, our combat deployments... were [much shorter]. So, I’m telling my wife, ‘we deploy for seven to nine months, don’t worry about it, I’m coming home.’ [Now] we’re going to be there at least a year [or up to] 18 months. I also felt like... I have a family now, and it’s not worth it.” Harvey had an opportunity to leave the military after his first deployment but explains, “I could have dropped a packet but wanted a combat deployment. I got what I asked for. At that point I was disillusioned... the leadership was out for themselves. It just boggles my mind how you don’t take care of your own soldiers, you know? I was really frustrated, like, I’m done, I did my part. I love my guys, but I got to get a career. Whether or not that was a right choice... I couldn’t tell you. I ETS’d in September of 2008.”

After leaving service, Harvey tried but was unsuccessful in his attempt to join the FBI. Instead in January of 2009, he settled on a military intelligence position in the Army

Reserves. He reports, “My wife was working at the time... I was unemployed, pretty much... broke.” During this time, Harvey and his wife had another child, now a family of five. Harvey applied for and received a direct commission as a lieutenant in the reserves, needing the money, he accepted a five-month non-combat deployment to Afghanistan in 2012. Harvey reflects on his state of affairs, “[As for my wife] I think it’s probably tough having a husband who career wise just can’t get it together. [Our relationship is] doing pretty good, I mean it’s tough, it hits the ego definitely.” It has now been three years since Harvey exited the military, he professes, “I [still] do not have a civilian career, I need to change tack here. I need a job that’s not going to go away. I need a job that’s gonna support my family. I’m looking at... IT or medical. I was looking around and I had a friend [that] was a prior combat medic... he was going to school for online nursing, he told me to look into it. I’m kind of more of a people person and I like service. [My friend] asks, ‘Hey have you ever thought about becoming a nurse?’ I say, ‘No... never... never thought about becoming a nurse.’ Before then I never thought about it.”

Leaning forward, Harvey looks upward as to reflect, “So 2014, I’m thinking nursing. (Harvey points to his bracelet with the friend’s names) I put this back on in 2012 because emotionally I could handle it. I need to do something even as little as this for my friends that aren’t here anymore. I think part of what attracted me to nursing is I lost my two buddies, [and also the] guys that got wounded... they got sent off to hospitals and I never saw them again. I kinda feel like, I came home... take care of my family and struggling to find jobs, [when these] guys... have life changing wounds. It would be nice to be able to give back, if not to those guys then somebody else.”

Harvey quips about his wife's response to his career choice in nursing, "She's excited about it, because it's not military (he laughs), she could [also] see the long-term stability in it." Harvey deliberates on his initial perceptions towards nursing. He states, "I thought nursing was a woman's job. I didn't know men were nurses. [But] in doing my research, I find out like what it exactly entails be a nurse. I was thinking, it's good to be a man... that's gonna open doors. I'm on the other side of the minority curve (he laughs). I'm a people person and I like science. [Sometimes] I wish I wasn't, but I'm also service oriented. [Most importantly], I've always wanted to do something that makes a difference." Harvey felt good about the prospect of becoming a nurse, hoping to give back, if only symbolically to his dead and injured military buddies. The process had begun; he and his wife were both pleased with his new career trajectory. Soon he would begin his journey to become a BSN prepared Registered Nurse (RN).

**Harvey, end of scene five, pentadic ratios.** The two primary ratios noted in the above drama are that of *act/agent*, followed by ratio *scene/act*:

- The primary *act* is the transition, a protracted excursion, and years lost as the *agent* struggled to progress, adapt and control future career related outcomes.
- The *act* becomes a process for choosing a career in nursing, the *agent* has a self-described epiphany on how nursing can be both meaningful and rewarding.
- The *scene* is stifling without new opportunity for advancement, the *act* stagnates, losing synergy toward achieving a new civilian career.

- The *scene* and the *act* again are products of the agent’s doing with missed opportunities. It takes years for the *scene* to evolve when the *act* eventually results in a new career trajectory, becoming a nurse.

*Franklin - The Cavalry Scout Became a Nurse: Dramatism Scenes Tables 4.11 thru 4.14*

*Table 4.11*

<b>Scene 1</b>	<b>Join the Army, a Natural Progression for the Low Income</b>
<b>Act</b>	Joining the Army, becoming an airborne cavalry scout soldier
<b>Actor</b>	Franklin
<b>Scene</b>	Graduating High School, trying to go to college, no funding, joins the Army
<b>Agency</b>	US Army
<b>Purpose</b>	Go to college, instead serve his country to receive GI Bill education assistance

Franklin’s narrative begins in a small nondescript central Texas town. He graduated from high school in June of 2005. He states, “Yea, there was maybe 114 kids in my graduating class. Not tiny but small. I grew up hunting, fishing, and shooting stuff. I lived with my mom, a single mom. My mom and dad split when I was little... I was probably six. I didn’t see much of my dad after that.” Franklin looks up with his head slightly off to the side as he discusses a historical footnote about his father. He offers, “I didn’t even know my dad [had been] in the Navy, he went to Vietnam... [you know], before I was born.” He halfway smiles and looks down, but only for a moment.

After high school, Franklin wanted to go to college but lacked the financial means to pay for it. He explains, “Right out of high school, I actually did initially try to go to [college]. I moved up to Fort Worth with a family friend. I was trying to get a job and work my way through. But I couldn’t afford it. I quickly ran out of money. I never got in. I wanted to go college, that’s what I really wanted to do. So, the natural progression for me, being low income, I guess, was I can’t pay for college... [might as well join the military]. I had actually considered it several times [before] because of patriotism and college benefits. Then a recruiter found me...I think three days later I was at Fort Knox.” Franklin’s family was supportive and proud that he was joining the military. He truly had patriotic sentiments about military service. However, he used the military as a conduit to garner financial support by earning GI Bill benefits, ensuring one day he could realize his dream of going to college.

Franklin clearly recalled his initial entry into the military. He describes, “My first day of basic training was 19 October at Fort Knox. [I was in training to become an Army cavalry scout]. After basic, I actually got airborne school in route to my first duty assignment. Airborne school was a blast! I think I could do 60 pull-ups without even stopping. It was a lot a fun, I liked the action, working out... exercising and the comradery. Probably five or six of us went to Alaska out of there. Yea, a good group of guys.”

Franklin was excited at the opportunity to join his new cavalry unit in Alaska; however, he was disappointed when he arrived. He explains, “I showed up and my entire unit, the whole Cav was on an FTX... field training [exercise]. Maybe 30 days later,

everybody got back... everybody else came back best friends. I was [the newbie], the black sheep. I felt like I got picked on a little bit (he laughs). I say a little bit, it was probably a lot of bit (he laughs aloud). I was 18 and I probably didn't handle it very well. I was a smart-aleck... I got hemmed up. But I didn't get in any [actual] fights, probably due to the fact that I would've gotten my ass whooped. [Suddenly you realize], you're no longer the biggest, strongest, or fastest guy anymore. Everybody's as big, fast, and strong as you are (he smiles, nodding his head). Once that happened, I kinda felt like I was one of the guys. Yeah, after that, it was all history."

**Franklin, end of scene one, pentadic ratios.** The two primary ratios noted in the above drama are that of *purpose/agent*, followed by ratio *act/agent*:

- The principal *purpose* throughout the opening narrative is about the *agent's* desire to go to college; *purpose* is abruptly negated due to the *agent's* socioeconomic status.
- The *purpose* of entering higher education was a top priority for the *agent*, who resourcefully exchanged personal safety to serve in the military during a time of war and earn future financial support through the post-9/11 GI Bill.
- The *act* involves the *agent* entering the army, going to basic training, and then airborne school. This *act* is a positive experience for the *agent* in becoming a soldier.
- The *act* of the *agent's* assimilation into the culture of the cavalry was more difficult; however, this integrative *act* was a crucial for the *agent's* continued development.



Table 4.12

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<b>Scene 2</b>	<b>In the Warzone, You're Probably Going to Get Shot At</b>
<b>Act</b>	Going to war, defending against enemy attacks
<b>Actor</b>	Franklin *Artifact presented: <i>picture, a friend with skull and crossbones glass eye</i>
<b>Scene</b>	The rooftops, sand, grit and roads with IED risk throughout Iraq
<b>Agency</b>	US Army, unit level scout cavalry
<b>Purpose</b>	Armed forces protection and interrupting enemy infiltration

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Franklin looks up, pauses as he recalls his first combat deployment. He begins, “I was already in Iraq at one year [from my first day in the Army]. We didn’t know which part of Iraq we were going too... we just didn’t know. [Then] we found out... that’s the scary part. Maybe 20 miles right off of the Euphrates, right outside of Baghdad. It’s as dangerous as it can get. It was intimidating, the fear of the unknown. However, we got settled in, we did the right seat, left seat [with the unit that was leaving]. Several of the guys [in that unit I actually knew], I went to basic training with [them].”

Franklin paused with solemn expression on his face. He explained, “One of those guys I went to basic training with committed suicide... after he got back. I remember he was terrified during that time-period when I saw him. He lost three close friends on that deployment. He had a lot of issues, [later I heard] he had been lit on fire in one of the IED attacks. He had burn injuries, just never recovered from that.”

Franklin leaned back as he continued, “I knew what we were getting into was dangerous; I knew that for sure. When you go into certain areas, you’re probably going to get shot at. [Especially] at the bazaars and the markets... we were [always] at risk for taking an IED attack. All [our unit did] was kick in doors. We kicked in doors 300 days out of the 365 days.” Franklin shakes his head as he states, “[We were there for] 15 months. But, we were thinking we were going to be there for only a year. Then at month nine, they told us we had been extended... a pretty big kick in the guns. It was a big morale buster.”

Even with the morale setback due to the extended combat mission, Franklin did have the luck to reacquaint himself with a young woman from his hometown. They both used internet communication, corresponding daily using MSN messenger. This interpersonal exchange provided solace to Franklin during the long and unforgiving days in the Iraqi warzone.

The dangers he and his unit faced daily were real. The dismounted foot patrols throughout the villages were always a risky venture. Franklin explains, “We were headed down through this palm grove, we were in single file. You’re always told and taught to step where the person in front of you stepped. So, the first guy in front of you might get blown up... [but] if he doesn’t, then everyone else should be okay.”

He squints his eyes as he explains, “So I walked where the guy in front of me walked and Murphy was five or six yards behind me, and he didn’t walk where I walked. He stepped on a dismounted IED, almost lost his leg. It knocks me flat on my face. So, [it’s] 2:00 a.m. you can’t see anything, I’m covered in a cloud of dust. I’m yelling out,

“Murph... Murph... where you at?” I can hear him moaning like, ‘Oh shit... my fucking leg is on fire.’ I got up... ran over to him as everybody else you know... hits the ground waiting on a secondary attack. I just grabbed him, dragging him over to the trees. That’s when we took small arms fire. Had I not pulled him out... he probably would have been shot right there, because [the enemy] were watching.” Franklin proudly holds up an Army Commendation Medal. He explains the award citation was earned for running into harm’s way to save his fellow soldier. He smiles as he describes how he felt after receiving the medal, “Oh, yea, this was awesome!”

Franklin goes on to describe another tragic event. He states, “We were stopping cars and searching vehicles. [Which] is probably ten times more dangerous than raiding houses [and kicking doors in]. Stopping cars is the most dangerous thing you can do in country. Any police officer in America will tell you that. [One day while] I was on rooftop duty, over watching. My section sergeant, Sergeant White and his gunner, Sergeant Turmeric along with Private Fuller stopped a car and two military aged males got out. [So there] we have two seasoned [NCO’s]... and a buck private. I was over watching [from the rooftop when] Private Fuller turns his body to look at Sergeant White, when he turns back around he’s got a 45 [pistol] pointed in his face. The guy fired, Fuller fell face down on the ground, this guy then turned to Sergeant Turmeric and shot him in the eye and opened fire on Sergeant White who is inspecting the vehicle. I’m trying to make accurate shots [at these guys]. Then the other guy grabbed Sergeant Turmeric’s weapon and started firing at the rooftop. I am taking cover [because now] he’s shooting at me. As for Sergeant White... the bullet went through his back and hit him in the heart. [I

believe] he was dead before he hit the ground. Then those guys [pulled White's body from the car and] jumped in the vehicle [and drove off].”

Franklin describes the frantic response following the shootings. He asserts, “Everybody started running, we called Med Evac. [First thing, we can see that Private Fuller was not dead], but it looked like it... I mean the guy put [the pistol] right to his face [but must have] missed him by millimeters. [Sadly], Sergeant White was dead. Our medic did CPR on him for 25 minutes waiting on the Med Evac. It was fruitless, never a pulse or breathing. Sergeant Turmeric was unconscious laying on the ground... was still breathing [and] was choking on his Copenhagen. I just remember rolling him over and scooping the dip out of his lips... he was gurgling. I just focused on what I had to do in the moment. We put them on the Med Evac... both of them; we put them on the bird.”

With sadness in his voice, Franklin explains, “[Afterward], we walked back to the patrol base, with blood all over us. We sat around, and we cried. We told the story, and we cried some more. We got relieved to go back [to our main base]; they wanted us to have some time off [so we could meet with chaplains]. My faith is probably what got me through without having some sort of residual PTSD. My faith is what kept me strong... but it was bad. When someone dies, they're just gone. That's such a strange thing... they are just gone. We had to clean out Sergeant White's locker. He was the only fatality in my platoon. [Now, the good news was] even though Sergeant Turmeric got shot in his eye, the bullet stopped just millimeters into his brain. He went to Walter Reed Hospital [for treatment] and he's fine today. He's got a skull and crossbones fake eye. We got to see him when we got back from deployment.”

Franklin then remarked on the escalation of combat encounters during deployment. He states, “It’s summertime now and we went from a fire fight a week to a fire fight a day. I mean we are getting [enemy] contact. One night, we were on a raid, it was four a.m. and I was standing on the road by some chain-link fence... palm branches in the way. Some guy in a house, that was about to be raided... came out the front door and shot me in the head. He just shot me in the top of my helmet. The bullet went through and through... the top of my helmet. Two or three inches lower and it would’ve probably caught me in my skull.”

He elaborates, “It jerked me sideways. I jumped to the ground and rolled over. I thumped him with a 203 grenade from my M4 [rifle], peppered him pretty good. He probably got shot by six guys... over 180 times from like 30 yards away. They shot him until he didn’t have any blood left to bleed. I didn’t personally kill him, but I shot him. I was pissed... he got the jump on me. We were pretty good, [but] I couldn’t see through the palm branches and that guy got me. I’m an action junkie... I kinda liked it. Honestly... that sounds sick right? (Franklin laughs). Got a new helmet, didn’t let me keep [my old helmet]. They wanted to study it for ballistics. I’m like, ‘come on man... you don’t get shot in the head every day.’”

Franklin’s cavalry unit had been in Iraq for a total of 15 months when they finally redeployed back to Alaska. He explains, “We left in phases. My platoon didn’t leave all at once. I was the youngest guy in my platoon. So, I got told to leave first. I kind of was happy to go home but at the same time the other guys [were still there]. But... everyone was back by Thanksgiving. Oh man, I [ate] a good Thanksgiving dinner [that year].”

Franklin smiled as he playfully taps his stomach. He then looked up to reflect and said, “I mean... I grew up for sure. Definitely grew me up... definitely more mature.”

**Franklin, end of scene two, pentadic ratios.** The two primary ratios noted in the above drama are that of *agent/act*, followed by ratio *scene/agent*:

- The *agent* is involved in the *act* of being a shooter, under enemy fire, accomplishes the *act* of performing basic first aid for a wounded friend.
- The *agent* participates in the *act* of neutralizing an enemy after being shot in the helmet. The *agent* admits to the *act* of shooting the enemy but believes that his *act* did not kill the shooter.
- The *scene* in Iraq proves to be dangerous for the soldiers; the *agent* fears the unknown threats that await him in the local Iraqi villages. Yet, in the same *scene*, the *agent* describes the brush with death as an exhilarating experience.
- The *scene* in Iraq is violent with constant enemy attacks, the *agent* performs exceptionally well under pressure, suppresses personal fear to save lives.

Table 4.13

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<b>Scene 3</b>	<b>It Was Only Us; We Were a Hundred Miles From Anything</b>
<b>Act</b>	Marriage, having a baby, deploying back to war
<b>Actor</b>	Franklin * Artifact presented: <i>picture, military friend wounded in action, in hospital</i>
<b>Scene</b>	From Alaska to Afghanistan; a dirty, desolate and dangerous place
<b>Agency</b>	US Army, unit level scout cavalry
<b>Purpose</b>	Provide on the ground enforcement of the US government infiltration

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After returning from Iraq, Franklin reached out to the young woman that he conversed with daily during the Iraq deployment. He was grateful for her kindness, warmth and steady communication. Franklin smiles as he explains, “Two weeks later I flew her up to Alaska for a visit, she was there for nine days. We decided we wanted to get married. I went [home] on leave a few weeks after that, we got married December 29th, [2007]. She sold her horses (he smiles broadly) ... that’s how I knew she loved me and she moved to Alaska. My wife got pregnant pretty quick after we got married. My son was three months old when I deployed to [Afghanistan] in February 2009.”

He said, “[Now life was different for me] big time! Actually, the second deployment was [also] very different. There was no kicking in doors... we didn’t raid any houses. More [of the] hearts and minds kind of stuff. In Iraq, we saw probably 150 firefights but in Afghanistan, we probably saw 10. However, those 10 were straight up battles; like a war battle... not a bunch of guys running around with weapons. [This time]

no... no fatalities, not in my troop anyway. We did get hit with IEDs but we had better trucks. There were several times we got our 25,000-pound [truck] lifted over five feet off the ground. You'd get out, the gas tank's blown off and the wheels are gone. You just burn the truck down and move onto the next one. It was a bad outpost. It was only 80 of us [and] we were 100 miles from anything. That's why between deployments the Army sent me to EMT-B school in Alaska. We still had medics; it wasn't my job to do anything with that, [just to make me a more fortified first responder]. All the guys had [their one] extra training thing, because it was a very remote [combat tour]."

Although Franklin had additional first responder training, he stated, "I really didn't get to use my [new] skills much... but the medic would help by talking to me about stuff." Then Franklin leans forward with a sense of urgency. He declares, "Our medic was blown up... three months into the tour. He had a severe laceration all the way down his neck." He then gestures with his hands, making a large circle as he describes the medic's facial swelling. He explains, "[His face] was this big within a minute, he couldn't breathe, I was just holding pressure on his neck... he was bleeding out, it was gushing out of his neck. I mean it almost cut his head off. That's the worst injury I've ever seen. But, he lived." To further illustrate the extent of the injuries, Franklin holds up a picture of the wounded medic. He said, "This is Hank, with his brother. This is when he was recovering at Walter Reed [Army Hospital]. It hit him, it blew him up... you can see his neck." Franklin explains that he and Hank still stay in contact, using Facebook. He then conveys, "Yep, [after that happened] we had to get a new medic."



While in Afghanistan, Franklin did not have steady communication with his wife. This made his separation from her and his infant son even more difficult and lonely. He describes, “We didn’t have internet there. We had a telephone booth and you’d get pay cards. A lot of times, [the telephone] didn’t even work. [I think] it was broken half of the year. [When possible], we would talk every three weeks... I’m missing home big time!”

During this deployment, the separation from his family caused Franklin to contemplate his future affiliation with the military. He expresses, “A lot of the guys I went to Iraq [and Afghanistan] with are now special forces. Some of them are married, unmarried and married again. Now it’s time [for me] to make a career choice. I was still in Afghanistan, and I knew I was going to get out in a couple of months. The whole point of joining the military was to go to college. I wanted to go to school from the beginning. [Like I said], when I deployed my kid was three months old and when I got back he was over a year old. So, having kids and stuff just exacerbated that. I knew I didn’t want to be cop... was tired of getting shot at and being in danger. I didn’t want my kids to grow up without a dad. Since I grew up hunting and fishing I was thinking maybe about becoming a game warden.” Franklin was resolved in his decision on exiting the Army and going to college.

**Franklin, end of scene three, pentadic ratios.** The two primary ratios noted in the above drama are that of *agent/scene*, followed by ratio *agent/act*:

- The *agent* deploys to Afghanistan, and in the *scene*, the risk to his Army unit is high due to the low number of troops left to guard a remote unfortified compound.

- The *agent* is in a *scene* poorly supported in terms of force protection with unreliable communication technology, lowering morale and exacerbating the sense of separation.
- The *agent* intuitively *acts*, applying direct pressure to the hemorrhaging medic; the *agent's act* helped save the injured soldier from exsanguinating from his wounds.
- The *agent* is aware that the time to *act* on the future has arrived, the *agent acts* on this decision, advocating for self and family, exiting the military to find a new career.

Table 4.14

Scene 4	<b>Nursing is Never Something I Thought About</b>
<b>Act</b>	Leaving the military, choosing a career in nursing
<b>Actor</b>	Franklin
<b>Scene</b>	Alaska and returning to central Texas
<b>Agency</b>	A local university
<b>Purpose</b>	To build a new career, adding meaning by caring for patients

Franklin's unit arrived back to Alaska after being gone for over a year. He was delighted to be back with his wife and son. Franklin was motivated to begin out-processing from the Army. He had exceeded his required military service obligation by four months due to the previous deployment. During the transitional process of separating from the military, Franklin's wife became pregnant with their second child. To assist with

their return to Texas, his wife's family was able to assist with housing and childcare. Their long-awaited homecoming occurred in late spring of 2010. Franklin adds, "We stayed at my wife's parents' house for like two months. I [just] wanted to get to know my son. So, I basically spent the summer just enjoying my son. We had her parents there... so that was fun."

Franklin candidly shares the process used in selecting his ensuing colligate career. He explains, "[I thought about becoming a game warden], I also thought I was going to become a firefighter and do some paramedic-type training. But we had another baby [on the way] and now I've got a whole family to support, maybe 35 grand a year doesn't quite cut it. As I struggled with what I wanted to do, [my wife] made the suggestion of nursing. The nursing thing isn't something I ever thought about. I guess I had the stereotypical [beliefs], 'This is a female's profession.'"

Nonetheless, Franklin began to imagine nursing as a career. He reflects, "When she said nursing, it just made me think about the training I had and the things I had seen. [I remember an event in Iraq], Al-Qaeda was shooting off a lot of mortars [and] it was early morning. They brought in five or six local nationals that were injured. The medic was just over whelmed. There was a lady with shrapnel wounds, a couple of [guys] that been shot in the arms, legs [and] a couple of kids."

Franklin illustrates the unfolding scene as he explains, "A baby had caught shrapnel to the top of his head and was just kind of pulsating. There was a kid who had a broken shin, he had a bandage wrapped around it and the medic gave him some morphine. Almost immediately, [the kid] was in respiratory distress... he just couldn't

breathe. I told the medic about it and he said, ‘just look him over head to toe.’ So... I did and felt a wet spot when I rolled him over. I could see a puffy white piece of lung sticking out on his left side. I found the entry hole and exit, so I covered them both with an occlusive dressing. I took my finger and pushed his lung back inside... like a tiny marshmallow. I was taught as a combat lifesaver that this was a pneumothorax... so I did a needle decompression on his chest. Almost immediately, you could hear the air rush out of it. He just looks up at me saying, ‘Shukran habibi.’ That means ‘thank-you my love’, but not like my love, like my friend or my brother (he smiles shyly). So, that was pretty awesome! That was really cool. That was probably the biggest moment for me on the deployment... maybe my adult life.” He further reflects, “It was at that moment I didn’t think beyond that, every single thing after that moment tied back into that moment. I mean, everything kind of ties in... we saved Hank’s life, Turmeric’s and Murph who may have died from secondary injury.”

After reflecting, Franklin now appreciates the balance and rationale for embracing nursing as a new career. He states, “Just that thought, the thrill and excitement... that’s what made me think about nursing. Just helping people, acting quickly... saving someone’s life is a big deal. Hank would be dead for sure. Life changes you a little bit; it was almost like magic, know what I mean? I had been kicking in doors and raiding houses for most my career... being a nurse would be way more rewarding for sure. I really thought [nursing] sounds pretty cool, I could do this.”

Franklin is committed to the idea of becoming a nurse. Considering timelines, he thought about applying for a two-year associate or diploma-nursing program. He

explains, “My wife said, ‘just suck it up and get your BSN straight way.’ Yeah, I knew I needed to get my degree. I wanted my degree. So, she was definitely right. (He smiles) We decided to go with the BSN route. So... I signed up for all my perquisite classes that I could get. We figured [with the degree] I would have [more opportunities] in nursing leadership roles.” Franklin along with his wife’s assistance applied to numerous baccalaureate-nursing programs throughout Texas. He was accepted to his nursing program of choice at a local university. Franklin was confident that nursing would offer long-term career satisfaction, and pragmatically he desired an income capable of supporting his ever-growing family.

**Franklin, end of scene four, pentadic ratios.** The two primary ratios noted in the above drama are that of *agent/purpose*, followed by ratio *agent/scene*:

- The *agent* simply needed to fulfill his long-held desire and *purpose* of going to college and earning a degree.
- Initially the *agent* struggled to define his true intrinsic *purpose*, wanting to earn a degree that would satisfy his wish of achieving significance and meaning.
- The *agent* articulates in this *scene* what led to his decision in becoming a nurse. The *agent* assisted the army medic in treating multiple injured Iraqi civilians when he haphazardly performed a lifesaving procedure on a young Iraqi child.
- After leaving the Army, the *agent* in this *scene* has an anticipated immersive occurrence, being home, having the opportunity to finally know his own child.

*Table 4.15*

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<b>Scene 1</b>	<b>Send Me to the Front</b>
<b>Act</b>	Joining and becoming a Marine
<b>Actor</b>	Vince
<b>Scene</b>	Joining the Marines and then 9/11 happens
<b>Agency</b>	The Marine Corps
<b>Purpose</b>	To serve because all the men of his family have served before him

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In January of 2001, George W. Bush was sworn in as the 43rd President of the United States of America. This is the same month and year that nineteen-year-old Vince enlisted into the US Marine Corps-reserves. He joined the military nine months before the 9/11 terrorist attacks occurred. Vince explains, “I joined because it is expected of me in my family.” He offered the rationale for this familial expectation, “I was born in the US, when I was two, they shipped me back to be raised in Taiwan. Then at about six, I really don’t know how old I was when I came back, [but] I had to learn English as my third language. [Actually], I had to learn both Minnan and English. I already spoke Hakka and Mandarin. My upbringing in Taiwanese culture, all men are expected to enlist in the service. All the men in my family had served, they served in Taiwan.”

Vince implied that his mother also expected him to honor the family tradition of service and join the military. He explains, “It was one of my earliest memories, I was raised with toy guns.” He also shared that his mother wanted him to join a non-direct

combat branch of service, such as the Coast Guard. However, Vince wanted to be regarded as a warrior. He offered, “I think I was nineteen, my mom insisted that I at least do some college before [joining]. I did one quarter of college. After I met my promise to my mother... I went. I felt, hey, I’m the first-born son of a first-born son and it is incumbent on me to demonstrate the faith and loyalty of our family. [I enlisted] in the branch that promised only pain and suffering, I joined the Marine Corps.”

Vince states, “When 9/11 kicked off I was eager to deploy. I had come home [from boot camp] because I enlisted in the reserves. I just went back to the University of California when my unit told me, ‘Hey look, get ready, we’re going to Afghanistan.’ This is the end of 2002, beginning of 2003. [However,] I am a weather guy, I’m the guy in the rear... I said, ‘This is bullshit, this is not what I signed up for, fucking send me to the front!’ I was seeking out a deployment, a combat deployment. I [found] a unit that deployed every six months, an [infantry] reconnaissance unit, so I worked out; I did as much as I could, so I could sway them. An Intelligence officer [finally] took notice of me, he says, ‘you can deploy with us, we have nobody in intel.’ I said, ‘I’d rather be a reconnaissance Marine, sir.’”

**Vince, end of scene one, pentadic ratios.** The two primary ratios noted in the above drama are that of *agent/purpose*, followed by ratio *scene/act*:

- The *agent* enlisted into the Marine Corps prior to 9/11 with the *purpose* of meeting a cultural tradition of serving in the military, as his family had done
- The *agent* demonstrated a willingness to suffer by joining the Marines with the *purpose* of fulfilling his familial commitment as the first-born son.

- The *scene* involves the 9/11 terrorist attack occurring with the US being in turmoil which fortified the *agent's* resolve in wanting to go into combat.
- The *scene* depicts the *agent* in as a weather station operator. As the *scene* then evolves, the *agent* became a combat infantry Marine so he could deploy.

Table 4.16

<b>Scene 2</b>	<b>The Marine Goes to Combat</b>
<b>Act</b>	The Marine infantry unit deployed to Iraq
<b>Actor</b>	Vince
<b>Scene</b>	A small nondescript forward Marine base that encounters enemy contact
<b>Agency</b>	The Marine Corps
<b>Purpose</b>	To keep peace and locate enemy provocateurs

In late 2004, Vince finally had the opportunity to prove his authenticity as a warrior. He declared, “They came and said to me, ‘Do you want to go to war?’ and I was like, ‘Fuck yeah, I want to go to war!’ We deployed the following January in 2005 and staged in Iraq. [I was now] a sergeant E-5, I had my own squad. We ended up at some military crossroads [location], 30 minutes away from reinforcements or support if we needed any. We lost a lot of Marines by the end of our six-month deployment, at least a quarter of us were either killed or wounded. It is easy to criticize leaders when you’re not in a command situation. They call it what... the fog of war? It’s too easy to blame leaders when people die. Nobody wants their Marines to die... nobody.



Vince's mood suddenly changes, he sits up and grabs the arms of his chair. He seethingly voices his contempt between clinched teeth, "I'm reluctant to throw criticism on anyone... except people who are in my direct experience. The platoon sergeant over me was not... (pauses and breaths out before continuing), to illustrate his leadership style, his form of punishment was to play 'fuck, fuck games.' He would have us run through passages, areas that were open, that had mortar attacks. At hours known to have more attacks. The insurgents were located across the Euphrates River and they would shoot mortars at us. He took it out on me and my Marines... I really have an issue with that. I fucking hate... fucking hate that guy... not a good guy! It's not the right thing to do, you treat prisoners better than that... come on! What recourse did I have in the middle of combat? [I guess] in times of war, you can abuse your Marines and get away with it. Some people did it without justification."

He slightly relaxes his grip but remains upright as he describes the attacks his unit endured during the deployment. He states, "A lot of deaths were [caused by] suicide bombers. [It was mostly] suicide bombers and IEDs that killed us. My guys, like in my squad, nobody died, some were injured, others were just grazed by mortars. I didn't go through as much as a lot of the other guys. For me, war... come on, people are going to die in war. [I] accepted the fact that I was going to see trauma and heavy casualties. Despite that, the ones that really bothered me were the ones who I felt I owed. Yeah, I had really good friends who died. One guy, Larry, he gave me his hydration pack, it was a Camelbak, because he thought I needed it more than he did. The next thing I know, he [and my other friend Cedric] gets blown up by a vehicle borne IED. I was like fuck man!

That crushed me; [afterward] I carried his water bag with me [always]. The other guy, Cedric, we planned to go to medical school together. [Sadly] they both died on Mother's Day."

Vince goes on to describe the fate of two more of his fellow Marines, one of which he felt he owed his life. Vince revealed that his friend Stoney, the Marine sniper, once provided cover for him during a mortar attack. Vince frowns as he details how Stoney and the other sniper were killed, "The snipers, the sniper teams... were being inserted at the same time, at the same place, every fucking day. They [even] told the command that perhaps that this was not the wisest strategic decision. Well, they [both] got killed. So, out of three sniper teams, we lost two entire teams. That was fucking stupid... yeah, they [all] meant a lot to me.

Vince divulges one more personal account from his deployment. One of Vince's close friends, Schloss, a Marine in his unit, was going through a bitter divorce. Vince tried to support Schloss, but his friend remained angry and withdrawn. Vince said, "He kept on volunteering for dangerous missions and eventually he got killed, his [death] wish finally came true." Vince confided that he was unable to offer his friend the support needed to deter his willingness to die in combat and carries a sense of personal guilt.

The deaths of Vince's friends and the other Marines left him feeling numb and angry for the remainder of his deployment. He pronounces, "It made us more aggressive. We wanted more destruction and quick! Anger was very encouraged in service. In war, anger was a very useful tool to stay alive. In combat for me, I got every extreme emotion I could think of. That was awesome, fucking awesome. Sometimes the shock of the

explosions was so overwhelming I couldn't move my legs. Sometimes I barely had the strength to hold onto my own sphincter muscles, so I would not shit myself. My courage was inconsistent at best. Courage is... even when you're scared... when I was scared, I'll do whatever I needed to do when it threatened my life [or others lives] because it was necessary. At the time my buddies died... when they died, I embraced my own... actually... I thought of myself as dead already. [I did this] so I could cope with doing what I [still] needed to do.”

**Vince, end of scene two, pentadic ratios.** The two primary ratios noted in the above drama are that of *act/agent*, followed by ratio *scene/agent*:

- The *act* is the deployment which shaped the experience that the *agent* endured, where the hardship and reality of war was fully realized.
- The *act* includes the combat environment in which the *agent's* sense of warrior ethos is now challenged and questioned.
- The *scenes* where the leadership, especially the sergeant, are described is where the *agent* maintains feelings of hate and perhaps moral injury due to the senseless risk they endured.
- The noted leadership's lack of strategic foresight and safety protocols in the *scene* left the *agent* feeling as if the lives of his friends and fellow Marines were needlessly lost in combat.

Table 4.17

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<b>Scene 3</b>	<b>The Warrior Questions the Ethos of War, Leaves the Marine Corps</b>
<b>Act</b>	The Marine infantry unit deployed to Iraq
<b>Actor</b>	Vince *Artifact presented: <i>An upper arm tattoo with 4 KIA friends' names</i>
<b>Scene</b>	A small nondescript forward Marine base that encounters enemy contact
<b>Agency</b>	The Marine Corps
<b>Purpose</b>	To keep peace and locate enemy provocateurs

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After six months of combat, Vince returned home from Iraq. As he speaks, he appears grim and pensive as he contemplates the loss of life and collective impact of war. He testifies, “We, [our Marine unit] had 48 dead, yeah, outright killed, in six months, not including the ones with traumatic brain injuries.” Vince shakes his head, leaning forward as he explains the long-term cost of the war for the Marines that were injured. He describes, “And the ones that were wounded, [for example a buddy of mine] died of his wounds in 2016, 11 years man. His brain was so bad he had to be hospitalized, he was trached and everything, man. He was in the medical ICU for the majority of his fucking surviving life. I couldn’t take care of him, I couldn’t do shit. I felt too guilty for being okay. This is actually one of the major impetus for me to go back, [thinking] maybe I need to do healthcare.”

Vince further reflects on his own conversion from that of warrior to that of becoming a self-described pacifist. He explains, “I made it back home, I’m done. I’m done destroying. It doesn’t make any sense to destroy. Dude, the purpose for the military

is to destroy. Guns are for killing and destroying. Guns aren't there to just look fucking pretty. Okay? I don't want anything to do with that anymore. [And the people of Iraq], I feel horrible... you have occupiers on your land, these oppressors, okay oppressor is not the right word, these people try to come into your home, what are you gonna do?"

Vince's mood seems to lighten as he defines his positionality on war, "I had to step back and [see] that destruction's not the way to go. [This is why] mothers are held in such high esteem, because they symbolize creation. Why is it such a beautiful thing? It's because that centralizes the creation of life. Even though I was raised Christian, my affinity to traditional religion waned as my dedication to humanity increased. Love for people, that increased by a lot. I didn't know what love was until I was ready to lay my life down for a friend. That's real love, that's a biblical passage... [based on] a friend laying down his own life."

Though Vince used Zen like imagery in his reasoning, his own emotional residue from the warzone becomes apparent. He describes the lack of closure after his friends were killed with a lingering sense of loss. He revealed, "Not seeing them [again], that's what's bothered me. My dreams would always be of one of the four of them. I'd always be close enough to save them, but I'm too slow. I always dream about the opportunity to save them, but I'm never be able to save them. That bothered me like hell. So, I drank a lot... [meaning] I drank a lot. I gained... I gained a lot of weight. I drank and ate a lot, I called it my celebration weight. It was to celebrate and enjoy the life that my brothers didn't get to have. It sucked."

Vince pulls up the sleeve of his t-shirt, revealing a tattoo of four black cursive names across his left bicep. He states, “yeah it’s the four guys’ names, I had it put on right after I got back from Iraq. I was like, fuck it dude, I’m adding your [names] in ink. I want to say the [two top] most painful experiences in my life is... number two, is my Marines dying and number one is my Marines dying, but I’m alive. I felt like I was angry all the time. My family tells me I was weird when I got back. I paced the house; I was just looking around to make sure it was safe. The first night or two I slept with a rifle.”

Exiting the Marines Corps was a logical if not restorative choice for Vince. He explains, “I was in the Marines, six years total. I was officially discharged in January of 2006. I was proud of being Marine, but not in the way we were used. It’s not defense... it’s NOT defense. I felt like we were misused. [Leaders] who don’t have any skin the game and they tell you to play the game... I can’t abide by that. They don’t know what it costs. You don’t know the cost until you’re there man. Or maybe... at least work in a hospital and see what it’s really like to [grasp] the cost of war. I felt, yeah, I felt like really disgusted. I don’t feel like I did anything wrong, I just feel like... I don’t know. Yeah, I was done!”

**Vince, end of scene three, pentadic ratios.** The two primary ratios noted in the above drama are that of *agent/agency*, followed by ratio *agent/purpose*:

- The *agent* takes a dominant position in this ratio, questioning the function of the *agency*, of both the Marine Corps and the executive branch of the US government.

- The *agent* is vocally frustrated with the *agency's* execution of the war. The *agent* describes the occupation of Iraq unfavorably with the costs measured in lives lost, ongoing suffering of the injured veterans, and being the lackeys of the *agency*.
- The *agent* again, affirms that the *purpose* of a military is to destroy but questions that need to destroy and kill in the occupation of Iraq. The *agent* deems that the cost being lives lost supplants the *purpose* of this war, being unjustified.
- The *agent* is angry that the *purpose* of war is poorly understood, nor is its' impact felt by those that perpetuate it, never knowing the actual cost for those in uniform.

Table 4.18

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Scene 4	<b>Where Do I Go from Here?</b>
<b>Act</b>	Higher education becomes the path of redemption
<b>Actor</b>	Vince
<b>Scene</b>	One higher education program after another until there is finally a match.
<b>Agency</b>	Higher education, function of the universities
<b>Purpose</b>	To find and understand the calling of new a career in nursing

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After leaving the Marine Corps, Vince returned to higher education, hoping college would be his pathway to self-enlightenment. He now had a purpose, a sense of duty and commitment. He said, "I just feel like I gotta make this count, at the time it was

for my buddies.” Vince stated that he and Cedric had talked about going to medical school together. He utters, “After Cedric died it just didn’t feel right to go through with medical school. [So], I switched from chemistry, to economics with the intent of going to law school. I graduated [from my] undergrad in 2009.”

Vince leans back as he postulates, “I thought that I could make a big difference. Instead of pulling a trigger, I’d help to... (he sits forward) I wanted to put criminals behind bars. I ended up going to law school on a full scholarship and my college sweetheart [went] to law school with me. We ended up going to law school together [but a situation occurred].” Vince pauses and becomes sullen as he explains, “A classmate had raped her, she was emotionally... just shattered. I ended up spending more time trying to help her out than on my books. I was angry, but I was just focused on taking care of her. After a year, it was just too much. We had to leave.” Vince explained that the law school attempted to diminish the severity of the incident. Feeling defeated, they both decided to move on and away.

Vince offers an insightful reflection. He explains, “I found that caring for someone was much more fulfilling. It really brought out a nurturing, compassionate side of me and I [became] less angry. I really didn’t expect that. I did not expect that. I thought I would have less patience, be more tired and stuff, but... yeah, I felt stronger or better. I still drank as much, but I would (he pauses) just to sleep.”

Vince appreciated his newly discovered nurturing side and sought closure by visiting the father of one of his fallen friends. He states, “I came back to visit with Larry’s [dad]. I brought the Camelbak to his dad. I went, ‘Hey look this belonged to your



son. He gave it to me.’ He hugged me, he said, ‘It’s not your fault,’ and then he says, ‘Hey, I love you.’ I took it to heart; we both cried. I felt fucking weird at first. I was just... I felt buzzed. You know that adrenaline buzz? Yeah, I got that buzz. We still have a relationship to this day; he’s fucking awesome. Actually, he’s the one that kind of turned me on to loving people. So, I took what he said to heart and based on how I felt when I was taking care of [my girlfriend], I ended up wanting to do more [in] healthcare.”

Vince further dissected his meeting with Larry’s father. He said after the initial encounter, they talked more in-depth, especially about his response to the deaths of his friends. Vince states, “Larry’s [dad] actually helped me, he said, ‘You need to go see someone. Just go to the VA. Just sign in, just do what you need to do and just come back out. If nothing is going on, then nothing is going on, but you need to go to the VA.’ This guy was a sniper in Vietnam, so I imagine he went through a lot of shit. I actually... I finally decided, okay, I should go file. Even my [girlfriend, now] fiancé, was saying, ‘Hey, you really should go, because this waking up thing... it’s not normal.’ I was like ‘okay.’ Sometimes I’d wake up thinking I was on fire. I’d wake up thinking I’m on post, I’d get hit by a rocket, I’m on fire. If it gets hot enough, I get confused and have dreams.”

Vince signed into the VA hospital for a mental health screening. At his appointment, he discussed his reoccurring dreams of not being able to save his friends, being under rocket attacks, his anger issues and the drinking. Vince states, “Doc diagnosed me, said I had PTSD. Took them about a three and half hours, I started bawling by the end of the interview. She was fucking good, but I was pissed. I was pissed

when she said I had it. But I also felt relief. I was so mad. I'm pretty sure I was visibly upset, I just stormed out. I just left, yeah, I mean, what am I going to do to fix it? There's nothing to do. I [eventually] went back, and I asked, 'well what is there to do?' and they were like, 'have you tried dream journals?' No medicine, no drugs, it was more like journals and stuff like that. Hey, I [now] have a VA card for [PTSD]."

Vince offers that other Marine friends diagnosed with PTSD, the ones from his old unit, had committed suicide. He shrugs his shoulders and says, "It just didn't make sense to me. Well, if he was suffering bad enough to kill himself, at least it's over now. It would actually kind of go against [my ideals] if I killed myself. I imagine my four buddies would look at me and be like, 'What the fuck? You wasted it!'" Vince reported that after his diagnosis of PTSD his symptoms lessened over time.

Vince was evolving, better prepared to move forward with his life and career choices. In January of 2011, he and his now wife, moved from their previous school in the Texas Panhandle to central Texas. Vince again was considering healthcare, other than medicine, as a potential career path. Initially, Vince thought he wanted to become a pharmacist since he had a strong undergraduate background in chemistry. He worked as a part-time pharmacy technician while taking his prerequisite college courses. Vince found that pharmacy, as a career, was not what he wanted after all. As a pharm-tech, he was able to observe direct patient care in the hospital setting and realized, "I wanted to do more bedside, I wanted to be more [on the] frontline. And I decided on nursing." However, Vince describes his initial ill-advised misogynistic views on nursing. He unabashedly expounds, "I knew enough to know that [nursing] was a women's job. I was

just [that] stereotypical. I thought that there's a reason why [only] 10 percent of nurses are men and they're not real men. That was my thought. It was very wrong. I was very, very wrong. And asshole-ish. Nurses are at the frontline [of healthcare]."

Vince explains that due to his family's cultural beliefs, his choice of nursing as a career would be frowned upon. He states, "I talked to my mom, I have a really good relationship with [her]. My mom understood the circumstances, so she was very supportive, she understood. She said, 'As long as you're happy, I'm happy.' I said, 'Hey, look, I want to do something that honors [my dead buddies'] memory, and I want to build and not destroy.' This went right into the core of building lives and helping people who really need help. If there is an afterlife, I can face it and say [to my buddies], 'Look assholes, I did good' and they'd be like... (Vince smiles) they'd just nod. I wanted to make the biggest impact with as little time possible." Vince was steadfast in his career choice to become a nurse. He applied and was accepted into a Bachelor of Science Nursing program at a local university in central Texas. He started the spring of 2013. His wife was also determined to study nursing and would be accepted into the same program the following year. This was something they felt compelled to do together. He smiled slightly, crossed his arms and stated, "We were doing [nursing school] for separate reasons, but together."

**Vince, end of scene four, pentadic ratios.** The two primary ratios noted in the above drama are that of *agent/purpose*, followed by ratio *agent/act*:

- The *agent* is adamant in his search for *purpose*, using higher education to discover a new service-based career that provides a sense of meaning and significance.
- The *agent* finds a calling and *purpose* in the field of nursing. The *agent* feels this career choice would merit his dead friends’ approval.
- The *agent* embraced the *act* of caring as a positive trait. The *agent* through the *act* of embracing his own vulnerabilities discovered a nurturing being within.
- The *agent* realizes that the *act* of caring within the realms of nursing, benefits both parties, the recipient of the care and the purveyor of the care.

*Lee – Bombs and Combat... Now I’m a Nurse: Dramatism Scenes Tables 4.19 thru 4.23*

*Table 4.19*

Scene 1	<b>Needed to Get Off the Rat Wheel</b>
<b>Act</b>	Joining the military to see the world
<b>Actor</b>	Lee
<b>Scene</b>	Small town, with little to no upward mobility
<b>Agency</b>	The US Air Force
<b>Purpose</b>	To build a military career as an ammunition specialist

The year is 1989, after 10 years of hostile occupation, the Soviet Union, depleted of resources withdraws from Afghanistan. Their global influence is fading, the Berlin Wall comes down, and the Cold War ends. It is during that November in 1989 that Lee’s narrative begins. At 18 years of age, Lee found himself at an impasse, feeling “locked in”

without opportunity. He explains, “[After high School] I was working as an electrician apprentice. [I] got tired of being in that small-town environment and wanted to break the cycle, get off the rat wheel and get out to see the world.”

Being hungry for adventure, Lee went to see the military recruiters and joined the U.S. Air Force. He states, “I was the first one in my family to join the military. I had two brothers and two sisters, [but] they all stayed right close to home. To be honest, if I hadn’t left town when I did, I’d probably be in jail... yeah, I was [becoming] a hoodlum.” With a half-smile on his face, Lee describes how the Air Force recruiter’s pitch went, “I was supposed to be an electrician in the Air Force, I got in, and I realized the military didn’t work nothing like that. [Instead] I ended up being a munitions systems specialist. I went to basic, then six weeks of technical munitions school... [after that] I got my first assignment. I would be going to Korea.” Lee further describes, “A remote tour is totally different than any other type of [assignment]. It was a close-knit group, [they become] the only family you got, I remember it being a huge adjustment for me.”

While Lee was overseas, during the fall of 1990, Iraq invaded the small oil rich nation of Kuwait. In response, the U.S. led a multinational coalition into the Gulf War, known as Desert Storm, which began in mid-January 1991. Lee explains, “It kicked off while I was in Korea... pretty much missed the majority of that.” Reason being, the war was over in less than six weeks. A cease-fire was declared on 28 February 1991. Iraq withdrew all military forces from Kuwait and agreed to the stipulations set forth by the United Nations. This cease-fire would hold for a little more than a decade. During that

10-year period, Lee would continue to serve in his career field as a munitions inspector, earning the rank of sergeant, a non-commissioned officer (NCO) in the U.S. Air Force.

**Lee, end of scene one, pentadic ratios.** The two primary ratios noted in the above drama are that of *agency/act*, followed by ratio *agency/agent*:

- The *agent* has gumption, a curiosity that his small southern town cannot appease; with the *act* of joining the Air Force, the *agent* is able achieve his goal being the *act* of leaving home.
- The *agent* is close to his family/siblings, but the *act* of untold opportunity drove the *agent* to leave. The *agent* being the first to venture out, using the *act* of self-advocacy and autonomy.
- The *agency*, being the Air Force convinces the *agent* that he would become an electrician and once committed; the *agency* compels the *agent* to learn a different skill set.
- The *agency* never indicates that the *agent* may be stationed in remote overseas assignment, nor be moved from assignment to assignment, the *agent* is at the will of the *agency*.

Table 4.20

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<b>Scene 2</b>	<b>I Wanted to Go Special Ops</b>
<b>Act</b>	Joining the Special Operations Community
<b>Actor</b>	Lee *Artifact presented: <i>A picture of his special operations team</i>
<b>Scene</b>	Stagnation in career, needing a change in venue
<b>Agency</b>	U.S. Air Force, Special Operations Group
<b>Purpose</b>	To become an agent within the special operations in an elite fighting group

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Although skilled in his military vocation, Lee had become disillusioned with the monotony of his career field. He states, “I was just getting shoved here and there... I was pretty disgruntled. I was done with it. That’s when an E-8, [a senior master sergeant], really took an interest in me. He basically pulled me aside one day. He really wanted me to stay in the Air Force. He said, ‘How about I get you an assignment that you want?’ So, I made a deal with him that I would do it. I wanted to go Special Ops... Air Force Special Operations Command (AFSOC). [It was] inter-service, [not just Air Force], they had Green Berets, Rangers and what not.”

The senior master sergeant delivered on his promise. Lee was thrilled to be a member of the special operations group and fully re-engaged with his military career. He said, “We would all deploy and go down range together. I was happy, because I was actually somewhere I wanted to be.” Lee proudly shares a picture of his special operations crew. He keeps it as a special reminder of a different time and place that only he and the team can fully appreciate. Lee was very satisfied with life in AFSOC.

Nevertheless, he became preoccupied with a young woman while he was on assignment. She was also in the Air Force. Unsuspectingly, this special somebody would turn out to be his future wife. They married in 2000.

Lee also had academic aspirations. While assigned to AFSOC, he had the opportunity to attend classes at a local university. He states, “I was a bomb builder for god sakes and knew [one day] I’d need to make other arrangements. [So], I jumped into school, I got my Bachelor’s in Professional Aeronautics.” Lee felt as if things were finally going his way. He was enjoying his role in special operations, settling into married life and was pleased to have his college degree. However, his life as a special operations team member would be forever changed by the 9/11 terrorist attacks in 2001.

**Lee, end of scene two, pentadic ratios.** The primary ratio noted in the above drama is that of *agent/act*:

- At this point, the *agent* is disgruntled with his 10-year military career in the *act* of being a munitions specialist/inspector.
- The *agent* is preparing to exit service when the *act* of receiving a new career path occurred, renewing the *agent’s* engagement in the military.
- The *agent* changes his life through the *act* of joining AFSOC and entering into a personal relationship resulting in marriage.



Table 4.21

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<b>Scene 3</b>	<b>Nothing Really Feels Dangerous Until You Get Back and Reflect On It</b>
<b>Act</b>	Going to war
<b>Actor</b>	Lee
<b>Scene</b>	Deployment into combat, life on base involves death and dying
<b>Agency</b>	The Air Force, Special Operations Group
<b>Purpose</b>	Provide support of the ongoing combat operations in Iraq

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There was a swift military escalation following the 9/11 attacks. Within two years of the terrorist strikes, the U.S. was fighting wars in both Afghanistan and Iraq. The flurry of activity resulted in an increased rate of deployments for Lee and his special operations team. He proclaims that the operational tempo was thrilling, “I loved it. I liked the missions we had. I liked the excitement of it. When you deployed you were really in the thick of things. [I was] getting shot at and was building bombs that were [only] going one way. When we deployed, they put us far away from the main base. [We had all these explosives, so] in case something happens, we don’t take out the whole [place]. We’d get [incoming] rocket mortars and we would receive small arms fire. Man, we were mortared every day. We were out in [the middle of nowhere]... surrounded by minefields. At the time, I really liked it, but it’s kind of surreal, nothing seemed weird when you’re over there. Nothing really feels dangerous until you get back and start reflecting on it [and think], wow, that happened!”

Lee and his wife both wanted children. He states, “We were still kinda new with this whole marriage thing. The clock was ticking, every time you came back from deployment it was just a matter of time before you went downrange again. We had our first kid in 2005, and I deployed when she was a month old. The child part is really the piece that kinda was a game changer for me. Leaving to go down range again, yeah, it was a lot rougher than I had remembered in the past. The fact that I have a one-month old baby that I would like to get home to see and I’d like to be around for.”

During this time the war was escalating, more troops were being deployed and U.S. casualties were increasing. As a matter of policy the military was becoming more aggressive in its approach to the conflict, known as the *troop surge*. During Lee’s deployment, for the first time in his career, he was concerned about the possibility of dying in combat. He clarifies, “It was different for me in that sense... trying to stay safe, to get back to my kid. Then just the fact it was the closest to combat I’d ever been up to that point. We [now] had suicide bombers walking into the front gate of the base and taking people out, it was just crazy. [Where we were] in Afghanistan, it was the main hub in and out of there. We were pivotal in taking out Fallujah. [Meaning] we were in the thick of the shit there.”

Being reflective, Lee looks straight ahead and expresses, “There were a lot of Army guys getting killed. I mean the Army guys had it the worst. That was when [the war] was most unstable. They would bring the [dead army troops] up, and the [we] would line the streets and do the last ride, taking them to the aircraft that would take them home. It was the biggest impact; I would always remember participating in those. It just really

brought death to your door. It just brought it to reality... what's going on is real. It could be me, that's what I remember thinking."

He paused, seemingly to search for the right words, he continues, "I was going out to the flight line and hosing blood out of the aircraft, body parts... picking body parts out. Death was an everyday element there... [I guess that's] the best way to say it. You know, just surreal stuff. The Army had a MASH unit [and] that's where they would bring all of the injured from down range. They would call out to us, to help them turn the aircraft around. Not so much with the medical piece, because we weren't medical. We just move body parts, move bodies, just whatever needed to be done. Just being young and full of piss and vinegar, I just thought it was fun to be that close to what was going on. It took years later to realize the impact it had."

Lee described life as he returned from combat, "We would come home from deployment and get interviewed by a psychiatrist. He'd ask, 'Hey, do you have any effects?' We'd say, 'no.' Everybody would just tell him what he wanted to hear, just so we could get out on our leave. [Plus], we didn't want it to ground us from going on further deployments. It's just... it was rough, I mean coming back. I remember it would takes months to wind down after a deployment [from] being so hyper-aware. Obviously, it was [still] pretty cool. I mean cool by coming back to basically a kid that's 6 months old. Yeah, it was just [like] seeing her for the first time. It was good to just spend a lot of quality time with [my daughter]. And everything was going good with the wife too. Lo and behold, she got pregnant with our second child after I came back from that

deployment. My kids are right at two years apart, well the first two are and we had one more after that.”

**Lee, end of scene three, pentadic ratios.** The two primary ratios noted in the above drama are that of *scene/agent*, followed by ratio *act/scene*:

- The *scene* is vivid as the *agent* fears not returning home from combat to see his baby daughter again.
- The *scene* turns much darker as the narrative continues; as the *agent* reflects on his own mortality, the *agent* feels the weight of the reality and finality of death. The long-term impact of the *scene* has yet to be realized by the *agent*.
- The *act* is played out as the military personnel line the streets in the warzone, with the *scene* depicting the last tribute to their fallen comrades, solemnly escorted to their final flight home.
- The *act* of the wounded and dying troops arriving to the military hospital, the *scene* is pensive and brooding with described blood and death being the subject of the prevailing theme.

Table 4.22

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<b>Scene 4</b>	<b>I'll Sell Fruit on the Side of the Interstate Before I do Another Year</b>
<b>Act</b>	Frustration and interpersonal conflict, retiring from the Air Force
<b>Actor</b>	Lee
<b>Scene</b>	The non-stop operational tempo in the warzone, a bad assignment
<b>Agency</b>	The Air Force
<b>Purpose</b>	To leave the military in order to find a new career

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The ongoing deployments to the warzones continued. Lee alludes to the impact that his continuous absence would have on their marriage. He illustrates, “At this point, I was just kinda all over the place, as far as where I was deployed to. As soon as I’d land, I was bags packed for the next thing leaving. It started getting a little strange, not with the kids, but with the wife. There was never infidelity or anything like that... it was just different. We had started spending so much time away. That’s when I noticed it kind of just being different.”

Lee explained that at about 21 years of service, he was contemplating retirement from the military. He described his situation, “Strangely enough, [I wanted to get out] probably due to the lack of excitement, because at that point, I was no longer in special ops. Also, I was at a base that I really didn’t wanna be at in the first place. [We had] horrible leadership from the top down. It just permeated throughout the unit. I was just miserable, and the more rank I made the more detached I was from doing what I actually loved. I just hated it. I remember telling my wife, I was like, ‘You know what? I’ll sell

fruit on the side of the interstate before I do another year here.’ That was where my decision was made to just go ahead and retire. So I did it.”

Reaching the end of his military career, Lee submitted his retirement packet and separated from the Air Force in November of 2012. Lee describes his feelings, “I was burnt out on the military, I kind of had a bad taste in my mouth, to be honest. I was special ops for [almost] 15 years of my career. I had been spit out the other end of the machine after I retired. I just feel like we were used and discarded. When you get out of the military, you just feel like you were left twisting in the wind with the issues. (Lee pauses) I didn’t know it for a long time, the PTSD I had. At first, I didn’t know I had PTSD, hell, I didn’t even know what PTSD was. [It’s] the psychological luggage that I still carry around from the military days. I was just bitter because I... I don’t feel they treat veterans well. So, I wanted nothing to do with the military and wanted a fresh start.”

Lee reveals, “That was a hell of a transition that year. I retired and separated, then me and my wife we separated that same year. After I retired, it was a huge transition, because that’s all I’d ever known was the military. Once I retired, I just didn’t feel as useful as I used to be. I felt useless for quite a while” Lee slowly shaking his head with his eyes cast upward, he reiterates, “That was a hell of a year for me. So, the same year I retired, got divorced from my wife, meanwhile, I got a phone call from Georgia. They said I needed to come home right away. I knew it that wasn’t good. Turns out, Blaine, my oldest brother, had an aneurism. They said, he just showed up to work one morning with a bad headache, just leaned against the wall, was non-responsive and that was basically

the last he had done.” Lee pronounces, “Sure enough, he was on life support, and they were just basically keeping him alive until I could get to town.”

With the litany of unforeseen challenges during Lee’s transitional year, he initially struggled to cope with his new reality. He attests, “When Blaine died, I really turned my back on my faith. I grew up Baptist... I was just so mad that something like that could happen to such a great guy. I just remember being so angry at that time. [Actually, even before Blaine died] I just was so freaking angry. Yeah, there was a lot of anger I dealt with. My wife had asked me to [see somebody] before we got divorced. I was so hard headed. I was like, ‘I don’t need to go sit and somebody else tell me the way I feel. I don’t need that shit!’ [That] was actually the one thing that made the wheels fall off of the wagon with my marriage.”

Lee then looks up as he affirms, “So, I didn’t go before we divorced. But after we got divorced, I started taking a long hard look at myself. I realized that there was a lot going on under the surface that needed to be dealt with. I was just a hot mess. I just found I was really angry, my fuse was short as it ever had been, to the point I was scaring myself. Shame to say it, I got into brawls and fist fights over the stupidest of shit. Man, I was a really dark person. Just me being honest, I would say [I thought about suicide] at one time, yeah. I was depressed, god, several times during that bad time. I mean bad.”

Lee explains, “So, I went out to the VA and saw their psychiatric unit. The psychiatrist I saw... sure enough diagnosed me with PTSD and clinical depression. I gave in and finally started doing the med thing. I started the process; they started throwing

meds at me. I went through two, three different kinds of meds... that just was not working for me. The process was finding a med that worked for me. [I guess] it's just part of life for me now, and the PTSD.”

Lee further reflects, offering some closure on his then fractured spirituality, “After [my brother] died, [I said that] I turned back on my faith... wrapping my mind around that afterwards to where I kinda came full circle. [I actually] came back around to my faith, and my beliefs, and spirituality.” Lee added that his children’s faith helped him. He states, “That was probably the one thing that that brought me back (now smiling). As a matter of fact, we all still go to church together every Sunday.”

**Lee, end of scene four, pentadic ratios.** The two primary ratios noted in the above drama are that of *scene/agent*, followed by ratio *act/agent*:

- The *scene* throughout is hinged on the *agent’s* discontent. The *scene* begins to unravel for the *agent*, which involves his military career, marriage, death of a brother and the deterioration of his personal well-being.
- The *scene* opens with the *agent* and his military career being at a standstill, when the *scene* finally reveals that the *agent’s* actual conflict is personal with anger within.
- The *act* of the *agent* coming to terms with his own personal problems, though unresolved, the *act* of the *agent* embracing his issues is the beginning of resolution.



- The *act* involving the military retirement, and the divorce followed with the death of the brother, has the *agent* perplexed and angry about his PTSD diagnosis and the seemingly lack of support as a veteran.

Table 4.23

Scene 5	<b>How Comforting They Were to Us... Solidified My Choice to Become a Nurse</b>
<b>Act</b>	Finding a new career
<b>Actor</b>	Lee
<b>Scene</b>	On deployment orphanages and brother's death
<b>Agency</b>	The Air Force, University setting
<b>Purpose</b>	To become a nurse, healing thy self and others

Lee rolled his eyes, puffed out his cheeks, then forcefully breathed out through pursed lips. With a wry smile, he said, "I never thought, I would in a million years become a nurse. [But] the one thing that perked my ears to becoming a nurse was one of my rotations when I was in [Afghanistan]. We were obviously confined to base since it was so hostile. [The] only way we could go outside the wire was if we went with the clinic to the local villages. I volunteered to do that; they would go to the orphanages and stuff. I was missing my kids, so I thought it would be a good way to fill the void, just to be around kids in general. I just remember the feeling of satisfaction I got from seeing the excitement and appreciation on their faces when you gave them stuff. I just remember that feeling, I don't know how you would describe it... I just liked it. Yeah, it definitely

made me feel good. Made me feel like I was making difference with someone. That kind of planted a seed that sprouted into me becoming a nurse, to be honest.”

The dichotomy of the situation in Afghanistan resonated with Lee, the refreshing nature of walking with the local children during the day starkly contrasted with his preparing of munitions of mass destruction in the evening. He reflects, “Every night we would load the aircraft to the teeth, and they would go out and do their thing. The only reason they quit killing people is because they ran out of rounds.” Lee asserts that the mission weighed on his mind. He affirms, “Absolutely, I would think about it a lot. It kind of really brought it home because you see innocent people, realizing that really real people are caught in the middle.”

Lee further reflects on his experience with his brother in the hospital, “During that whole process, the thing that stood out the most to me, the people that I remember that had the most impact, the most comforting through the whole experience were the nurses. I knew all the nurses, I knew all their names. I never thought of myself as a nurse because I didn’t know they had male nurses quite honestly. It just so happened that unit [my brother] was on, had several male nurses. You could tell they all gave a damn and they were there for all the right reasons. I just thought it was cool they were there. [I recall] how comforting they were to us. Really... that solidified my choice to be a nurse. The whole experience with my brother in the hospital was pretty much the one thing that sealed the deal for me to become a nurse.”

The process and certainty of becoming a nurse was beginning to take shape for Lee. He describes, “I knew nothing about nursing. I was always in the macho bomb-building world. I was pretty ignorant as far as what nurses did. I never was exposed to nurses on active duty, only medics and search and rescue guys. So, in my ignorance, I always thought that the nurses were just minions the doctors used to wipe butts and empty bedpans... that’s just me being honest. Oh, [I know] that doesn’t even scratch the surface of what a nurse is. [At the time] I didn’t realize the responsibility, the burden of a nurse... the things they had to know to be a nurse.”

Lee decided to test the waters of becoming a nurse. He explains, “My neighbor was a [male] nurse, he let me shadow him to make sure that’s exactly what I wanted to do. I’m kind of an all or nothing kinda guy, so I jump in and just get completely immersed in stuff. The more I did it, the more I liked it. [Before this], I never understood how much a nurse needed to know. It made me hungry for knowledge, from there on it lit a fire. I made decision to go to nursing school. So, I had to start my [pre-requisites] and to keep my mind off the other crap that was swirling around in my life.”

As Lee was preparing to enter the nursing program in Arizona, his ex-wife received orders for a change of station; she and the children were moving to a base in central Texas. With that, Lee declined his acceptance letter to the university in Arizona and followed his family to Texas. He validates, “I moved here because I wanted to be close to my three kids, I wasn’t going to be separated from them. My ex and I have always been good friends; we’re not about the whole bitter ex-relationship thing. I [even] helped her house hunt; now she and the kids live 15 miles from me.” Once settled, Lee

applied to the local university's BSN program." He states, "I was accepted in 2015. I was committed and convinced this is what I needed to do and wanted to do. My second career had to be something I wanted to wake up to every morning and enjoy."

**Lee, end of scene five, pentadic ratios.** The two primary ratios noted in the above drama are that of *scene/agent*, followed by ratio *act/agent*:

- The *scene* involves the *agent* coming to terms with a potential career in nursing that the *agent* hoped would help return to him a sense of purpose and utility.
- The *scene* in the hospital allowed the *agent* to observe the positive impact nursing can have on the patient and family members, with the *agent* reflecting on wanting to emulate that compassion the nurses showed in the aforementioned *scene*.
- The *act* of seeking out opportunities to help the *agent* affirm the wanting to become a nurse even though the *agent* was unsure what nurses did, he admired the way it made him feel.
- The determined *act* of becoming a nurse, the *agent* described that nursing was something he wanted to do and had to do was profound.

Table 4.24

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<b>Scene 1</b>	<b>I Was Just a Permanent Resident at the Time</b>
<b>Act</b>	Joining the military
<b>Actor</b>	Sean
<b>Scene</b>	An immigrant life; menial jobs, trouble in high school, lacking direction
<b>Agency</b>	The US Army
<b>Purpose</b>	To get out of town, travel and find a new way of life

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In 1985, a single mother with her two sons and daughter began a risky and arduous journey. The family was emigrating from Central America to the United States. The mother had faith that America would offer her children opportunity and hope. Her youngest son's name is Sean and this narrative now becomes his story. Sean explains, "We made the trek, like so many people they're talking about on the news, [we came] across the border. We ended up in Wisconsin [because] my uncle was attending the University at the time. So, he was the family that we had, he kinda helped set everything up. My mom and dad weren't together. My dad was with... let's say, a lot different females, so there's kids spread around. I lived in Wisconsin from the age of seven until I turned 21."

Sean speaks of his high school years as he struggled to find the incentive to study. Sean admits, "English I picked up fine... [as] kids you pick up everything really quickly. I was a bright student but not a very motivated or dedicated student. [Sometimes] I

wouldn't go to school for a month, they probably should of expelled me. [I'd] go and hang out with girls, go to the mall, anything other than school. I ended up actually having to go to a special school. It was not really a special school... [it was] geared towards people to help them get their high school diploma. I ended up getting my high school diploma when I turned 19."

After high school, Sean found himself without goals or direction. He states, "I wanted to do something because I felt like I was just roaming. I wanna try different things. I wanted to be able to travel. I was just a permanent resident at the time. [So], I thought the military would be a good option... it gave me opportunities." Sean spoke with a military recruiter. He explained, "They were full of shit, [but] I already knew that. I favored the Army, because they were going to send me to Germany... I always dreamed about going to Europe. [Also], they were going to give me a bonus, two things a young guy is looking for."

Sean expressed how his uncle and mother viewed his military career choice. He stated, "My uncle, he thought it was cool. [My mom on the other hand], ah, hell no... she said, 'what are you doing? You're crazy.' I was like, 'I want to get the hell out of here.' I was [only offered] cavalry scout or infantry, because I wasn't a US citizen. I was like, 'You guys are so full of shit, but whatever, this is what I want to do.' [So], I went in the military in 1999... I left three weeks after turning 21."

Sean served a four-year enlistment on active duty in the Army. He explained, "I went to Ft. Knox for basic training, [then] Germany, I got there November 1999. I got sent to Fort Polk, Louisiana in 2002... clearly the one place other than Alaska that I did

not want to go. I was like, ‘Ah, I don’t give a crap about this,’ as far as continuing in this career as an enlisted cavalry scout. I kind of started thinking about what am I going to do when I’m done. ‘I don’t want to be cop. I don’t want security stuff.’ What [am I] gonna do in the future? The [army guys] started trying to push me back to re-sign as a cavalry scout. I was like, ‘I’m just going to get out and forget you guys.’ So that’s what I did. I ETS’d... in December of 2003.”

**Sean, end of scene one, pentadic ratios.** The two primary ratios noted in the above drama are that of *scene/agent*, followed by ratio *agent/agency*:

- The *scene* begins with the *agent* and family emigrating from Central America to U.S. to find a better life in America.
- This *scene* encompasses a period of young adult life transitions as the *agent* experiences personal turmoil, attempting to find and define a future with numerous challenges due to the *agent’s* immigration status.
- The *agent* is distrustful of system-based *agencies*, be it high school or military organizations.
- The *agent* realizes that *agency-based* systems have bureaucratic hurdles that must be endured. The *agent* in turn uses the *agency*, the US Army, to assist in facilitating both the *agent’s* economic and academic opportunities.

Table 4.25

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<b>Scene 2</b>	<b>I Have to Do Something... I Need To</b>
<b>Act</b>	Joining the National Guard in Louisiana and then transferring to Florida.
<b>Actor</b>	Sean
<b>Scene</b>	Moving to Florida, wanting to go to college to earn a degree in technology
<b>Agency</b>	The Florida National Guard (NG)
<b>Purpose</b>	Go to college and try to attain that elusive American dream

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After Sean left active duty, he initially remained in Louisiana. He asserted, “I was gonna stay [there] and actually go to college. [In order to have educational benefits] I went into the Louisiana National Guard. [However], I went down to Florida for a vacation [to visit] the same uncle that was in Wisconsin. I was like, ‘Man, this is really nice.’ So, I ended up transferring. [So now] I had to join the Florida National Guard. The only [unit] they had there was... air defense.”

Once Sean had relocated to Florida, he began looking ahead, contemplating his future. He shares, “After getting out of the military, I was like, ‘I have to do something. I need to.’ To me growing up... we just didn’t grow up in that environment where you dreamed things like some kids do, the American kids mostly. When you’re somebody that’s new to this country, [you] have nothing. You have no family, you’re living off of welfare... getting government cheese, you get hand me downs... Goodwill and all that stuff. You don’t dream big. You don’t dream to attain things, to attain respect... or prestige. [Basically], you don’t dream shit. All you do is take care of yourself, live day by



day... check to check. I was looking for something that I would be able to do so that I'm not living check to check. [Not] going from menial job to menial job.”

My thought at the time was that I need to do computer science, something with computers. I kinda got knocked off that, because my math sucked. I was 24 at the time... I was like, ‘What am I doing?’ I started school, did one semester, pulled out. [At that same] time we got ‘Title 10’ orders to deploy to Afghanistan in 2004.”

**Sean, end of scene two, pentadic ratios.** The two primary ratios noted in the above drama are that of *scene/agent*, followed by ratio *agent/purpose*:

- The *scene* described is of poverty that creates a cycle that steals the *agent's* sense of personal identity and respect.
- The *scene* offers a glimpse into the many obstacles that the *agent* had to overcome, lacking role model exemplars on how to achieve upward socioeconomic mobility.
- The *agent* acknowledged existing barriers but held onto the belief that the immediate *purpose* and goal was to achieve and earn a college degree.
- The *agent* feared failure, but his sense of *purpose* pushed him onward for a better life.

Table 4.26

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<b>Scene 3</b>	<b>The Leadership Pissed Me Off!</b>
<b>Act</b>	Being in the National Guard and going to the warzone.
<b>Actor</b>	Sean
<b>Scene</b>	The warzone, the drudgery of patrolling the dirty and dusty streets of Afghanistan
<b>Agency</b>	The Florida National Guard (NG) the new unit that the agent was assigned to.
<b>Purpose</b>	Provide security and safe passage of other assigned military units

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Sean grumbles, “[Nope], I didn’t get deployed while I was on active duty. [But sure enough], I knew I was going to get fucking deployed [with that National Guard unit]... I just knew it. These fuckers were stupid, [both] the NCO’s and officers. The officers were weak as hell. They were more worried about not looking stupid than actually trying to do the right thing or learning how to do the right thing. It pissed me off... pissed me off! [I’m like], ‘You’re in charge of this shit? Woo! National Guard!’”

Sean appraised the risk associated with the upcoming deployment. He surmises, “At the time [Afghanistan] was kind of stable, because it was more than three years into it. But... you still hear deployment... you’re going to Afghanistan... you watch the news. Our unit was air defense that was [now] going to be trained as MPs. [Previously on active duty] I was actually a combat MOS and trained on weapons [and understood the role]. People [in the unit] were all kinda worried about it. I am fairly certain that didn’t help

morale. [So], we arrive in country, late April [or] early May in '04. The first night, we're putting our shit away... we get rocket attacks [and] mortar attacks... on the first night. Nobody got killed, but a couple people had injuries."

Sean recalls, "We were surrounded by minefields, mainly from the Russians... I mean in Afghanistan [the mines were] everywhere. Actually [the] civilian [Afghans]... would go out there with a little stick and shit, digging up [mines]. They would get paid for it."

Sean explains, "So... the locals are bringing [us] this guy. They're dragging him... pretty much with his hand blown off. [The medic said] you've got to help me with this guy. I was like, 'This dude is dead. What do you want me to do?' He had a huge gash in his groin, he had bled out everywhere, he had no color and his freakin' hand was blown off. He was dead from the blast. We were doing chest compressions and shit. There was nothing for us to do, [but the medic] wanted to try, so we tried. I remember him getting pissed. The medic was like, 'God damn it! This is the one guy out there trying to improve the life for his people here and he's the one that get's blown up.' Yeah, because it was [my] first, I remember his reaction to it. I had never seen a dead body before that time. Yeah, first dead body. I remember the [medic] because he was always squared away. He knew what to do...I remember him for that."

As Sean reflected on the heroics of the combat medic, he suddenly counters back the NCO's and Officers in his unit. Sitting upright, he scornfully recalls, "But the main thing I remember about [deployment] was that I hated the leadership. I absolutely hated the leadership. Our section sergeant was a pussy. We were out doing missions and stuff

and he wouldn't go. He specifically asked... not to have to go out on those missions. He was our section sergeant... he was an E-6. I was like, 'You're the one who has rank... fucking own it. These kids should be looking up to your ass [and] you're sitting here like a little bitch.' It pissed me off... it put more weight on me because I had more training. The [soldiers] would ask me stuff like, 'What would you do?' I felt a lot of responsibility to the lower enlisted guys. I knew they looked up to me. [The whole situation], it pissed me off!"

Sean's distrust and contempt for the defunct leadership team was apparent. He clarified, "I had a very contentious relationship with the leadership [and] I didn't give a fuck. I remember I was just angry a lot when I was there. I was pissed at the leadership and how they weren't doing their jobs. They weren't leaders to me... they would cover for each other. That's not what I was used to, especially the stuff like the cav scouts... it was very regimented. It pissed me off! I was angry a lot while I was there."

Sean told of a personal heated exchange with his section sergeant. He explains, "So the [sergeant] with a [private] get into an argument. All I heard was his calling this kid a coward. I said, 'Permission to speak freely?' He's like, 'Alright go ahead.' I'm like, 'How the fuck are you gonna tell this kid he's a coward? Are you fucking shitting me... you're the bitch that don't go outside the wall. You're asking people to do stuff you're not willing to do yourself... that's paramount to being a good leader! You're supposed to be inspiring these kids to follow you. I wouldn't follow you into a 7-11.'"

Sean offered how other military groups in their compound viewed his unit. He said, "Even the other leadership teams were like, 'That's your unit? That's your

leadership? Man, you guys are [screwed].’ It just made me pissed and upset for the [enlisted] guys that were there. I’m thankful at that time there wasn’t a lot going on. Just mortar attacks here and there, rocket attacks here and there. Nothing major. Yeah... I hated my leadership there.”

**Sean, end of scene three, pentadic ratios.** The two primary ratios noted in the above drama are that of *agency/agent*, followed by ratio *agent/purpose*:

- The *agency* is the entire unit, including the leadership in which the *agent* has ethical misgivings in terms of their not looking after the best interests of the soldiers.
- The *agency’s* leadership per the *agent’s* testimony appears to be self-preserving and neglectful of their troops and mission. The *agent* then feels an overarching responsibility to oversee the soldiers’ safety and morale.
- The *agent* has high expectations of the leadership based on the previous exposure on active duty, knowing that the *purpose* of the wartime mission requires training, competency and safety procedures to ensure the enlisted troops’ wellbeing.
- The *agent* faces a moral dilemma, perhaps with noted moral residue when the perceived *purpose* of the deployment mission acquiesces to the comforts and personal safety of only the leadership team.

Table 4.27

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Scene 4	I'll Figure It Out If Nursing is Really Something I Like
<b>Act</b>	Preparing academically for entry into nursing school
<b>Actor</b>	Sean
<b>Scene</b>	Drinking, anger issues, college and nursing school
<b>Agency</b>	University school system, pre-requisite higher education
<b>Purpose</b>	To become a career nurse with a degree

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Sean recollects that his unit returned from deployment in 2005. He recalls, “That’s when I [got serious] about what I wanted to go to school for, so I decided... nursing. Why? Because I could get a job. I knew I would be able to get a job. I wanted to do different things. I want to learn different things. You could just do about anything with a degree within [the] nursing field. But honestly, that’s about all I knew about it. I’d never been in a hospital. [I knew] a lot of girls go [into] nursing, and I’m one of the few guys.”

However, Sean explained how his father reacted when he discussed going into nursing. He explains, “Now my dad when I told him. He was like, ‘What the hell do you want to go into nursing school for? Isn’t that for women?’ So, yeah, he’s old, Latino, a freaking jackass. He’s like. ‘Why don’t you want to be a doctor?’ I’m like, ‘I don’t want to be a doctor... [nursing] is what I am going to do!’ [I’m thinking] this is what I can do. It’s not going to take forever like a medical degree... I can actually see an end-point. So, I started the prereqs’ for nursing school.”

Sean reflects on the fact while attending college to complete his nursing prerequisite course work, he had finally fulfilled his obligation to the military. This included both active duty and the NG. He explains, “I was officially done in ’06, totally done with my eight-year commitment. I was just like, ‘Let me go!’ I just hated those [National Guard] people. I really did not like the people in charge of us. I was a very angry person. I just drank a lot. I never did drugs [but] I drank a lot more than I ever did. [In terms of PTSD] I never thought about it... never really considered it, because I haven’t taken [direct] fire. I would say [I wasn’t] like other guys that you’d associate [with] PTSD. I never had to pick up one of my buddies blown up or had him die in front of me. I didn’t think of it as PTSD. I just was really angry, and I brought some of that anger home with me. [At the time, I didn’t see it as a problem]. I mean... I wasn’t going to work [or school] drunk.” Sean shrugs his shoulders.

Sean struggled to align his goals as he completed the prerequisites for nursing school. He reflects, “I just wanted to do something, and honestly [nursing] seemed like it would be the easier way to go. I was like, ‘I’ll figure it out... and see if it’s really something I like. [While preparing for nursing school, I did have concerns]. I kind of thought about... well... I am socially awkward. I’ve been told I am kind of a hard ass. I hurt people feelings with the stuff I say. So again, I don’t know how that will translate into nursing. [But] at that point what I wanted to add to my life was just to have a degree. To have something of substance, be an adult and grow old and [really] do something”

Sean grappled with the next stage of his life. He describes his quandary, “I had never thought I would [actually] be able to go to college, to afford college. My only

example was my uncle. He was the one. He got his degree. Other than that, nobody else in my family outside of [my country had a degree]. For that matter... my [extended family, half] brothers and sisters, nobody had gone to college. My brother or my sister never even graduated high school. All I knew [was] the things I looked at and I knew the officers in the military, they had their degrees. They seemed to be in a better position than I was enlisted. Maybe... in the back of my mind, I'll go back [into the military] as an officer. Maybe in that way... it did kind of shape [my decision] as far as going into nursing.”

While Sean was in college, in 2008, the national economy suddenly plummeted. Conversely, Sean realized that healthcare remained a viable option even in midst of the economic downturn. The unfolding circumstances helped affirm Sean's decision on nursing as a career. However, Sean remained uninformed about nursing as a profession, other than seeing it a vehicle for attaining a degree. He explained, “I didn't know shit about nursing. Honestly, I knew nothing about what nurses did. I was like, ‘I'll have a job, something of substance.’ So, to me... nursing, okay... but the degree is what really was in my head. I'm like, ‘alright let's do this nursing thing! I started it so let's keep following this track.’ So, I got accepted to nursing school [in Florida]. It was competitive, like anywhere else. They took like 25 out of couple hundred applicants.” Sean's girlfriend, also a college student, was supportive of his career choice in nursing. With her support and his gumption, Sean was ready to take a seemingly blind leap into the academic arena of professional nursing.



**Sean, end of scene four, pentadic ratios.** The two primary ratios noted in the above drama are that of *scene/agent*, followed by ratio *agent/act*:

- In this *scene*, the *agent* struggles with reconciling the lasting moral residue from his previous deployment in Afghanistan and internalizes the anger with alcohol abuse.
- The *scene* develops as the agent ponders his goals on how to attain a college degree. In this *scene*, the *agent* remains unsettled and somewhat uncommitted to nursing.
- The *agent* chooses to *act* on the choice of taking pre-requisite course work required for entry into a bachelorette nursing program at the local university.
- The *agent acts* on the opportunity to apply for acceptance into a bachelorette nursing program, the *agent* remains unsure on what this career choice entails.

*Nate - I Was 10 Feet Tall and Bullet Proof: Dramatism Scenes Tables 4.28 thru 4.32*

*Table 4.28*

Scene 1	<b>My Dad Mentioned That There Was No Money for School</b>
<b>Act</b>	Joining the Army National Guard, graduating from high school
<b>Actor</b>	Nate
<b>Scene</b>	Small town, high school graduation, large family
<b>Agency</b>	Army National Guard
<b>Purpose</b>	To serve his country and gain GI Bill educational benefits

We meet Nate during the summer of 2002. He explains, “I’m from a very small town, it’s a very small Texas town. [It’s all about] Friday night football and very patriotic. I joined the National Guard (NG) in between the summer of my junior and senior year, [signed up] on my 17th birthday. I [took basic training that summer and] did the actual [military] job training afterwards when I graduated high school [in 2003].”

Nate reflected on the fact that 9/11 had occurred and the war in Afghanistan was already ongoing when he joined the Army NG. He expressed his sense of service to country; however, he clarified, “It was not full the reason for joining.” He revealed, “I came from a [large] blended family. My dad had married three times... so there were three children with his first wife, and then my sister and I with my mom. And then he remarried again and has two adopted children. [Also], I was kind of a misguided teen. Made okay grades but I never really, (he pauses and restates) I got distracted a lot. Just not doing the work at school that I should have done. [Nevertheless], I wanted to go to college. My dad mentioned that there was no money for school. I didn’t really want to take out student loans, so the biggest factor [for joining the military] was the GI Bill.”

After Nate completed his military training in field artillery, he returned home. Nate looked forward to attending college. He said, “So the end of 2003, I applied for school [and] started the spring semester at [the university]. I went into the first semester as a biology pre-med major, since my initial goal was to go into medicine. [However], I was still kind of determining on whether or not college was for me. I actually did pretty well, except for economics.” After finishing the first semester, Nate had an opportunity to deploy versus entering into his second semester of school.

Nate explains, “During the summer of 2004, a National Guard unit, a battalion from [Southwest Texas], was looking for volunteers to go to Iraq.” Nate asserts, “So, I volunteered for an 18 month [deployment]. The motivator to join was multifactorial, mostly because I wanted to serve my country, but also felt compelled to [just] get in and do something.” Nate’s family and small-town community were supportive of his service, he stated, “They were very proud. But, the funny thing, a month before I got my orders, I started seeing someone who eventually would become my wife. Whenever I had time off [from preparing for deployment], I would drive down to see her. When my orders came in, I explained to her what was happening. We kinda meant for it to be more casual... but then it just evidently grew in to something more.”

**Nate, end of scene one, pentadic ratios.** The two primary ratios noted in the above drama are that of *agent/purpose*, followed by ratio *agency/agent*:

- The *agent* wants to attend college but is still unsure of his true *purpose* in terms of direction and educational discipline.
- The *agent* does discover a twofold *purpose* in serving with the National Guard; one being the GI Bill, the other using the volunteer deployment to Iraq. The *agent* uses a *purposeful* tack to temporize his decision on an academic career path.
- The *agency* being the National Guard provides the *agent* with an opportunity to serve his country, while seeking the respect of his family and community.

The *agency* becomes a vehicle for the *agent*, providing a prospect to learn a vocational skill, gain financial solvency and develop a sense of pride in service.

Table 4.29

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<b>Scene 2</b>	<b>In the Warzone This is Real!</b>
<b>Act</b>	Going to War in Iraq
<b>Actor</b>	Nate
<b>Scene</b>	The military encampments, dusty dangerous streets in the warzone of Iraq
<b>Agency</b>	Army National Guard
<b>Purpose</b>	To provide unit security and over watch against enemy combatants in Iraq

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Nate’s hometown main street was aglow in lights as the holiday season approached. Instead of enjoying the holiday with his family and girlfriend, Nate remained sequestered as he prepared to deploy. He said, “So, the end of December... actually, I got to Kuwait [then moved into Iraq] in early January of 2005. Our job was forward operating base (fob) security. We ended up doing guard towers, convoys, and quick reaction force missions.”

Nate sits upright, as he recalls, “Yeah, we’d only been there, in country, a little over two weeks. That’s when our first contact [really] occurred when one of our vehicles was hit by an IED. We had guys... we were coming out of a turn and they took it too short. [The explosion] ended up flipping the vehicle over. The gunner was ejected, I would say 25 or 30 feet away, the driver and commander were all stuck in the vehicle.

Actually, all the guys in the truck were our guys. I was trained as a combat lifesaver [with basic first aid skills]. We didn't have any medics, so I went down there as a first responder. We were able to pull them out; they suffered some significant injuries with broken bones. The gunner had a concussion, no bleeding but the other two had to be flown out of there. So, after that, you're kinda like, this is real!"

The IED strike on the convoy demoralized some of the soldiers in Nate's NG unit with many becoming anxious to patrol off compound. However, Nate shrugs his shoulders, "The Army was doing the... (he pauses) it was kinda like touchy feely. They were worried about the whole post-traumatic stress thing. We had to talk with a chaplain and counselor about how we felt and all that." Shaking his head in disagreement, he speaks, "Me being 19 years old, 10 feet tall and bullet proof, I thought it was a waste of time. I went into the deployment knowing that this is a possibility and so I prepared [myself] for that to occur."

Nate implies that the ebb and flow of deployment in a warzone requires fortitude. He explains, "In a lot of respects, in order to continue with a job, you kinda have to shove that stuff down and keep going. Whereas, some of the guys were more emotional about it. I never really made fun of them or anything, but you know, you just kinda look down and smirk. Being National Guard is not like being active duty. Active duty is very structured. You have your NCOs and the NCO's do what they're supposed to do. The National Guard, most of them are weekend warriors. Being arrogant and young, I assumed that role [of the active duty NCO] and flourished with it. I ended up becoming a convoy commander within two weeks of the incident. I had my 20th birthday in Iraq."

Nate reflects, “Because I was in a leadership position, I could tend to be a jerk. I tended to be more of an asshole and authoritative, telling people what to do instead of showing them why they needed to do it. A lot of it is because of the fact that it is life and death, I knew what needed to be done. I didn’t want to put my life in the hands of somebody who didn’t know what to do. The old saying is, ‘Out of 100 men that go to war, 80 percent don’t belong there, and the remaining are actually good warriors and are made for the warzone.’ [I was a warrior... yes], I was 10 feet tall and bullet proof.”

While on deployment in Iraq, the winter soon became spring. Nate describes, “March, April timeline, we started to get more insurgent activity, seeing more IEDs. One time I was driving, an IED went off. It blew my door open and sucked my weapon out... sucked my weapon out! But no one was hurt and we just kept on going. [Of course, I was scared but] again, I just shoved it down. Matter of fact, we kinda laughed it off and chose not to think about it.”

As Nate described his narrow escape, he offers hints to what was on his mind afterwards. He attests, “Didn’t really do much of any self-reflection, [but] I spent every free moment that I had talking with my girlfriend on the phone. She sent me a letter every day that I was gone... they’re all very, very sentimental. I carried a picture of her with me the entire time I was there, in my breast pocket of my flak vest. She also, gave me one of those monogram laser-etched dog tags. I was doing foot patrols and chasing after somebody. I fell down and the tag popped out of my flak vest. I didn’t realize it until later that evening that it actually fell off my chain. I frantically looked for it.”

The Iraq deployment timeframe was now at 6 months and Nate's unit was starting to see an increase in enemy hostilities. He describes, "Things are kicking up. I was little worried now, more so than on the convoys, it was because you're stuck in one place. So, if anything were to go wrong, such as a suicide bomber with a suicide vest, it was going to take everybody out. Daily... mortars... rockets. The [insurgents] would try to run [trucks filled with explosives] into the compound. Because of tower fire [we'd shoot and take it out], so it never got any closer. [Instead], you got a lot of body parts and what not flying in, that was the disgusting part. [You'd walk up on] shells of just basically skin sacks, no bones or anything... it was pulverized. You know that charred flesh smell? [Sort of] like when you see a dog on the side of the road that's been hit... but it smelled worse."

**Nate, end of scene two, pentadic ratios.** The two primary ratios noted in the above drama are that of *agent/act*, followed by ratio *act/scene*:

- The *agent* is making life choices, involving the *act* of joining the Army-NG, going to college and selecting an 18-month volunteer deployment of Iraq. The *agent* initially appears well in control of the collective of *acts* and their outcomes.
- The *agent* is reflective of his performance through his *acts* of domineering autocratic leadership. The *agent* although self-deprecating offers a justification for his harsh *acts*.

- The Amy NG vehicle flipping over caused by the *act* of an IED detonation creates a *scene* where injury and mayhem ensue as the wounded are pulled from the wreckage.
- The *act* of providing unit security, protecting the military compound from insurgent vehicle bombing attempts, the *scene* reveals that death is everywhere, with the described visual of human remains scattered across the compound.

Table 4.30

Scene 3	<b>Our Command Would Not Let Us Fire on Them</b>
<b>Act</b>	The mortars strike, killing and wounding U.S. military members
<b>Actor</b>	Nate *Artifact presented: <i>A round silver disc with a biblical inscription</i>
<b>Scene</b>	The compound, the tower watch and death/mass-casualty
<b>Agency</b>	Army National Guard, Iraqi Insurgents
<b>Purpose</b>	Over watch force protection from the vantage point of guard towers

The long hot summer in Iraq finally gave way to the fall as Nate’s unit took over tower-watch and guard duty responsibilities. Nate begins to describe a tragic day while he was on tower duty. He states, “Occasionally, we still had some [significant] events occur. [One day] I saw these insurgents. We saw them shoot mortars [at the compound]. We called up [the command] to see if we could at least shoot their direction to get them to stop. The insurgents were sending two or three mortars at a time, [they would] fire and move.”



Nate was certain of their strategy as he explained, “They had a spotter somewhere that was... or even on the compound, walking them right toward the chow hall. Our command wouldn’t let us fire on them. They were concerned about collateral damage. [I mean come on], they were in an open field. If it’s an instance where you try to do something and you’re disobeying a direct order, regardless of the outcome you’re gonna get in trouble. I felt more helpless there [in that moment] than anywhere else. So, eventually they hit the mess hall and because it was lunch time, [with] high traffic... we had a bunch of casualties. [I was] very furious. I know at least 12 died and I think it was upper numbers of around 50 [injured].”

After the mortars hit the mess hall, a flurry of recovery and medical assistance rushed to the wounded. Nate explained, “Because I was on tower duty, we didn’t do the quick reaction force. We had a physician and nurse [on compound] but they weren’t equipped to handle that type of trauma. We helped move [the wounded] to the air base where they had better medical facilities and they could transport them. Kind of ironic, there were only two Navy personnel on our fob and they were both taken out.”

Nate looks upward, as he describes his anger. He reflects, “Well... it made me mad at the upper echelon. Inside the fob, you rely so heavily on the brass. I was upset with the fact that they wouldn’t... (he pauses) you had one hand tied behind your back... they wouldn’t allow us to do anything. Yeah, I actually held them responsible. [I know] they didn’t necessarily cause it but didn’t do anything to help it. I took it to my platoon sergeant and basically that’s as far as it went.” Being exhausted made the situation more unbearable. Nate asserts, “I was so fatigued and had been there for so long without a

break, 24-hour operations... seven days a week. At this point I was just so frustrated, everyone else seems to have been home on leave [already] and I was stuck here. That's another one of those instances where you just kinda put it off, shove it down and just keep on going."

Nate was finding himself easily frustrated with his fellow NG members as they ruminated on their perceived near-death experiences. He complains, "Oh, those touchy-feely meetings, where a lot is said but nothing is ever done. I remember people always talked about two inches to the left it would have been me. I am the point, either it is, or it isn't... there is no could have been. You can either dwell on it or pick-up and drive on. I was more of the pick-up and drive on kinda guy. War is hell. There is no rhyme or reason for why one person dies versus another. I [see it] as being in the wrong place at the wrong time."

Nate describe his state of spirituality during these harsh and trying times on deployment. He reasons that his faith was intact before and after, but not during the deployment. He inferred that faith offered him little, if any solace. He illustrates, "I [still] believed but didn't necessarily use it as something to soothe pain. I didn't pray, [but] I wore a cross. There were those instances where you're like, 'Oh, please God, help me through this.' But I never really read the bible." Yet, Nate opens his hand and shows a rustic silver pocket piece that his uncle gave him. He explains, "I carried it with me throughout, it [has] one of my favorite bible verses on it, Joshua 1:9, 'Fear not. Have I not commanded you to be strong and courageous? Do not be discouraged. For the Lord, your God is with you wherever you go.' Now... it's more like a good luck charm. I don't

like to be without it.” At this point in the deployment, Nate is both physically and spiritually exhausted during his tour of duty in Iraq; finally, he gets to go home on leave, receiving a two-week reprieve from the warzone.

**Nate, end of scene three, pentadic ratios.** The two primary ratios noted in the above drama are that of *act/agent*, followed by ratio *agency/act*:

- The insurgents *act* of using multiple mortars launched into the US military compound as the *agent* helplessly watches the unfolding crisis, describing moral residue and/or moral injury.
- The *act* of the purposeful direct and catastrophic mortar strike on the mess hall on unarmed military members left the *agent* angry and resentful of this horrific outcome.
- The military compound’s command as the *agency*, feared political repercussions to the point where they were unable to order a neutralizing *act* of the mortar attack.
- The *agency* was so myopic and plagued with risk aversion that they were incapable of assessing the deadly *act*’s outcome, even with ample time to stop the deadly *act*.

Table 4.31

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Scene 4	Home on Leave and Back to the War
<b>Act</b>	Returning home on leave, the ensuing conflict, arguing and disharmony
<b>Actor</b>	Nate
<b>Scene</b>	At home with family where there is unfolding conflict
<b>Agency</b>	The agent/actor's family, stepmother
<b>Purpose</b>	To return home for a much-needed respite

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Nate was in the air for nearly 20 hours, when he finally arrives back in Texas. After being overseas for nearly a year, Nate was again on U.S. soil. He was looking forward to relaxing and reconnecting with family. With a half-smile on his face, he explains, "Getting home, actually being home, flying into Dallas... the reception you get in Dallas made you forget about everything else. They have firefighters shooting water [into the sky] as their salute. Getting from Dallas to San Antonio... they upgraded me to first class. Everything that you get from that and appreciation, made it worthwhile."

Nate smiled as he describes, "[It was great] seeing everyone at the airport and my girlfriend was there as well." Nate expressed that his family was the first to greet him; his girlfriend remained slightly off to the side. Nate was able to work his way towards her and they finally embraced. He said, "Having her do that definitely made it easier, made the process easier." The reason is that his girlfriend remained an outsider to his family, especially to Nate's stepmother. Nate reveals, "The relationship between my stepmom and girlfriend was not good. Adjusting [to home] was the hardest part for me and having

to deal with all that drama. So, towards the end, I was actually glad to go back [to Iraq] because it wasn't as drama filled. It got to the point, I was like, I told them, 'Fine, I'll just break up with her and then everybody can just shut up and leave me alone.' I ended up doing that two days before I left... I broke up with her."

It would take Nate a mere moment to realize his monumental mistake. He confesses, "After I got out of that environment with the family, in Dallas, I called her and apologized. I told her I don't know what I was thinking. So, [we] ended up getting back together at that point over the phone. But I didn't tell my parents we started dating again. I felt really horrible. I sent her flowers multiple times. Even to this day, I feel so bad about it." With his relationship renewed, Nate returned to Iraq for six exhausting months.

**Nate, end of scene four, pentadic ratios.** The two primary ratios noted in the above drama are that of *agency/agent*, followed by ratio *agent/act*:

- The family as the *agency* meets and envelops the *agent* as he returns home on leave from his combat tour in Iraq.
- The *agency* as the family, particularly the stepmother, controls the *agent*. The *agency* overtly alienates the *agent's* girlfriend to the point where the *agency* forces the *agent* to abandon the relationship.
- The *agent* is emotionally drained from the *act* of his family's controlling influence; the *agent* in *act* of desperation dissolves the relationship with the person held dearest.
- The *agent* quickly nullifies his egregious *act* of forsaking his relationship by regaining the forgiveness, love and confidence from the then girlfriend.

Table 4.32

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<b>Scene 5</b>	<b>Coming Home, Leaving the Military to Become a Nurse</b>
<b>Act</b>	Coming home and life transitions force new choices
<b>Actor</b>	Nate
<b>Scene</b>	Marriage, coming back home, a new reality awaits
<b>Agency</b>	Family, VA Hospital
<b>Purpose</b>	Leave military service and identify a new career pathway

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After Nate’s return to Iraq, the insurgent activity was beginning to lessen. The military was drawing down, reducing their presence in that particular region of Iraq. Nate explains, “We got orders that we were shutting down the fob. [Eventually], we were just keeping security for ourselves in this huge palace on the river... Saddam’s hometown. I came home in [2006]. I still had leave, so I was paid by the military to sit on my butt [for a few extra weeks].”

Nate was 21 years old when he returned from Iraq. He describes, “I started back up in school. And I moved in with my girlfriend and her mom. I completed two semesters. I did [the fall] semester and then the spring of 2007. Then, the end of the spring semester, I would say April, that was when I got orders. Before deploying, I proposed to my girlfriend. I ended up getting a three-day pass... we got married. It was actually a backyard wedding.” Soon after, Nate deployed back to Iraq on a noncombat mission. He states, “It was actually a pretty good assignment. This was to train Iraqi correctional officers. It was a shorter tour; we came back in April of 2008.”

With two deployments behind him and a new marriage, Nate had decisions to make about his future. The first decision was to exit from the Army-NG. Nate explains, “Well, I separated from the military because I was never actually able to go to school. [For example] I did three semesters the entire six years [in the NG]. No longer was the unit something I was excited to be around [and it] left a bad taste in my mouth, so I got out.”

Nate pauses with a pensive look his face. He became silent, for more than a moment... then speaking in a hushed tone. He discloses, “So when I came back, I suffered from PTSD, a lot after my first tour. I had a lot of anxiety. I avoided public places, a lot of road rage, short fuse. [At first], I never actually sought help. So, trigger points would be any stressful situation. Every once in a while, the smell of diesel fumes would take me back to those time frames. I never, even to this day, I haven’t talked about this. What ever happened while I was there... [I was still] shoving everything down. Everything happened so fast, moving out, being on my own... the depression and PTSD started after that. I had a short fuse, any time [my wife and I] would argue I would get upset. I never put my hands on her... but I did lash out. She forced... not necessarily forced, but strongly suggested I seek help. So, I went to the VA.”

The VA hospital’s mental health group met with Nate and began the assessment process. He explains, “So initially I saw this Doctor, you fill out questionnaires, and then talks with you. [He] said, ‘you’ve been diagnosed with PTSD, major depression and suicidal ideation.’ I made it a point that I didn’t want to be on meds. I felt as though they’d give you medication and then you’d be stuck in the system. [The doctor] said, ‘I

can either put you on meds or you can go to group classes.’ [I] ended up doing behavioral therapy and [staying] medication free. I participated in that 10-week program, [going] each week. I felt better, the tools not only made my relationship with my wife better, it also made going through each day easier. Still didn’t feel 100%, but you never do get back to what you were.”

Nate professes, “I had a new sense of motivation, a motivation with a purpose as well as the fact that I was married. I needed to do something that ensured my family would be taken care of.” Nate reiterates, “I was nearing the time frame where I needed to figure out what I was going to do. My wife helped me get into [a local private college] to continue school the fall of 2008.” He explains, “The behavioral therapy... helped me reflect on who I am and what I wanted to do. [My wife] would ask me, ‘what was the best part of about being in the military?’ I mentioned the few instances where I was able to help people... it wasn’t being a convoy commander [or] ordering people to do things. It was assisting [people] in times of need.”

Nate’s brother in-law had just finished nursing school. Nate said, “[My wife] was trying to get me motivated on my future. She said, ‘You need to speak with my brother.’ I needed a career, [so] I spoke with him about it. He said that I should check out nursing. I was like, ‘Aw, come on. Being a male nurse?’ I talked to him about how many guys were in the class. Yeah... making sure, he wasn’t the only guy there. He mentioned that there were quite a few military people. So, I looked into it. Speaking with my medic buddies, a lot of them were pursuing careers in nursing.”



Nate's behavioral therapist asked about his goals. He concedes, "I mentioned degrees... getting a degree. I looked at it as more of an opportunity to get a career. I really didn't know [about nursing]. My dad was a surgical tech and looked down on nurses. So [up to this point] my only experience I had about nursing was through him. It did seem too touchy-feely. So, that's why I was still kind of guarded... going down that route. [But] I needed to make a decision [on what] to do with my life... felt as though med school was too far off. I needed to do something now. Speaking with my brother-in-law, he spoke to me about different areas of nursing; that helped as far getting over that machismo attitude."

Finally, Nate was coming to terms with whom he was and thought he wanted to be. He reveals, "I always had an open mind... trying to get a feel for a [nursing] before making a full judgement. I was making all A's, all right, no problems. My motivation was more towards school. (Nate smiles) When I chose [nursing] was when I got into nursing school. I was finishing cognitive therapy. The cognitive therapy in conjunction with other things helped me. [I] had gotten a lot better...[my] coping mechanisms had improved. My relationship... with everyone else around me had improved as well. My outlook on life had improved significantly." Nate was healing and well on his way to becoming a nurse. He and his wife together looked forward to this next stage in their lives.

**Nate, end of scene five, pentadic ratios.** The two primary ratios noted in the above drama are that of *agent/act*, followed by ratio *agency/agent*:

- The *agent* has reached a developmental stage with the ability to influence numerous *acts* throughout this narrative as the *agent* prepares for the *act* of life transitions.
- The *agent* needed to embrace the *act* of seeking professional help with his PTSD.
- The *agency* being the Veterans' Hospital medical team would screen and access the *agent's* mental health status... offering the *agent* a safe place to reflect and restore.
- The *agency* would provide the needed assistance to the *agent* in healing and progressing healthily towards the next stage in his lifespan development.

### **Data Summary and Emerging Themes from the Dramatisms**

During the process of data analysis, the first interview yielded a significant portion of this study's findings in terms of identifying participants' lived experiences that led to their unanticipated mid-life career transitions. The emerging themes gleaned from the above dramatisms, aided with the use of the pentadic analysis, provided a collective acuity into the participants' motivations for joining the armed forces, their impactful warzone experiences, and like decision pathways for exiting the military. The data findings corroborate their mutual motives for entering higher education to become nurses.

The first set of established themes were based on the participants' responses to the opening research question, "*Tell me the story of how you decided to join the military during a time of war?*" The results aided with the use of pentadic analysis indicated the collective primary ratio of note was *agency/agent*. The military organization is the

*agency*, which directly influenced the *agents'* desire for change. The second notable ratio was *purpose/agent*. The *purpose* and/or motivation for change was based on their desire to secure some form of financial autonomy. It is through their military service that the *agents* were able achieve that goal.

Across the data set, participants chose to join the military because they were from small towns, lacked employment opportunities, and were without financial support for college. Six of the seven participants were from economically depressed communities and from single parent or blended families that were of lower socioeconomic status. In the following excerpt, Nate explained, "So my dad mentioned that there was no money for college, and I didn't really wanna take out student loans, so the biggest factor [for joining] was the GI bill." Although, one participant, Harvey, was 28 years old when he enlisted, he too was unable to establish career or economic opportunities for himself prior to joining the Army.

After the 9/11 terrorist attacks occurred, this event evoked a sense of service to country in all the participants interviewed. However, it was not explicit in the analysis that patriotism was their primary reason for joining the military. The participants' families and their small townships were very enthusiastic with the same patriotic fervor that had gripped most communities across the U.S. This optic of community-based patriotism proved to be more of a vestment of prestige for the participants rather than being the solitary motivator for entering the military. These findings are substantiated and one can deduce that the participants joined the military not understanding the full breadth of what they were in fact signing up to do. The participants, as Bret implied, "... had a

cinematic view...” of what the armed forces would be like and did not fully consider the harsh realities of a wartime mission.

The summation of data analysis indicates that the motivation for joining the military was pragmatic. The military offered an opportunity for the participants to exit their community and/or earn funding for college. Note, the participant known as Vince, joined the military initially with the motivation of fulfilling a cultural expectation of military service. Even so, Vince joined the Marines as a reservist to receive funding for college, also being from a single parent household.

Regarding the participants’ choice to separate from the military, the primary pentadic ratio of note was transposable as being either *act/agent* or *agent/act*. The second prevailing pentadic ratio was *agent/purpose*. The reflective accounts of the described acts of violence that occurred in combat affected the agent’s perceived outcomes associated with that defined event. The interpretation of those experiences led to the *agent’s* expressed need for finding a new *purpose*. Participants shared a perceptible compulsion to rectify the adverse outcomes that transpired during their combat deployments. The participants’ valuation often led them to the conclusion that their leadership was fallible and bore part of the blame for the wounded and killed.

Analysis indicated that participants denounced the consequences of war and became untrusting of their military leadership. They voiced a distrust at all levels of the military command structure. This included their view of the senior leadership’s execution of the war effort including the political arm of the government in the national capital. The participants described feelings of being used, discarded, unvalued, disrespected and

ultimately unprotected while in combat and afterwards. All of the participants, except Lee who retired from the Air Force, elected to exit service after serving in combat, mainly due to the described indicators often associated with moral injury and/or residue.

As was found in their decision to join the military, there was an underlying pragmatism for exiting the military, as well. All the participants were motivated to go to college, and those with children had the desire to provide a stable life for their families. Moreover, they described a comparable motivation for attaining a renewed sense of purpose and meaning, which compelled them to enter higher education.

In choosing nursing school, the participants reflected on events that occurred in the military and/or in combat as being influential in their decisions to become a nurse. Each participant's dramatism was unique; however, the data analysis exposed a common core of like contributory events that influenced their impending transitions.

The pentadic analysis of the data suggested that a ratio of significance was both *act/agent* and *scene/agent*. The explanation for the pairing of these like ratios hinged upon the participants' vantage point of their described incidents. For example, if the subject matter involved an *act* affecting the *agent*, the ratio is then *act/agent*; however, if an incident occurred in a described *scene*, as recalled by the *agent*, the ratio would be viewed as *scene/agent*. Although the impactful stories are uniquely told by each agent, in the end, the residue and aftermath of their combat experiences left them shaken and uncertain on how to proceed with their future.

The above dramatisms certainly contained tragedy with harrowing first-person testimonies from the two warzones of Iraq and Afghanistan. Their depictions of near

death experiences, injuries and deaths of their fellow military members were prevalent throughout their narratives. The first theme that evolved from the CIT data suggested the participants' realization of the finality of death emerged as they discussed their experiences of a friend being suddenly killed. Virtually the same sense of loss is described when they spoke of their wounded colleagues, whom they rarely, if ever saw again. The harsh abruptness and impact of death involving combat was collectively expressed as being disconcerting and morally distressing.

Plainly, the next common emotion conveyed was their sense of empathy and awareness that they, too, could die in combat. This imposed truth of their own mortality and the witnessing of death in the warzone were jointly described as a vital, painful and evolving experience. Vince concisely described the collective positionality of the participants. He said, "I'm done. I'm done destroying. It doesn't make any sense to destroy. Dude, the purpose for the military is to destroy... I don't want anything to do with that anymore." The data analysis indicated that the participants were deflated and saddened after their combat tours of duty, nor could they any longer identify with nor continue in their militia roles.

Within the interview data, there was an interestingly different and distinct theme described by most while in the warzone. This occurrence or perhaps phenomenon was their unexpected sense of wellbeing, which correlated with performed acts of kindness and/or compassion. They all found joy in their ability to offer aide to others that were wounded, regardless of nationality. These experiences were instrumental in participants identifying with how much they liked helping others in need. For example, Franklin

helped a small Iraqi child breathe again, or Lee's symbolic gesture of handing out small gifts to the Afghan orphan children, merely to see them smile; these modest acts conveyed an expressed sense of mindfulness and elation for both. These and similarly described scenarios brought forth powerful life-shaping memories for all the participants.

Universally, after being in combat, the participants wanted in some way to honor their fallen military brethren. They all desired to add new meaning and purpose to their lives after leaving the warzone. As the participants approached their impending life transition in terms of considering nursing as a career, a resounding theme was the fact that they all did not know "men could be nurses". The participants made their career decision grounded on what nurses symbolically mean to society, explicitly viewed as being a valued healthcare profession. Partially informed at best, they all unabashedly, with a renewed sense of purpose and direction, prepared to enter higher education to become nurses.

Notably, within the reported dramatizations, the data findings indicate five of the seven participants were diagnosed with PTSD. Although Sean was undiagnosed, he described the characteristic symptoms consistent with the diagnosis. Franklin was the only participant to self-report being free of PTSD symptomology. This personal information was not purposely sought, instead it was selflessly offered by the interviewed participants. Nonetheless, this disclosure is an added dynamic to the narratives as it influenced the participants' academic progression.

## **Entering Higher Education to Become a Nurse**

In review, Schlossberg's (1995) transition model has three central components as previously described in the methods chapter. The first component of this model is referred to as *approaching transitions*. The second is *taking stock of coping resources*, and the final component of Schlossberg's model is *taking charge*. The latter hinges on how well the individual can strengthen existing resources to ensure a positive transitional outcome (Anderson et al., 2012, p. 38).

At the close of the first interview, the participants were *approaching their transition* into higher education. This supposition is supported by the fact that the seven participants were accepted into a baccalaureate-nursing program to earn their BSN degree. For example, admission into a university nursing program occurs prior to the junior year of college and only after completion of the required prerequisite course work. The follow-on matriculation process for BSN programs is traditionally very competitive. Six of the seven participants entered traditional BSN programs, resulting in a four-year college degree. However, one participant followed a slightly different tack. Bret opted to enter an accelerated 12-month BSN program since he had a previous bachelor's degree. Bret's time in college for his nursing degree to include prerequisite course work was approximately two years in duration.

In the second series of interviews the participants were asked about their experiences involving entering, moving through and out of higher education (Schlossberg, 1995). These questions (Appendix A) were as follows; (a) *Tell me about your experience while enrolled in nursing school (situation)*; (b) *Please tell me about any people who*



*assisted you when going to nursing school (support); (c) What did you learn about yourself through nursing school and becoming a nurse (self)? (d) What were some of the most challenging aspects about nursing school (strategies)?* The latter question was followed with (if not provided in their response) a prompt of how these challenges were handled.

This second iteration of interview questions helped appraise the participants' assets and liabilities as they moved in, moved through and moved out of their nursing program. The data analysis provided a common trajectory of their higher education experiences and is described here, augmented using participant excerpts. Table 4.33 (below) provides a succinct data description of the participants' personal inventories as they approached their transitions, preparing to move into their respective nursing programs. These findings are provided as aggregate data from this study's cohort.

Table 4.33

*Entering Higher Education – Approaching Transition*

Name	Degree Status	Relationship. Status	Education Benefits	Employment Status	# Children	Dx PTSD/ Moral Injury
Bret	NND	Married	VR&E	BW	0	Yes
Harvey	DBM	Married	GI	NW, SW	3	Yes
Vince	NND	Married	SL	BW	0	Yes
Franklin	None	Married	GI	W	2	No
Lee	DIM	Divorced	GI	NW	3	Yes
Sean	None	In a Rel.	GI	W	0	Yes*
Nate	None	Married	GI/HZ	NW, SW	1	Yes

*Note.* The above reflect the elements of the 4S Model *Abbreviations*: Degrees: DBM = Degree Before Military, DIM = Degree While In Military, NND = Non-nursing Degree after Military; Edu Benefits: GI= GI Bill, Hz = Hazelwood Act, VR&E= VA Voc. Rehab & Employment, SL = Student Loans; Employment: W= Working in School, NW = Not Working, SW = Spouse Working, BW = Both Working. (\* PTSD symptoms of PTSD)

**Moving in.** As part of the interview protocol, the participants were asked to discuss their personal resources at the time they started nursing school. These data are relevant to the conceptual *4S model* (Anderson et al., 2012; Schlossberg et al., 1995), which accounts for the participants’ *situation, support, self, and strategies*. This model provides the researcher with an instrument to better gauge the intricacies of existing resources that adult learners navigate to be successful in their transitions. These personal resources are either assets and/or liabilities, which are displayed as ratios, see Table 4.34. The four stated elements can have a positive, negative or a neutral influence on the

transition process for moving into higher education to become nurses. In the following three transition phases, as the researcher, I will provide additional observations beyond the Schlossberg model, based on my analysis of the participants transitional assets as they move in, move through and move out, constructed from the collected interview data.

*Table 4.34*

*Moving In: The 4S Elements*

Names	Situation	Support	Self	Strategies	Ratios/Researcher's analysis of transition progression
Bret	Neutral (n)	Assets (+)	Assets (+)	Assets (+)	3S+/1Sn, assets favorable
Harvey	Neutral (n)	Assets (+)	Assets (+)	Assets (+)	3S+/1Sn, assets favorable
Vince	Neutral (n)	Assets (+)	Assets (+)	Assets (+)	3S+/1Sn, assets favorable
Franklin	Neutral (n)	Assets (+)	Assets (+)	Assets (+)	3S+/1Sn, assets favorable
Lee	Neutral (n)	Assets (+)	Assets (+)	Assets (+)	3S+/1Sn, assets favorable
Sean	Neutral (n)	Assets (+)	Assets (+)	Assets (+)	3S+/1Sn, assets favorable
Nate	Neutral (n)	Assets (+)	Assets (+)	Assets (+)	3S+/1Sn, assets favorable

Note. The Schlossberg (1995) 4S Model assets inventory are applied to the participants as they moved into their higher education venues. The 4S model's assets and liabilities are reported as ratios, asset (+)/ liability (-); for example, an even split of 4Ss asset to liability ratio would be represented as 2S+/2S-. All participants have similar 4S ratio status upon moving in, being favorable for success. Financial stressors were marked as neutral (n) because their personal finances were offset by their military/veteran earned education benefits.

*Situation.* The participants are involved in an ongoing transition process; not only are they moving in, they are also moving away from their previous careers as military warfighters. The interview data was assessed to see if the participants' previous lived experiences coupled with their impending career change created a dichotomous situation for them. However, the analysis led to the conclusion that the participants did not experience a disproportionate amount of stress as they moved into higher education. Instead, this transition seemed to occur at an optimal period in their adult lifecycles. The participants were prepared for and desired this change with the hope they would add new meaning to their ensuing adult years.

Other situational assets were noted in the subsequent analysis. As listed in Table 4.33, four of the seven participants had earned non-nursing degrees prior to entering their nursing programs. Additionally, all the participants were in a described monogamous relationship; five were married, one with a long-term girlfriend, and another was divorced, although they remained amicable. These interpersonal relationships, per the data, contributed to their situational stability.

Also, four of the participants had young children. Their families were an important component of their situational footprint as they moved in. The interview data confirmed that all the children and other pivotal family matters were considered an asset as they moved in to the transition to the nursing program.

Moreover, a substantial barrier that adult learners often face as they move into higher education is cost and impending debt. These obstacles are often linked to their existing commitments and/or finite assets. If the adult learner lacks the ability to cover

personal and educational expenses, an unanticipated monetary lapse can quickly derail best laid plans.

The same situation applied to the participants of this study. Also, their existing fiscal commitments were what placed them at the highest risk for experiencing an impediment to moving in. However, they mitigated their liability with the use of financial safeguards that helped leverage their solvency. All participants had access to some form of military funded education assistance, predominately post-9/11 GI Bill. As Nate affirmed, “Yes, I [had] the post-9/11, which made everything easier, being able to focus more on school and less on work.” Although, these education benefits were facilitatively helpful, all the participants struggled to some degree with their personal finances.

Although the participants had a monetary buffer, they still had existing financial liabilities. As noted in Table 4.33, a few of the spouses were the sole income providers; in other cases, both parties needed to work and sometimes only the participant could work. For example, Lee who was divorced, worked as a medical technician *pro-re-nata* (PRN) while in school. Lee stated, “I was a lot better off than a lot of people... that’s for sure, [but] I paid child support... it took about half my paycheck each month.” The analysis inferred that the participants’ education benefits helped offset the negative liability of their curtailed personal finances. All things considered, the participants’ situations were subject to the normative daily challenges that most individuals and families endure, which caused minor prioritization dilemmas. Subsequently, their situational status was analyzed as neutral (*n*), neither an asset nor a liability. In Table 4.34, all the participants were assigned an *n*, as displayed in the *situation* column.

**Support.** The participants' military/veteran education benefits were valuable support assets, refer to Table 4.33, for their individual education benefit funding sources. However, their spouses, to include Lee's ex-wife and Sean's girlfriend, were primary support systems for their initial entry into nursing school. All the participants' significant others supported their moving in, either emotionally and/or financially. Franklin spoke of his wife's explicit support, he explained, "We spent that whole [last] deployment saving money. She was going to school before I got out of the Army, [but] she quit [so I could go] ... she pretty much got me in." Mutually, the participants' consensus was that their spouses/partners were their pillars of support, categorically their most significant asset for moving in.

Also, the participants other than Lee, described having an important, but segregated support system consisting of fellow war veteran colleagues. This support ranged from personal interface to social media as a mode of staying in contact with another. For instance, Bret counted on his ex-Marine buddy who had since become a sheriff's deputy. His friend had learned about Bret's mental breakdown and was openly supportive of his career choice to become nurse. He said to Bret, "I have my job, you have this [nursing school] and you know, we're both contributing members of society." The supportive relationships that the participants maintained with their prior service military associates were purposefully kept separate from their families. They mostly described these friendships as therapeutic, which allowed them to decompress with those that shared their warzone experiences. The analysis reinforced that their collective support systems were assets.

*Self.* The reflective self was evident within this cohort. For example, Harvey said, “I always wanted to do something that made a difference, I know that sounds a little corny... [but] the nursing aspect attracted me.” They shared a collective positivity about their career choices, but they also expressed an uneasiness about their transition into nursing school. They described a vagueness associated with becoming a nurse and the gender bias was bothersome.

In terms of the gender bias, the following comments provide a glimpse into the participants’ uneasiness about adopting the role of nursing. Sean recalled, “Now... my dad, when I told him, he was like, ‘What the hell do you want to go nursing school for? Isn’t that for women?’” An additional example includes Nate’s perspective on nursing as a career. He said, “My dad used to be... a surgical tech. So, he would talk down about nursing... so the only experience I had about nursing was through him. It did seem too touchy-feely.” Also, Franklin described his awkwardness, “I was pretty nervous, I could tell you the maximum effective range of any weapon, but I just didn’t know a lot about [nursing].” The participants coped mostly by focusing on the required academic rigor, trusting they had made the correct career decision.

Additionally, while they were in the process of moving in, three had recently completed cognitive therapy while another was involved with ongoing treatments and medication trials. In referencing those with PTSD, if their existing psychological difficulties remained unresolved or without treatment, this would have likely become a significant liability for the affected participants. However, as they moved in, their inventory of personal resources remained stable.

Also, their noted personal challenges were never described by any of the participants as being a barrier to their moving in. For instance, Lee was still experiencing anger associated with his PTSD as he moved in, he stated:

I was so volatile... it was just rough. That's when they me put me on my first meds. You always have the nightmares and what not, they gave me a separate medicine for that. Meanwhile, that's about the time I started school... Yes, I was excited, all kinds of emotions were swirling around in my head.

The analysis strengthened the assumption that the participants had the required grit to successfully move into their nursing programs. This determination was noted as they strived to move in, they all remained steadfast in their search to find a higher calling. Grit is the term I used to describe the participants' resilience and persistence with emerging evidence of post-trauma growth. For example, after cognitive therapy Bret stated, "I just... I just had a totally different attitude, was definitely excited about doing this [nursing] thing, you know wanting something for myself... knowing it was for me, yeah" Also, Nate explained his positionality as he was moving into nursing school. He said, "I was finishing cognitive therapy... in conjunction with other things, [it] helped me with motivation and getting into [nursing] school." Their collective of described motivations, as they moved in, created an overall positive situation with assets that outweighed any existing liabilities.

**Strategies.** The participants' common approach to their career transitions were primarily crafted as a careful and thorough plan for moving in. This plan accounted for their situation, support, and personal inventory of assets and liabilities. Their planning



factors included the processes for financing their degree, fiscal considerations involving their households, how they would manage family commitments, and other pertinent agenda items related to their nursing education. It is here in the *4S* strategies element (Anderson et al., 2012; Schlossberg et al., 1995) that the *taking stock of coping resources* and *taking charge* categories of the model are best appraised. As discussed above, Bret chose to enter an accelerated nursing program because it was the best strategy to use towards attaining his goal in becoming a nurse. Harvey could have taken this same approach since he had a previous bachelor's degree, but he did not use this strategy.

Harvey explained:

Planning wise, we had to tighten up quite a bit financially. I looked at going into the accelerated program, but I felt with family that was too much. I figured even though it would delay me going back to work [by a semester], having the summers off with the kids would be better.

These and like strategies were foundational to the participants' successful planning processes, with their thoughtful strategies being in place well before they ever applied for nursing school. Their strategies were logged as assets for moving in.

**Moving-Through.** Schlossberg (1995) differentiates transitions into three configurations; transitions are viewed as either anticipated, unanticipated or non-event. For example, the participants had previously accomplished moving-in; they all experienced an anticipated transition into higher education. Within this timeline, the participants had successfully moved in as undergraduate students in their nursing programs. As the participants engaged in the moving through process, during this time

which took 18 to 24 months, the participants experienced unforeseen life events (see Table 4.35), which impacted their 4S asset and liability ratios.

Table 4.35

*Moving Through: The 4S Elements*

Names	Situation	Support	Self	Strategies	Ratios/ <i>Researcher's analysis of transition progression</i>
Bret	Liability (-) <i>) Divorced</i>	Liability (-) <i>) Ex-Wife</i>	Assets (+)	Assets (+)	2S+/2S-, <i>assets n, at risk</i>
Harvey	Neutral (n)	Assets (+)	Assets (+)	Assets (+)	3S+/1Sn, <i>assets favorable</i>
Vince	Neutral (n)	Assets (+)	Assets (+)	Assets (+)	3S+/1Sn, <i>assets favorable</i>
Franklin	Liability (-) <i>) Birth of baby</i>	Assets (+)	Assets (+)	Assets (+)	3S+/1S-, <i>assets favorable</i>
Lee	Liability (-) <i>) Ex-Wife Deployed</i>	Liability (-) <i>) Ex-Wife Deployed</i>	Liability (-) <i>) PTSD s/s</i>	Assets (+)	1S+/3Sn, <i>assets unfavorable, (-) high risk</i>
Sean	Liability (-) <i>) Program failure</i>	Assets (+)	Liability (-)	Assets (+)	2S+/2S-, <i>assets n, at risk</i>
Nate	Neutral (n)	Assets (+)	Assets (+)	Assets (+)	3S+/1Sn, <i>assets favorable</i>

*Note.* The Schlossberg (1995) 4S Model assets inventory as applied to the participants as they moved through their nursing school. Bret and Lee's 4S ratio status is at risk due to the impact of both support and situation negatives. The remaining participants are favorable for success. Financial stressors were neutral (n) since all had education benefits.

**Situation.** As the participants moved through their respective curriculums, they successfully assimilated into their new roles as nursing students. However, not all

participants described a smooth transition. For example, Lee lamented, “The first semester was the worst for me. With the PTSD... I had trouble focusing [and] realized real quick that nursing school is an animal all its own. Probably the biggest emotion felt was uncertainty.” Still, Lee progressed through his program without delay.

Collectively, the participants’ finances remained solvent. The findings indicate that their earned education benefits served as a fiscal advantage, shielding them from excessive monetary hardships. However, the data also confirmed that for all, finances remained a struggle throughout. Sean provided insight as he explained, “Finances were a big deal. So that was a big fight we (he and his girlfriend) had because bills weren’t getting paid.” Comparable financial issues existed for the participants as they attempted to meet their day to day living expenses. Still, their tuition was primarily paid with educational benefits, allowing them to move through higher education without accruing significant academic debt.

While most of the participants’ circumstances remained unremarkable, a few of the participants experienced a significant shift in their personal situations. First, Sean had difficulty keeping up with his nursing courses. The fact that he worked over 30 hours a week was a distractor and was further complicated by his self-described excessive drinking. During his first semester Sean failed out of the nursing program, experiencing a non-event transition. He subsequently submitted a formal letter requesting reentry into the program. Sean explained:

The letter was hard to write. This was my first [real] reflection after coming back from deployment. I just pretty much put it out there... [telling them] I would get

help from the VA, I'd work less. I'd drink less. I'm kind of a socially awkward person, another reason I went into nursing is to [learn to] talk to people. I [really] needed to become that person, the one that was there in the moment.

The nursing school's administration deliberated on the complexity of Sean's situation, and he was readmitted. However, it is important to consider the impact of the situation that Sean had created for himself. In hindsight, this situation was an essential step in his transition process. This non-event created a beneficial pause, allowing Sean the time to rethink and fully commit his energies to mature into the compassionate nurse he desired to become.

Additionally, while Bret was attending nursing school as an accelerated student, he was either attending class or was in nursing clinicals (providing patient care in hospital settings) seven days a week. During this time, Bret had an extramarital affair with another nursing student. He stated, "I immediately went home and told my wife... I wanted a divorce." Even after entering marriage counseling, their marriage ended in divorce. The above situation occurred during the first six months of nursing school and was a liability as he was moving through. Bret's hardship is further expounded upon in his reflections of self.

Franklin also experienced a consequential event, albeit a joyous occasion, which was the birth of a third child. This situation occurred during the second semester of nursing school. He explained:

We did a natural birth at home. That's what my wife wanted, she's a granola mom... [did it in a] blow up pool in our bedroom... kind of crazy now if I think about it (he laughs). That might be why I got my A in labor and delivery class. His finances were finite, he and his wife had three young children to care for, and his available time to assist was limited. Because of these stressors, the situation became a liability for Franklin as he moved through.

Likewise, a situational crisis developed for Lee during his third semester of nursing school. His ex-wife was unexpectedly deployed to Iraq for six months. He then moved into her home to care for their three children, attempting to limit their day to day disruptions. When asked if this affected his stress level, he responded:

Oh my god yes, it was horrifying, and I still don't know how I did it... the kids were all 10 years [of age] and younger. I was trying to pass third semester... traditionally known as the worst [most difficult] semester.

Other participants also experienced situational challenges along the way. In the two-years they attended their nursing programs and lived on limited budgets, life required all the participants to adapt and adjust their existing situations regularly. However, the data supported that the events were primarily inconsequential to their progression of moving through higher education. Even those with greater liabilities, as discussed above, managed to keep their situational resources aligned to the point they were able to facilitate their moving through.

**Support.** As the participants were moving through, their spouses, Lee's ex-spouse and Sean's girlfriend continued to be the mainstay of their support systems, excluding

Bret's now ex-wife. For example, Harvey confirmed the importance of his wife's contributions, "My wife was super supportive. Now granted it was tough... because she's got the full-time job and the kids. I feel very fortunate... I don't think I could have done it without her." Comparable data obtained from the other participants' interviews fully supported Harvey's sentiments. They all affirmed that their significant others provided substantial support that directly contributed to their success of moving through.

Also, their military support networks of veteran buddies remained a staple throughout their time in nursing school. Sean stated, "Yeah [they were supportive], not that they knew what was going on... we would blow off steam, just shoot the shit... definitely, we would hang out once in a while." It was also during this time that the participants' reached out and found extended support systems within their nursing programs. These support systems included fellow nursing students, in some cases school administrators and faculty members.

The following exemplars provide context to the types of expanded support systems described by the participants as they moved through. Vince explained how a nursing faculty member facilitated his learning. He said, "[He] had a very good approach as far as talking to [his] students as a human being and not some peon student... I learned a lot about myself, and that helped me open things up." Nate also spoke about a professor that supported his transition in becoming a male nurse. He shared:

I [finally] had a faculty that was male... he had such an influence, kind of showed me that you don't have to be the touchy-feely type... you can still be a

male in this profession, and still provide [good care] to help people. That [gave me] a lot of motivation and understanding.

Lee required supplementary support systems to help augment his unexpected childcare commitments and stressors brought on by his ex-wife's deployment. Lee received assistance from student colleagues, faculty and one of the nursing school's associate deans. Lee and the associate dean forged an informal support system that helped sustain him as he struggled to move through. He explained, "Dr. Crow [pseudonym] was pretty much my number one go-to. We hit it off from the giddy up. He was approachable and was a really good sounding board." Because of this supportive relationship, Lee explained he was better equipped to self-advocate with faculty members when stressors emerged in his ongoing course work.

Conversely, Bret did not look to his faculty or administration for support, especially during his divorce. When asked, he snapped, "Absolutely not! I really resented... I... I really was not a fan of the Jesuit programs, it was just the rigidity." Bret implied that the university's religious influences would have caused him more conflict than support. His divorce created a void within his primary support network. However, he acquired a surrogate support system that assisted him as he moved through. This associate was a friend of the family, originally from his hometown, and was married with children. She and her husband essentially treated him as an extended family member. This newly established support system provided Bret with a renewed sense of belonging and external accountability.

Additionally, most of the participants, excluding Sean, found added support with students and peer groups. With that stated, the findings indicate that participants were generally very selective in their choices of confidants and study groups. For instance, Harvey befriended a colleague, who was also an adult learner. He explained:

I really didn't know anybody going through the program, and this [older student] said something very sarcastic to me. She was like, 'Oh I'm sorry, I don't even know you.' And I was like, 'You and I are going to be friends, because I like shit like that.' She was super smart.

Additionally, Franklin enjoyed group work and found strength in numbers. He said, "I got plugged into a really good study group. Came on campus a lot [to] study with them... was the older students and veterans. I couldn't study at home; the kids were just too loud." However, Sean did not reach out to his fellow nursing students at all; the demographics were a barrier to him. He described, "I didn't really have study buddies... everybody was much younger. So, I was in my late 20's and they were all like 18. [Also] it was kind of... mainly Caucasian. Not really many Hispanics." Sean generally preferred to study alone at the library or at his apartment, which he shared with his longtime girlfriend.

As noted above, the participants used a variety of external support systems within their academic settings to assist in their moving through. The analysis confirmed that they all found solace to some degree with older nontraditional students with similar demographic profiles when available. Being adult learners, the participants had different learning styles and time constraints, oft differing from that of their fellow traditional



nursing students. With their family support systems in place, regular contact with their prior military friends and their collegiate associates, all participants were able to garner the needed support to move successfully through their nursing programs.

*Self.* As a collective, the participants remained engaged, mindful and reflective as they moved through nursing school. As adult learners and combat veterans, they described themselves as being disciplined, targeted and goal driven. Analysis identified that they were not easily distracted or dissuaded from achieving their career transitions.

Even Bret remained emotionally strong after his divorce. When asked how he felt while he was in school, he declared, “Battle ready, man.” However, he became somber when he reflected on the divorce and his ex-wife. Bret explained how his cognitive therapy, which he referred to as lifesaving, helped him heal and grow from his previous experiences in war. He then offered the unanticipated consequence of his personal progress. Bret deliberated as he explained:

[Initially] I didn’t want to marry anybody that resembled myself... [I was dirty, they needed to be] somebody totally opposite of me. I loved her, I know I loved her. That was the hardest divorce; I can’t imagine a divorce harder than that. You’re hurting somebody that never did anything wrong to you. [But it finally came down to] just being okay with myself [and moving on].

Bret implied that he wished things could have been different, but after regaining a renewed sense of identity and for reasons best known to himself, he elected to finish this journey of becoming a nurse on his own.

While moving through, the other participants essentially focused on their day to day academic requirements of becoming nurses. For example, Nate expressed the drive and determination required to embrace his becoming a nurse as he moved through:

It does take a little a bit going from this machismo male in combat to transitioning to this [nursing] role. [But] for me... I had nothing left to prove. Because everything I had... blood, sweat and tears, I left it on the battlefield. That's where my ego is at... [I think] actually showing compassion is how you can prove you're a better person.

Lee described his continued intermittent emotional struggles as he moved through. He reflected:

[My PTSD] had gotten pretty bad again... I quit taking my medication about halfway through [school]. It didn't take much to light my fuse. I actually found being around my kids... actually comforted me and brought me back to earth.

Lee, like the others, remained remarkably resilient in the face of personal trials under very stressful circumstances.

The above reflections serve as exemplars of the types of challenges and approaches used by the participants to take charge of their existing personal resources. The data support that their personal growth and insightful understanding of internal motivators helped them refine their coping skills, which improved the execution of their academic transition as they moved through.

**Strategies.** The data included personal accounts of the participants' sense of the performance pressures associated with the rigors of their nursing curriculums. To note,

their families remained ever supportive as they moved through, but the academic process at times fatigued both the participants and their family members. Sean spoke of his academic progress following his readmission to nursing school. He explained his scholastic strategic methods:

I mean, for me, I am always a work in progress. [Always] trying to reconcile what I was trying to do. [To study] I pulled away from campus. [But] I'd go to the library... more [productive] alone time, more time away from work. I think that I'm better... even though I didn't go to the VA [for PTSD treatment]. I [even] ended up on the Dean's list.

Also, Nate employed study strategies that were akin to what the other participants used. He chose to be away from home to study, thinking primarily about finishing his nursing degree. He explained:

I felt as though I was focusing so much on school... but I felt... I felt as though if I was going to become the breadwinner, because she was the only one making money, I needed the opportunities to study and take care of what I needed to care of.

These types of strategies were collectively described by the participants as a tradeoff, they knowingly lost valuable time with their loved ones to achieve their common purpose of becoming a nurse. The analysis also supported that the participants and their significant others appeared to accept that this ordeal would have a limited duration, and was a team effort, enduring the additional burdens. The findings suggested that progressing toward their strategic goals at times proved to be a difficult task for all

involved parties. Nonetheless, this venture was considered worthy of their and their families' temporary sacrifice as they moved through.

**Moving out.** At this point in the transition process, all the participants had met their degree requirements to graduate with their long sought-after BSN. As they moved out they all needed to prepare for their licensure exam, which is the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX). All candidates must pass this examination to receive their RN licenses. Although the NCLEX is a nationally administered standardized test, each State's Board of Nursing regulates nursing practice within their domain. Once the participants passed the NCLEX, they could enter the job market to begin their nursing careers. When these stipulations were met by the participants, their career transitions, as defined by Schlossberg (1995), had been achieved. All participants accomplished moving through and became collegial members of the nursing profession.

Table 4.36

*Moving Out: The 4S Elements*

Names	Situation	Support	Self	Strategies	Ratios/ <i>Researcher's analysis of transition progression</i>
Bret	Assets (+) <i>graduated/ Passed NCLEX</i>	Assets (+) <i>family friend</i>	Assets (+) <i>renewed</i>	Assets (+) <i>nurse in ICU, traveler</i>	4S+/0S-, <i>all 4S elements favorable</i>
Harvey	Assets (+) <i>graduated/ passed NCLEX</i>	Assets (+) <i>spouse, family</i>	Assets (+) <i>resilient</i>	Assets (+) <i>nurse in ICU, reserve officer(intel)</i>	3S+/0S-, <i>all 4S assets favorable</i>
Vince	Neutral (n) <i>graduated/ passed NCLEX, divorced</i>	Liability (-) <i>ex- wife</i>	Neutral (n) <i>resilient/ situational depressed</i>	Assets (+) <i>nurse in ICU</i>	1S+/1S -/2Sn, <i>assets neutral, slight risk</i>
Franklin	Neutral (n) <i>graduated/ failed NCLEX, passed 2<sup>nd</sup> attempt</i>	Assets (+) <i>spouse, church</i>	Assets (+) <i>resilient</i>	Assets (+) <i>nurse in neuro ICU</i>	3S+/1Sn, <i>assets favorable</i>
Lee	Assets (+) <i>graduated/ passed NCLEX</i>	Assets (+) <i>ex-wife/ family</i>	Neutral (n) <i>minor PTSD symptoms</i>	Assets (+) <i>nurse in ER</i>	3S+/1Sn, <i>assets favorable</i>
Sean	Assets (+) <i>graduated/ passed NCLEX</i>	Assets (+) <i>spouse</i>	Neutral (n) <i>resilient/ medical disorder</i>	Assets (+) <i>Army nurse officer/ ICU</i>	4S+/1Sn, <i>elements favorable</i>
Nate	Assets (+) <i>graduated/ Passed NCLEX, graduated master's in nursing science</i>	Assets (+) <i>spouse/ family/ church</i>	Neutral (n) <i>renewed w/ minor PTSD symptoms afterward</i>	Assets (+) <i>nurse in ICU, advanced practice NP</i>	3S+/1Sn, <i>assets favorable</i>

*Note.* The Schlossberg (1995) 4S Model assets inventory as the participants as they moved out; graduated, passed NCLEX and status as registered nurses. \*Franklin NCLEX fail, passed six weeks later. \*\*Nate earned his master's degree, acute care nurse practitioner, Harvey entered army reserves, full time civilian ICU nurse, \*\*\*Sean went on active duty as a nurse corps officer, ... now civilian ICU nurse.

*Situation.* The participants achieved their anticipated transitional goal (Schlosberg, 1995) of graduating with their BSN. However, there remained one additional step in their continuum to successfully achieve moving out. The NCLEX, as mentioned above, was a known and expected pause in their ability to enter the job market as an RN. The passing of this licensure examination was a significant event in their process of becoming a nurse and was equated to be another anticipated transition for moving out.

All participants passed the NCLEX on their first attempt, except for Franklin. He simply stated, "It was about 45 days after school, I took it [and] failed the NCLEX the first time." Although Franklin anticipated passing, he instead experienced a temporary non-event transition. He needed to wait nearly another six weeks before he could retest. In the meanwhile, he worked as a medical technician until he passed the NCLEX on his second attempt. At this point the entire study cohort had completed their transition as evidenced by their moving out of higher education, passing their licensure examination and entering the healthcare industry as nurses.

All participants received employment offers soon after passing the NCLEX. The participants were able to secure nursing positions in their choice of specialized areas (Table 4.36), which is more the exception than the normative standard. Noteworthy, they all went into acute patient care services, either intensive care nursing or emergency

nursing. As affirmed in the data, even as nurses, they still desired to work in an intense and/or high-risk career field even in the hospital settings.

The collective of the participants' family situations improved as the participants moved out, directly linked to the progression of their fledging nursing careers. However, a study participant experienced a substantial change within his familial situation, just as he achieved moving out. This unanticipated transition was the abrupt end of Vince's marriage. He explained, "She said, 'I'm not happy, I want a divorce,' and I was, 'well what... this kind of sudden.' She filed [for divorce] the end of November, and I graduated early December." Vince's wife was also a nursing student in the same program he was in, one-year removed. Though destabilized by his personal dilemma, Vince proved to be resilient. He managed to sustain his trajectory of moving out, passing his NCLEX and accepted a critical care nursing position at a local medical center.

Status change in a personal relationship during the moving out stage also occurred with Sean. After graduation, Sean proposed to his longtime girlfriend, and they were married. He then joined the army as an officer. He stated, "I thought I wanted to try it again, I wanted to give back in a sense... to actually give somebody a good [leadership] example." Sean left for active duty as a second lieutenant in the army nurse corps, which brought him and his wife to Texas. He then revealed:

So, I was about year in [as a nurse corps officer] ... I got medically retired. The geneticist thought I had muscular dystrophy, the neurologist thought I had a metabolic disorder. Turns out I can't process fat for energy... I couldn't be a soldier anymore.

Sean was medically discharged from the military after being diagnosed with a potentially debilitating musculoskeletal disease. However, Sean was still able to work and was employed as a civilian critical nurse at a local medical center.

*Support.* The existing support systems remained similar as in the previously described transitions, excluding Vince. He no longer had a reliable spousal support network after his wife left him. Vince's fractured support was a liability. He was initially embittered, withdrawn and unwilling to reach out to other family members or friends for support as he dealt with this unanticipated transition of divorce. On a superficial level, Vince maintained some contact with his student cohort. Mainly, to cope he internalized his energies and focused fully on what was needed to complete the process of moving out of the transition of higher education.

In moving out, the other participants were in a reciprocal position, now being available as support assets for their families and friends. Nate confirmed he purposefully took time off in December after he graduated. He momentarily disengaged from the moving out transition to spend quality time with his wife who was pregnant with their first child. He said, "I didn't... take the [NCLEX] test until January. So, the holidays weren't that bad. I knew the test was looming, but I was able to enjoy the holidays with her [and family]." The analysis demonstrated that other participants also made good use of their time after graduation and before beginning their nursing careers. This period was predominantly used by the participants to celebrate and reintegrate with their loved ones as they finished their moving out transition and into the nursing profession.



The findings also identified remnants of previous external support systems associated with their nursing programs. Notably, after graduation, five of the seven participants' mutually-supportive student groups did not dissolve. Instead the participants explained that their individual nursing cohorts modified into temporary support systems that bridged their transition of moving out. Post-graduation the participants benefited from the supportive relationships they maintained with their nursing classmates. The participants' support roles involved group preparation for NCLEX, tension reducing social activities and announcements for those that passed their licensure examinations. These results were oft communicated on their group's social media sites for all to see. Lee described his process:

I thought I bombed [NCLEX] so bad. I called a couple of my [student] friends, they said, 'there ain't no way.' I was just a ball of nerves, waited 48 hours [until the results showed I passed]. Went out that night and tied one on with those friends... just celebrating. Once I passed that [test], just a ton of bricks were off my shoulders.

Like Lee, every participant experienced a similar sense of dread after taking their NCLEX until they received their test results. The participants received and provided support for one another, described as a communal effort. For example, Vince stated, "I was second from my class to take the [NCLEX], we had a class website. I posted what advice I could and explained how I felt. So, when they took it, if they felt equally horrible, they didn't feel alone." The findings confirmed that the importance of these

student support systems post-graduation was viewed favorably by the participants as they moved out.

Predictably once the participants moved out to be RNs and became productive members of the healthcare community, the need for the student support systems eventually attenuated. The student cohorts had served their function and afterwards fragmented into subsets of friends and social contacts. As the participants finished the process of moving out, they found that their new nursing coworkers served as a professional and collegial support system that helped assimilate them into their new hospital work settings.

*Self.* In this 4S element, the data analysis accounts for the participants' impactful outcomes surrounding the attainment of their anticipated transition of becoming nurses. After completing their academic course work, the participants reported a personal sense of accomplishment and wellbeing. As previously cited in the above dramatizations, initially the participants shared the sentiment that they needed to give back, felt guilty for surviving and had a sense of owing their fallen and/or wounded brethren.

However, once the participants completed their transitional journey of becoming nurses, they no longer seemed to carry that overwhelming sense of guilt. Instead, participants reached a point where they chose to serve as a caregiver mainly on their own behalf. This described involvement and advocacy for self is congruent with (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996, 2004) post trauma growth theory. As Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996) state, "One class of benefits cited by individuals who have faced trauma is positive change in perception of the self" (p. 456). These findings are supported with data affirming the

participants internal motivators and newly articulated appreciation of serving a higher calling because it brings intrinsic meaning to self.

The following vignette is an exemplar of the types of self-reflections shared by the participants as they evolved and moved out. Bret shared his personal account:

Well, I [no longer] look at this as a second chance. Now it's the sense of like, I have the peace of mind knowing I'm doing the best I can. You're part of something, I think... that matters. I mean you save people's lives. I do look at it as connected... coming out of my cognitive processing therapy... the clearing of this haze from my mind, sort of having clarity of thought... having a sense of fulfillment.

Also, Sean shared a reflective if not transformative moment as he connected on a personal level with his dying patient:

I also realized how much I identified myself with my [diagnosed] physicality... it was probably the biggest turning point... how I see nursing, how I see what I do. I think it was pretty amazing... we had one lady with liver failure... I go in there and I'm helping her... I just see this tissue with some blood on it, she's using it to wipe her nose. I'm like, 'um, are you especially attached to that tissue? You know you got a whole box right here... I can give you a clean one.' She starts laughing. I made her laugh... I'm just joking around and she laughs... she died a few day later. I remember that, because that was one of her last moments. It's satisfying to me that I could, for that moment, she was laughing, and I could take her to a place other than where she was at.

Essentially all the participants shared similar testimonies as Bret and Sean stated above. The findings affirmed, that they believed as nurses they would now be able to make other lives better and in return add meaningful context to their own.

Although, Vince initially shared the above sentiments, as he awaited the final divorce decree, his positionality regressed momentarily as he contemplated his moving out. He explained:

She was supposed to be my life... [instead] that was the third most painful thing that happened in my life... it really hurt. [So again] it was for my brothers, I had to do it for my brothers, and that was it. [Now] I had to keep pushing.

However, as Vince moved out, he healed emotionally and confirmed that he too was serving a greater purpose, not just for his “brothers” but also for himself. His reformed valuation aligned with the shared views of this study cohort. The findings supported that the participants’ comprehended that their moving out and into their new careers, signaled that they had achieved their long-anticipated transition of becoming nurses.

*Strategies.* The analysis indicated that the participants’ applied strategies to their moving out that were both pragmatic and straight forward. These findings involved strategies that influenced their NCLEX preparation and the types of nursing positions obtained. Although aspects of these data were previously discussed in the above 4S model (Schlossberg, 1995), elements of situation, support, and self, are interwoven into the strategic methods used by the participants as they finalized their transition of moving out to become nurses.

In addition, as they moved out, all participants employed new strategies that improved their mental and physical health. Harvey, Vince, Franklin, and Nate discussed their implementation of healthy lifestyle changes that included physical exercise regimes and planned family activities. These newly prescribed fitness routines were improvements over their previously described sedentary lifestyles while in school.

As Harvey was moving out, he reflected on how he had learned to quell his PTSD-linked anxiety triggers by using healthy choices. He explained:

I have high blood pressure. I can go from being totally calm to... raining hell on someone. I [now] have a better understanding of when I need to be stressed... when I don't need to be stressed. [My strategies] are to work out at least three times a week. I [also] take the kids to play sports... hanging with the kids really helps.

Vince employed similar strategies that helped him to cope better, rationalize, and regain his overall health. He explained:

I increased working out. I worked out a lot. I actually started to lose weight, lean out and Marine up again. [During this time], I had two offers from ICU's. And out of loyalty, I stayed in [my current critical care unit]. Loyalty was very important to me. Especially at this point in my divorce. I value loyalty a lot.

These types of strategies, abovementioned, were used by the participants and expressed throughout the interview data. They described the strategies used on how they moved out and prepared for their new nursing careers.

The findings identified that this cohort often used like strategies, as discussed above, to facilitate the final required steps to complete their career transition. The analysis also corroborated the participants' collective satisfaction in the culmination of their purposeful and strategically planned career changes. Based on the above interview data sets, I found in my analysis that the participants described a heightened level of mindfulness and self-awareness, not previously identified in the interview data. The reflections shared from their new careers in nursing were thoughtful and heartwarming to hear from my now esteemed colleagues.

### **Reflections on Becoming a Nurse and Future Plans**

The entire cohort of participants expressed being very satisfied in their career choice to become a nurse (see Table 4.37, below). The cohort of participants affirmed that their becoming a nurse was the right decision. The range time for those working as nurses' post transition was from six months to seven years. They all voiced having a universal sense of fulfillment that they derived from their now meaningful work as nurses. Notably, the participants that had recently entered nursing as a career remained somewhat overwhelmed by the amount of learning required before they would feel competent to practice independently.

Table 4.37

*On Being a Nurse and Future Plans.*

Names	Current Nursing Degree	10 - point Likert Scale ( <i>lesser to greater: satisfaction in nursing career</i> )/ participant commentary	Current Practice/Nursing Career Goals
Bret	BSN/*3	Likert response: 9. He explained, "I don't want to show hubris [but]... I do not feel like I am lacking in anything [anymore]." He implies being fully satisfied in his career as a nurse.	Working critical care, is in **enrolled in MSN, FNP program
Harvey	BSN/*6	Likert response: 7. He stated, "I am pretty happy with what I'm doing... just not done yet." Self-doubt in skills remained but enjoyed his work. He admittedly is hard on himself.	To consider FNP, wants more practical experience
Vince	BSN/*2	Likert response: 9. He replied, "No such thing as a ten" Described a deep personal joy in his work as a nurse.	Working in critical care, **enrolled in a CRNA, DNP program
Franklin	BSN/*1.5	Likert *** <i>not available</i> . In response to being in the right career. He stated, "I'm sure of it!" He affirmed he would do it all over again.	Acute care, advanced degree (Desires to be FNP) TBD
Lee	BSN/*6	Likert response: 8. He explained, "It's exciting...I just wish I was further along than I was." Lee valued his career as a nurse. He would have preferred nursing as his first career.	Emergency nursing, advanced degree TBD
Sean	BSN/*6	Likert response: 10. He said, "If I'm going to be away from what I love most, [my family], it has to count. So, when I go to my patient's room... I'm there 100%, you're it!"	Critical care nursing, considering nursing/healthcare administration, TBD
Nate	BSN, MSN, ACNP/*6	Likert response: 10. He stated, "I love my job, found my true calling providing compassionate care... building that bond of trust."	Eligible to be university clinical adjunct nursing faculty, DNP TBD

*Note.* An (\*) indicates years in practice at time of interview. An (\*\*) indicates at time of document submission. BSN is Bachelor of Science in Nursing, MSN is Master of Science in Nursing, ACNP is acute care nurse practitioner, FNP is family nurse practitioner, CRNA is certified registered nurse Anesthetist, DNP is Doctoral of Nursing Practice (a terminal nursing practice degree). TBD is to be decided. The (\*\*\*) refer to Franklin's Likert rating being unavailable, he received a phone call during the interview question was not posed after the interview recommenced.

The participants' level of academic preparedness to practice as nurses, at the time of the interviews, were BSN RNs with only Nate having attained his Master of Science

(MSN) in nursing before the study. Nate is a licensed advanced practice nurse, specialized as an acute care nurse practitioner. The other participants confirmed that they were interested in obtaining an advanced nursing degree, with two currently enrolled and the remaining participants having voiced wanting a few more years of nursing experience.

### **Findings Summary**

The data obtained from the two interviews was notably rich and thick. The detailed descriptions from each of the seven participants was extensive and deeply insightful. Appreciatively the participants shared their deep personal reflections in an honest and unabashed manner. Their demonstrated trust and deep emotional recall were both compelling and humbling. These men volunteered to become combat qualified militia fighting forces, wanted to go to war as they searched for a fulfilling career in the military and to earn GI Bill education benefits for college. However, as stated in the above dramatizations, their described lived experiences often consisted of the unthinkable. The resultant effects of their tours of combat changed how they viewed themselves, colleagues, family, and country.

This study researched their narrative stories of combat and the ensuing dichotomous changes that occurred in their lives and careers afterward. Their choice to enter and/or return to college to become bachelor prepared nurses proved to be a significant and meaningful transition. Schlossberg's transition model (1995) was used as a theoretical framework, which helped guide the data analysis, accounting for the process of moving in, moving through and moving out. The data analysis refined the 4S elements



that involved the integral resources needed to complete each leg of the aforesaid transition in becoming nurses.

All participants struggled with personal challenges at some point during their higher education transition, with some more significant than others. The findings established that all cohort members had developed substantial resilience and had genuine support systems in place. These two factors are viewed as essential components for their successful transition to become nurses. Additionally, not one participant had the slightest regret in becoming a nurse and all agreed that their work is fulfilling and meaningful. They all prevailed and for the moment are striving and succeeding at making other peoples lives better, as they themselves move forward into the next chapter of their evolving lifecycle. The findings affirmed the complexities and importance of this study cohort. The research and analysis accounted for their motivations behind their unlikely journey from combat to caregiver.

## CHAPTER V. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

*Man's search for meaning is the primary motivation in his life... This meaning is unique and specific in that it must and can be fulfilled by him alone; only then does it achieve a significance which will satisfy his own will to meaning. (Frankl, 1984, p. 121)*

### Summary of Findings

As described in chapter one, the purpose of this qualitative study was to better understand the motivations of why combat veterans entered higher education to become nurses. This wonderment was based on my awareness of individual adult learners that entered collegiate nursing programs who were veterans of the Iraq and/or Afghanistan wars. They seemingly entered nursing to build a new career significantly divergent from their previous military career in combat arms. That observation led to the following research problem, as restated from chapter one: *There is an adult learner cohort of United States military combat veterans from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars who has changed career paths by returning to school to become nurses.*

In this study narrative inquiry was the methodology used to address this phenomenon using a series of two interviews for each empaneled participant. The questions used in the first interview, in general terms, were designed to elicit the participants' personal stories. Their descriptions provided data on why they joined the military, the impact of their combat experiences and their reasoning for exiting military service. The interview questions helped investigate their narratives as to how and why they decided to enter an undergraduate nursing program to become nurses.

### **Tour of Duty in the Warzone**

The first series of questions focused on the participants' initial motivations to join the military. The data analysis established that the participants were from lower middle-class, single parent or blended families, living in predominately economically depressed communities. The participants and their families reportedly lacked the resources to pay for and/or assist with their college expenses. The participants were not able to find suitable employment, nor could they afford the costs associated with entering higher education. Instead the participants looked for opportunities beyond their own townships. As a collective they were pragmatically drawn to the military's offerings of vocational training in combat arms and enjoyed the opportunity to have a structured career. The findings indicated that patriotism was a factor in their choice; however, the primary rationale for entering military service was founded on their ability to travel, learn a trade and notably earn educational benefits for college.

The interviews produced insightful data about the participants' military combat experiences that impacted their lives, substantially altering their perceptions of self and the world around them. Their described experiences in the warzone were far different from what they had ever expected. The participants described a full range of sensations including pride in their accomplishments, the comradery, and acts of bravery, which were countered with lingering memories of fear, anger, loss, death, and sadness.

These detailed narrative stories of life and death in the warzone were presented as Burkean (1945, 1950) pentadic criticisms as described in the methods chapter. The dramatisms, with the use of pentadic analysis, provided an informative analysis of each

of the participants' impactful narratives in the Findings chapter. The pentadic analysis described their motivations for leaving the military and their newfound desire to add meaning to their lives through the service of helping others.

### **Transitioning into Higher Education and Beyond**

The second set of interviews were analyzed and presented as aggregated data as they related to the participants' transitional processes of entering higher education to become nurses. All of the participants in this study were admitted to a university with a degree generating program which was used as a gateway to their new career in the healing arts. The applied theoretical framework used for this study was Schlossberg's (1995) 4S integrative model of the transition. The model design facilitated the data analysis and evaluation of the participants' personal resources, linking situation, support, self and strategies. Their resources were then analyzed as being either assets or liabilities of their transitions. Schlossberg's theoretical framework provided a paradigm for assessing relevant themes across the data gathered about the transitional process of moving in, moving through and moving out of higher education.

It was noted that all participants in the study successfully moved out of higher education with their bachelor's degrees in nursing. To bring the interviews to conclusion, open-ended interview questions were used to evaluate the participants' current career satisfaction. The data analysis was presented as a synthesized description of their personal insights as professional nurses within the healthcare industry (see Table 4.37). The analysis suggested that all participants attained meaningful personal fulfillment in

their new careers as nurses. The following section provides a discussion of the literature as applied to the research findings and the theoretical framework used in this study.

### **Discussion**

The findings, as discussed in chapter four, were largely supportive of the literature previously cited in this dissertation. Specifically suited to this study's results was the literature germane to the adult learner as an identified cohort. The cited characteristics of the adult learners (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007) and that of the post-9/11 veteran adult learners shared many similarities. However, the combat veteran adult learners in higher education often faced additional barriers and challenges (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011) unique to their demographic profile.

Initially this research focused on the participants as young adult males and followed them during their unfolding lifespan. The preceding literature review of adult theoretical models assessing lifespan development (Erikson, 1963; Munley, 1976; Patton et al., 2016) credibly described the study participants developmental milestones associated with early adulthood. However, after the period of early adulthood, there were noted discrepancies between the temporal lifespan theories and the findings reported in this study. To add context, "the concept of [adult] development is most often equated with change" (Merriam, et al., 2007, p. 298), which can occur in either a linear or nonlinear manner. The noted adult developmental transitions in this study involved the participants' initial military careers, ensuing motivations for changing careers, and their moving into higher education to become nurses.

## **The Developing Adult, Identity and Lifespan Models**

The participants' described view of self was associated with their being in the military during early adulthood and amply aligned with Erikson's (1963) psychological developmental theory. For example, Munley (1978) researched the application of Erikson's (1963) theoretical perspective on identity. To examine this formative period, Munley (1978) studied college students to gauge their sense of identity with that of their vocational selection. Munley's research supposition and findings affirmed the intimate pairing of one's career was interconnected with that of personal identity. Munley's conclusions aligned with the qualitative data analysis and findings of this study. The veteran participants strongly identified themselves with their role as military fighting men. It was a later quandary of identity that was challenged during their evolving lifespan. Their newly formed experiences shifted the positionality of their identity away from military fighting men and towards reevaluating their future career choices.

Within the literature, the lifespan/lifecycle models pertaining to both Levinson's (1978, 1986) and Gould's (1972, 1980) work were found to be relevant to this study as well. Both theorists embraced Erikson's (1963) work and used key concepts to construct their developmental models. Notably, within Levinson's (1978) lifespan model, he accounted for the developmental stage when male adults would likely experience a midlife career evaluation. Levinson (1978) believed that this midlife appraisal may result in a career change, but if unresolved, it could lead to, as he coined, a midlife crisis. This defined stage was arguably pertinent to all the study participants regarding second career transitions but occurred at different times during their lives. Alternatively, the

developmental sequences accordant to Levinson's lifespan model were expected to follow a defined stage and linear process.

Schlossberg's (1995) transition theory was particularly relevant since it is an adaptable lifespan model. This model effectively accounted for the spectra of career changes that occurred for the participants for similar reasons but at different times in their lifecycles. The current research findings demonstrated the significance of the interconnectivity of the participants' 4S ratios of assets versus liabilities during their transitions. Schlossberg's theory, as previously noted, was used in this study as a theoretical framework, which will be further discussed later in this section.

### **The Lived Experiences of Military Combat Veterans**

The findings also support previous research and descriptive data analyses concerning military combat war veterans. Toblin's (2012) citation provided detailed explanations of post-9/11 veterans' core demographics and associated warzone maladies. Within the expanding volumes of post-9/11 veteran healthcare literature, there are in-depth descriptions of the types of wounds veterans may have sustained while in combat. These health-related classifications involved both the physical and emotional injuries that often required specialized medical and/or mental health services. These described services were needed by five of the seven participants, of which they described receiving care for mental health issues.

**Considering PTSD.** The cited research literature provided percentages of combat veterans considered to have PTSD linked to their combat experience. Research conducted on behalf of the Veteran's Administration (VA) found that nearly 20% of post-

9/11 service members that were deployed to Afghanistan and/or Iraq screened positive for PTSD, per Fredunchlich (2015). These reported percentages included all military personnel that served in the warzones, regardless of their military vocation, including the screening of involved military veterans that were engaged in noncombat support roles as well as those who were directly involved in combat operations.

Junger (2016) highlighted the long-term sociological impact that the lived experience of combat can have on military veterans. Junger emphasized Marlowe's (2001) study of Gulf War veterans. The research findings revealed that witnessing the harm or death to others, including the enemy, can cause a significant emotional reaction for the military member. This stated outcome is especially relevant in addressing the findings of this study. As divulged by the participants, five of the seven have been medically diagnosed with PTSD and depression, while one participant described experiencing a nexus of symptoms associated with PTSD. These data bring the study percentage of participants with PTSD conceivably up to 85%. Any correlation to causation is assumptive; however, all the participants' narratives from the warzone involved death and/or traumatic wounding of colleagues, local nationals and the typified enemy. These findings fully align with Marlowe's research conclusions.

Additionally, Nakashima-Brock and Lettini (2012) described the effect that current technologies may have on military members deployed to war. They examined how newly availed interconnectivity can skew one's perception of the time and distance continuum for those deployed thousands of miles from home. For example, this study's participant, Harvey, reported experiencing a comparable surreal incident during his



deployment. One moment he was speaking on a cellular call with his spouse and soon after he participated in a firefight, risked his own life in a battle which resulted in the death of a close comrade. Harvey tearfully described being guarded afterward when he talked to wife, not wanting to convey the risk he faced moments after their call. This specific type of scenario was described by Nakashima-Brock and Lettini (2012) as having the potential to accentuate traumatic psychological harm in terms of emotional processing of impactful events.

The above discussion demonstrates the potentially harmful outcomes that these described indelible traumatic events can inflict on those that endured them. The participants' recall of these distressing memories does not appear to fade, instead become metaphorically woven into the fabric of their being. This outcome was a driving force behind their future life transitions. Although, most of the study participants described having lifelong ramifications associated with their tours of combat, they were all determined to evolve and grow from their experiences.

**Post trauma growth (PTG).** Not all literature concerning combat veterans offer negative findings. As Epictetus (55-135 AD), a former Greek slave turned Stoic philosopher, stated, "It's not what happens to you, but how you react to it that matters." Distinguishingly, there are positive outcomes, as noted in this study regarding veterans reintegrating into their civilian lives. The participants found new meaning in their lives by abandoning their previous careers and knowingly entering what is considered a traditionally female dominated career. They successfully used higher education to rebuild their lives through service others.

Mezirow (1990) theorized that an impactful life experience may prompt a critical self-reflection, triggering a transformational learning event to occur. He reasoned that transformational learning as an outcome may help one to resolve and/or add meaning to the previous instigating event. Based on the combat to care giver study findings, the premise of transformational learning has relevance for plausibly explaining aspects of the participants' motivations for change using higher education.

Additionally, the following citation described an interesting sequela associated with traumatic life events like the ones experienced by the combat veterans in this study. Harbin's (2015) examination of the phenomenon of post trauma growth (PTG) proved supportive to this research's findings. His estimation of PTG offered a plausible construct for the study participants' motivations behind their transitional career change. In terms of PTG, if a traumatic event occurred in an individual's life, it is proposed that one can recover from a severe distressing psychological injury and eventually go on to experience positive emotional growth afterward.

In this study all the participants described experiencing similar traumatic events while deployed to the warzone with denoted remnants of moral injury/residue afterward (Shay, 2014). Though deeply affected by their stated experiences with most being diagnosed with PTSD, all went on to positively shape their future narratives. Per Harbin's (2015) definition, the participants demonstrated that elements of PTG were present, as evidenced by becoming nurses, which added new meaning and purpose to their lives.

**The act of caring and compassion.** The participants collectively established through their narratives that the lifesaving, compassionate and simple acts of caring they

performed while in the warzone were highly impactful. In fact, these experiences became the genesis of their impending career change. The intrinsic feedback derived from their selfless acts of caring supports the implied premise of Watson's (1988) transpersonal caring research. She theorized that the act of compassionate caring provides therapeutic attributes for both the patient and the one providing care. All the participants expressly stated that they enjoyed the innate sense of purpose achieved from helping others. Similarly, Doty's (2014) research findings provided empirical data using biomarkers obtained from healthcare providers. He confirmed that the act of caring has both positive physiological and psychological benefits for the individual providing that care. Participants in this study perceived similar benefits during the provision of care in the warzone; their acts of caring also provided inspiration and motivation during their vocational transitions and learning.

Goleman and Davidson (2017) provide an exemplar of a veteran that had been on multiple combat tours in Afghanistan and subsequently had been diagnosed with PTSD. The following narrative provided a familiar likeness to that of the participants in this study diagnosed with PTSD that received cognitive therapy:

Steve was close to suicide when he entered Walter Reed [Army] Hospital for help... After two months of sobriety he [joined] a mindfulness group that met once a week... what really clicked was the loving-kindness [meditation] practice... he felt 'at home again,'— a strong sense that things were going to be okay. Last we heard, Steve had gone back to school in mental health counseling... and was [now] completing a clinical doctorate... his dissertation topic: 'moral

injury and spiritual wellness.’ Steve feels uniquely equipped to help [other veterans with PTSD]. (Goleman & Davidson, 2017, p. 200-201)

Goleman and Davidson (2017) discussed how Steve utilized his personal experiences to underpin his motivations to engage in the caring for others. Similarly, the findings in this study indicated that the participants also attained an aspect of self-healing by entering a caring discipline. The participants’ new careers in healthcare as nurses provided them with a sense of meaning and purpose, potentially bringing them closer to achieving, as Maslow (1965) theorized, self-actualization. The following section will discuss the utility of Schlossberg’s transitional theory in terms of application for post-9/11 veterans.

### **Schlossberg’s Transitional Theory and Research Applications**

Schlossberg’s (1995) transition theory has been methodically discussed throughout the preceding chapters. It is important to note that Schlossberg as an adult development and transition scholar devised her melded adaptive theory to primarily account for life’s detours during the middle adult years (Transitions through life: How to survive according to Nancy K. Schlossberg, n.d.). This framework was intended to be used as a tool for academic counselors in assessing multiple types of adult learners experiencing education-based transitions. As discussed in chapter one, Schlossberg specifically recognized and addressed the plight of the returning post-9/11 military veterans. She stated:

Veterans deal with multiple transitions. They are leaving the military... even though there is relief, even excitement about returning home, they are leaving the familiar, their friends, and sense of mission. At the same time, they are dealing

with “role exit” matters... reintegrating with their families and starting college.

(DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011, p. 18)

Schlossberg's (1995) framework is an ideal tool for social science researchers to analyze the veterans' 4S asset to liability ratios from a near 360-degree vantage point. This adaptable model provides the capacity to ascertain adult learners' successful or challenged transitions with context.

Based on the adult education literature cited in chapter two, Schlossberg's (1995) transition model has become an important adult education framework for studying the military veteran learner. For example, the participants in this study that experienced divorce, separation and even those that had children born while in school were all impacted. These described liabilities had the potential to impede their ability to progress in their nursing programs but were adequately offset by other personal assets. The participants' liability ratios were assessed using the 4S model, helping gauge the extent of the personal impact they experienced and other mitigating factors.

As discussed above, Vince experienced an unanticipated transition, which was the divorce from his wife. He experienced an event that lead to a transition that was out of his control, effecting his support system and personal wellbeing. Schlossberg (1995) also discussed situations that are deemed as nonevents. For example, Sean initially failed out of nursing school and experienced a nonevent, impeding his ability to continue with his career transition. Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2012) defined four types of nonevents; which are personal nonevents, ripple nonevents, resultant nonevents and

delayed nonevents (p. 234). Since Sean was able to reapply to nursing school and was readmitted, he experienced what is defined as a delayed or temporary nonevent.

In terms of qualitative research, the Schlossberg (1995) model offers adult education research scholars a guidepost in which to evaluate adult learners throughout and at different junctures in their educational journey. This transition model has great potential for even broader applications across disciplines within the education research community for a variety of traditional and adult learner groups. The following section addresses the implications that this educational research study and similar studies may have on the post-9/11 adult learner cohort.

### **Implications**

The above discussion highlighted the considerations and implications that this current and growing cohort will have on the university and vocational education systems throughout the country. Schiavone and Gentry (2014) proposed that the post-9/11 veteran cohort is currently the fastest growing student group entering higher education. Furthermore, this group is expected to expand incrementally over the next decade.

### **Implications for Veterans Returning to College**

This study adds to a growing body of academic literature regarding the expanding post-9/11 adult learner cohort. The implications of this research offer a unique opportunity to better understand the veiled challenges and the sublime resiliency this veteran cohort can attain. The study findings provide privileged first-person narratives of life-shaping events from the warzone and the genesis behind the motivations for meaningful change in the participants' lives through education. This study introduced a

select sample of post-9/11 veterans, who are part of a much broader cohort with similar demographics. The study participants' exemplars provide perspective for the types of support that veterans may require during their academic transitions.

The best practices for accommodating and supporting this cohort are currently under evaluation. For instance, as cited in the previous literature review, Ghosh and Fouad (2016) found that military veterans seemed more detached from their academic campuses than their civilian counterparts. This counters Ureno's (2014) research findings, which indicated that veterans in higher education tend to need more professorial face to face meetings than traditional students. As the situation stands, I concur with Gosh and Fouad's (2016) recommendation that academic programs will need to either be established or reorganized to best aid transitioning veteran students.

### **Implications for Nursing School, Faculty and Curricula**

This *combat to care-giver* study provided overviews of a new and growing cohort for those involved in higher education. Moreover, these findings provided specific insights for adult educators in collegiate nursing programs. Nursing faculty not only are responsible for delivering academic content, but as nurses they need to be empathetically aware of their students' experiential journeys.

It is fair to assume that majority of nursing faculty do not share the lived experience of direct combat, nor is it a prerequisite. However, all nurse educators need to be aware of how those traumatic occurrences may have shaped the veteran adult learners' lives. As evidenced in this study's findings, the participants' motives to become nurses were driven by their traumatic lived experiences in combat. The collective of issues the

veterans faced while in school ranged from the perceived stress of the academic rigors, debt, patient care encounters and open timelines needed for personal healing.

To help provide faculty awareness, perhaps an ad hoc panel comprised of post 9/11 nursing student alumni could speak with nurse educators about their experiences in the military and transitions through nursing school. The discourse could highlight teaching methods and communicative approaches that helped or impeded their academic progress. Conceivably this tack could become a venue for conducting action research at multiple nursing schools across the nation, providing dialogue and data on this emerging nursing cohort. Also, nurse faculty will likely need to address and adapt teaching strategies since, “veteran students may struggle for academic achievement [initially] as a result of the differences between military training and nursing education pedagogies” (Dyar, 2016, p. 175).

Other noted implications based on the findings in this study, was that nurse educators unintentionally but routinely caused additional duress for veteran participants in the classroom. For example, Lee discussed how he was cornered by a nurse faculty member for having what was perceived as a disinterested attitude during a patient simulation. He reported feeling flushed and angry at the false accusation. However, per his therapist’s skills training sessions, Lee managed to deescalate the conflict to avoid exacerbating his PTSD symptoms.

I submit that nurse faculty should be formally prepared to better understand how academic rigors and ill-timed communicative processes may cause PTSD like symptoms to manifest. This type of faculty development program should be provided initially as a



face to face encounter for all faculty. Thereafter, online classes (new research, successes, and warnings) should be developed for all faculty members as a continuing/annual education requirement. Of equal importance, nursing educators need to be aware of their own implicit bias involving gender and/or combat veterans entering collegiate nursing programs (Dyar, 2016). The implicit bias training for faculty should include, but certainly not limited to the post-9/11 veteran student.

The findings from this study indicated that veterans need not be treated differently but may require alternate support considerations. Although the combat to care giver participants share similarities, they are also distinctly different, as are all students. Currently there is no one specific approach to take; however, improved communication between nursing faculty and the veteran student is optimal. As stated above, open communication and ongoing educational research will hopefully provide evidence-based strategies on how to best interface and guide the post 9/11 veterans learning outcomes.

In terms of innovative opportunities, the following could potentially yield positive results. A recent publication by Goleman and Davidson (2017) provided evidence on the plasticity of the human brain involving the practice of reflective meditation. The authors offered topical evidence on the growing science of caring and the positive psychological effects associated with the purposeful practice of compassion.

Goleman and Davidson (2017) discussed the means in which meditation can positively influence behavioral outcomes. Their work corroborates how mindfulness and compassion can quite literally rewire our brains for doing good. They stated, “Compassion meditation enhances empathetic concern, activates [neuronal] circuits...

that register the suffering of others... Compassion and loving-kindness increase amygdala activation... the longer people practice, the stronger these brain and behavioral tendencies toward compassion become” (p. 121).

I posit that the work of Goleman and Davidson (2017) demonstrates that an immersive compassion meditation program of study should be offered as an elective course to all students in the health sciences. Goleman and Davidson are proponents for the infusion of compassion meditation training as a proven approach for expanding one’s mindfulness based on research with Tibetan monks. Although a seemingly new phenomenon, the art of teaching and practicing compassion is based upon ancient foundational tenets of Buddhism (Seppälä, Simon-Thomas, Brown, Cameron, & Doty, 2017).

Currently, there are numerous programs available for compassion and mindfulness training. As mentioned previously, the *loving-kindness meditation* (LKM) practice is gaining acceptance as an empirically based compassion teaching therapeutic. The use of loving-kindness meditation focuses on teaching the participant the ability to wish for someone else’s freedom from suffering by developing an overt motivation and desire to take responsibility for relieving that individual’s suffering (Goleman & Davidson, 2017; Seppälä, et al., 2017). Another well researched and accepted compassion teaching program is the *cognitively-based compassion training* (CBCT) model. The CBCT is used for training a variety of groups but notably for veterans, medical professionals, educators and students in higher education. The CBCT incorporates an eight-step program, traditionally taught over an eight-week period facilitating

mindfulness by employing a variety of teaching methods. The CBCT model embraces the assumption, “that by increasing compassion for others, including to those who have caused one harm, is a trainable skill (Seppälä, et al., 2017, p. 21).

The practice of compassion meditation or other like models may very well help expand nurses’ and other health related professionals’ capacity for compassion for their patients. The current empirical studies and expanding compassion literature available demonstrate the importance of mindfulness as a competency which I argue based on the findings of this current study and others needs to be an intentional and integral part of the healthcare profession’s ethos. Although, initially presented as a potential military veteran nursing student therapeutic, upon review, perhaps this technique could become a staple practice within the entire healthcare community.

### **Implications for Academic Administrative Policy**

Many universities are currently seeking official “veteran friendly” status, which then places the university on a centralized list referred to military veterans seeking a school to attend. The National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) provided discourse on this very topic. On the NASPA website, Minnis (2014) addressed the fact that the term “veteran friendly” can often be used more as a recruitment instrument than reflect a true veteran resourced institution. For example, the current, “criteria used to rate and rank the schools range from minimal, such as Servicemembers Opportunity Colleges (SOC) membership... to more in-depth examination of the number and kind of services offered” (Minnis, 2014, para. 1). Case in point, the current study demonstrated that the post-9/11 veteran as an adult learner in

higher education required specialized support services. I expect that a “veteran friendly” institution should embrace the fact that this group of adult learners need tailored assistance and need not be viewed only as revenue generating opportunity. The specific services could include counseling programs, targeted lectures, veteran group support activities, research opportunities, veteran job assistance, housing and access to available VA programs.

Perhaps identifying the post-9/11 veteran early in the admission process may prove to be a very important step for establishing a trusting relationship with this adult learner cohort. However, this suggestion could be rife with difficulties for administration if veterans are unwilling to self-report or are skeptical of this request. Conceivably if the veteran adult learners’ data is collected during their transitions, this could lead to customized interventions for those considered at-risk before academic failure becomes imminent. I trust that with time the appropriate administrative resources and process will be fortified to ensure that this post-9/11 veteran cohort will be provided every opportunity at success.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The study results may not demonstrate transferability to other veteran adult learners outside of the healthcare sector in either vocational or higher education settings. Intrinsic to qualitative research, it is appreciated that these study results may have less applicable generalities available to larger adult learner populations, including veterans of previous conflicts prior to 9/11. Also, there is a noted gender delimitation within the study design. A DoD military combatant historically has been restricted to males.

However, the DoD has opened combatant roles to females in 2014, a historic policy change. Based on the previous requirement, only men were empaneled in this study, potentially limiting transferability to women veteran cohorts in nursing school. However, the purpose for conducting this qualitative research was not to claim generalizability, rather, this study was intended to allow others to discern the context of the study, the demographics and other contextual factors from the participants' perspectives (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 77). Ultimately, the readers will need to determine if this study of post-9/11 veterans in higher education has relevance to their own locus of concern.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The current research literature referencing the post-9/11 adult learner cohort has increased in volume over the past few years. As discussed, most of the adult education citations explore the impact this veteran group will have on higher education as their numbers increase over the next decade. Other related research topics involve fiscal opportunities linked to the veteran students' post-9/11 GI Bill education benefits. However, I propose that additional education research with added emphasis on the veterans themselves may improve the scholarly knowledge available on this group of adult learners. There are numerous studies available that examine the impending impact that this expanding group of veteran beneficiaries will have on the higher education system. Yet, there are identified gaps within the adult education literature concerning the post-9/11 veteran as a recognized adult learner cohort. The gap is characterized by the shortage of qualitative and quantitative research that accounts for the following; the veterans' lived stories, academic counseling needs, motivations for entering higher

education, graduation rates, degree concentrations, and the anticipated contributions this future veteran workforce will have on the economy and higher education. Perhaps promoting research that investigates academic matriculation rates and degree completion ratios may provide valuable insights for this cohorts' academic liabilities. Obtaining these data would further necessitate the need to study the post-9/11 veterans within the scope of being adult learners as to better understand their nuanced profile and capacities.

To assist in this effort, as previously discussed, Schlossberg's (1995) transition framework is an effective baseline qualitative research tool. This transition model reliably exhibits the veterans' resources, accounts for their experiences and helps identify internal motivations for entering higher education. In addition, the post trauma growth inventory (PTGI) tool (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2012) may prove to be a useful collaborative research instrument involving combat veterans with described traumatic events. The PTGI is an assessment tool that can be used to collect data from combat veteran participants prospectively and/or concurrently while in transition. The PTGI provides measurable data about an individual's probability of undergoing a favorable personal growth progression after a traumatic event. As previously discussed, much of the current post-9/11 veteran research literature is problem focused, often targeted on the health-related clinical problems associated with this veteran cohort. Post-9/11 veterans are commonly viewed as a clinical problem. The postmodern philosopher Foucault (1973) would label these findings as, "using the clinical gaze," by identifying this group by their negative attributes rather than their capacities (Langer, 1992). Perhaps this perceived, assumingly inadvertent bias, may negatively influence future programs of study concerning this

cohort of interest. Conceivably, the PTGI tool used in tandem with Schlossberg's transition framework may yield newfound data defining the essential requisites for a veteran's successful lifecycle transition.

The use of the critical incident technique (CIT) in the "Combat to Care-Giver" study was an effective tool for eliciting rich, thick descriptions from the participants about their lived experiences in combat. I recommend the CIT as a valuable tool for future qualitative research concerning combat veterans. However, the CIT by design is somewhat prescriptive, using a very specific line of questioning. One needs to be cognizant of the fact that post-9/11 military veterans may be diagnosed with PTSD and may have other existing emotional maladies. The prompts used in the CIT should be empathetically developed and reviewed to ensure that as an instrument it should do no harm to the participant.

Regardless, opportunities for additional quantitative, qualitative and mixed methods research of post-9/11 veterans in higher education are bountiful. This cohort has been in existence for a relatively short period of time. However, it appears that the underpinning of this much needed adult education research effort has begun, evidenced by the number of recent dissertation publications (; Clark, 2014; Davis, 2014; Dyar, 2016; Shea, 2010; Ureno, 2014) emerging on behalf of this adult education post-9/11 veteran cohort. As the evolving education research becomes more focused on this emerging cohorts' demographic profile, the sophistication of the research design will generate even more meaningful results. The hope is that through the advancement of

post-9/11 veteran adult education research, vital best practice evidence will be provided for educators and university administrators for supporting this cohort.

### **Summary and Conclusions**

When this “combat to care-giver” study was first conceived, I was not prepared for the indelible impression that the study participants’ personal and impactful stories would produce. I was prepared for the shared experiences regarding the participants’ military culture and their desire to find new meaning after experiencing a traumatic incident. However, it was the study design and data analysis that that forged the participants’ narratives into the meaningful stories reported here.

This study provided context to the stories told by seven men who were strangers but collectively shared the experience of going to war and later becoming nurses. The study participants often shared their personal narratives aloud for the first time during the scheduled interviews. When questions were posed, it was as if a fulcrum pried opened their seemingly repressed recollections from the warzone. Yet, their stories were frequently told in a disconcerted manner. They seemingly raced to describe their scattered memories as they came rushing back for fear of losing them. The resultant transcripts were lengthy and unwieldy, which required careful temporal reordering.

The co-construction of the interview data was first prepared with the use of *in vivo* and thematic coding. It was this process of co-constructing the narratives that led to purposeful retelling of the participants’ stories from the warzone. Crotty (1998) presented the Stanley Fish essay as an exemplar where social construction occurred between individuals that created a “*shared way of seeing*” (p.45) by assigning new meaning to a



list of ambiguous words. As in this study, the newly assembled stories required confirmation from the participants that their co-constructed narratives were reflective of their lived experience. Their approval signified to me that we had achieved a *shared way of seeing*, their poignant co-constructed narratives were now our story.

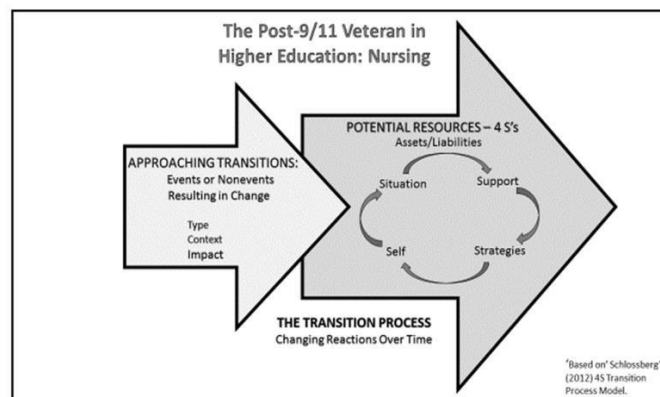
Their described realities confirmed the potential long-term psychological cost of war. Refreshingly, this study also demonstrated that higher education can serve as a bastion of hope for those seeking meaningful change in their lives. For example, Bret found that nursing as a new career helped him achieve new meaning in his life. He stated, “I [no longer] look at this as a second chance. Now it’s the sense of like, I have the peace of mind knowing I’m doing the best I can. You’re part of something, I think... that matters. I mean you save people’s lives.” In closing, I share this quote from Frankl (1984, p. 163): “Once an individual’s search for meaning is successful, it not only renders him happy but also gives him the capability to cope with suffering”.

## APPENDIX SECTION

### APPENDIX A

#### Interview Protocol: The Interviewer's Guidelines

The following narrative interview questions were designed to stimulate thoughtful conversation and reflection with the participants. There were 10 primary semi-structured/open ended questions asked of the participants in study. For further clarification, there may be additional follow-on sub-questions which were considered optional. If asked, they were intended to elicit further reflection and/or collect demographic information related to the primary inquiry. If needed, additional ad hoc probing questions were used to ensure conversational flow and richness of data (Creswell, 2013; Seidman, 2013).



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#### Goals for Interview 1: *(Researcher's note)*

*In these first two question clusters, my focus was to identify the events/nonevents that began the change toward the first career transition. My aim was to gather narrative data to help me understand the participant's type(s) of events, the context of the events, and the impact the events may have had toward the future transition of becoming a nurse. The participants were asked to bring an artifact(s) along with them for the interview.*

*Included in the e-mail to the participants, a Critical Incident Technique (CIT) prompt was provided to allow for deeper reflection prior to coming to the interview and the prompt was addressed at the close of the first interview (see below).*

**Tell me the story of how you decided to join the military during a time of war.**

- Talk with me about [your artifact] and how you feel it helps you to think through this story/choice.

**Tell me the story of why you separated from the military.**

- Please share with me about your combat deployments if they may have influenced your separation from the military

*Prior to meeting for the first interview, the following prompt was sent via email to the participant (as explained above) and was used to close the interview:*

**Tell me the story of how you decided to go to nursing school to become a nurse.**

- Reflect on your choice of artifact(s) and discuss how you feel it helps you to think through this story/choice.
- Think about how prior combat deployments, please share with me how that experience did or did not influenced your decision to become a nurse.
- Please discuss with me the timing of the decision to go to nursing school (*before entering the military, while deployed/active duty, after separating from the military*)
- What were your prior thoughts on what nursing is as a profession, and how these thoughts fit with your understanding of nursing now?

**Goals for Interview 2:** *(Researcher's note)*

*Here, I probed with a series of questions into the events and people that influenced the participant to make the decision to go to nursing school to become a nurse. I opened the second interview with a friendly exchange with the participant as to check in with one another since the last interview. To facilitate the following discussion, I'll offered an abridged reflection of the previous Critical Incident Prompt as to segue into the interview.*

*In the following questions, my aim was to elicit data that may help to explain the potential resources participants utilized in the transition using the 4S model (Anderson et al., 2012; Schlossberg et al., 1995): the situation, support, self, and strategies that existed during the transition process from combat to caregiver.*

- *(situation)* **Tell me about your experience while enrolled in nursing school.**
- *(support)* **Please tell me about any people who assisted you when going to nursing school.**
- *(self)* **What did you learn about yourself through nursing school and becoming a nurse?**
- *(strategies)* **What were some of the most challenging aspects about nursing school?**
  - How did you deal with these challenges?

*In these final questions, my aim was to elicit data about the moving through and/or moving out of the transition. I concluded the data collection by asking participants to reflect on where they are now in their transition.*

- **How do you feel now about having become a nurse with a new career in healthcare?**
- **What do you think is next in the story of your life?**
- **What additional thoughts would you like to share?**

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**NOTES:** *Additional Probe Questions Asked*

## APPENDIX B

### Member Check Protocol: Script for Participants Review of Interview Data

The following scripted e-mail was sent to each study participant once data analysis had been conducted. This script provides an explanation of the document and requested process for reviewing the analysis of the interview data, which only include their own segment of the study.

#### Email Script

*“Dear [name of participant] I have attached the study results based on our previous interviews and meetings. This document is not a direct transcript but is a compilation of the reflective analysis based on your story, where themes and meaning statements were identified from the notes, artifacts and the transcript of the interviews. As you read this document, please take notes on how you feel about the statements: either that you agree, disagree or would like clarification. Once finished, you can choose to respond by sending an email, calling on the phone, meeting face to face or any combination thereof the previous mentioned options for communicating with me. Do know and understand it is my duty to you, to ensure that you are in agreement with these findings. This is your story that you shared with me and I insist that the final product is to your satisfaction.”*

**NOTE:** *The participants had the option and ability to meet with me using any of the aforementioned approaches mentioned in the above script. I was available to discuss and/or meet with them in any requested venue that meets their needs. The participants were provided my office and cellular phone numbers, email and office address.*

## APPENDIX C

### **Military Veteran Study Participant Mental Health/Counseling Information**

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The following offers you information on how to access mental or medical healthcare through the Veterans' Healthcare Administration (VHA). There are two assigned VHA hospital chaplains available for you to contact if you feel there is a need to see someone for counseling or spiritual assistance. The following named chaplains are not medical professionals but are trained counselors and can further support your needs. The primary and secondary points of contact (POC) are available during normal business hours (0700-1600hrs).

#### **South Texas Veterans Health Care System (STVHCS):**

#### **Audie L. Murphy Memorial VA Hospital**

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#### **Chaplain Kerry Haynes**

D. Min., BCC/MH, Mental Health Chaplain  
South Texas Veterans Health Care System  
Phone: 210-617-5300, ext. 13317

#### **Chaplain Roger Rahill**

M.Div., BCC, Staff Chaplain  
*(available after business hours as a consultant/navigator)*  
Polytrauma/PTRP & Spinal Cord Injury  
Room - 229.2  
Phone: 210-617-5300, ext. 13764

#### **Both POCs are located at the main hospital campus:**

Audie Murphy Veteran's Hospital  
7400 Merton Minter  
San Antonio, TX 78229

It is encouraged that you access the Veterans Health Services, by enrolling with the Veterans Affairs office. (\*Please NOTE: This is not a required step for you to receive veteran health benefits).

**Please be aware that if you experience a sense of urgency or you do not feel comfortable contacting a hospital chaplain, the following is immediately available to you:**

**1. Location of the San Antonio Veteran Center:**

9504 IH 35 N, Suite 214  
San Antonio, TX 78233  
<http://www.va.gov/directory/guide/vetcenter.asp>  
Phone: 210-650-0422 or 210-650-0422  
Fax: 210-650-0169

**2. Veteran Crisis Line:**

1-800-273 TALK (8255), *Press 1* (24 hours, seven days a week)

**3. The Audie Murphy Veteran's Hospital (main campus):**

Emergency Mental Health Services: 210-617-5300 / 210-617-5300  
7400 Merton Minter St, San Antonio, TX 78229  
<http://www.southtexas.va.gov/locations/directions.asp>



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