TRANSFORMATIONAL LEARNING IN A WASHINGTON STATE VETERANS THERAPEUTIC COURT: A HOLISTIC, MULTIPLE-CASE DESIGN STUDY

by

Thomas Lee Williams

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

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Abstract

The purpose of this holistic, multiple-case design case study was to describe the transformative learning journey of justice-involved veterans assigned to one of Washington State’s veterans treatment courts (VTC). Veterans treatment courts are designed to help justice-involved veterans break their criminogenic cycle, but the VTC’s efficacy is still debated. Yet, when applied to other modalities, transformative learning has proven effective in changing counter-societal behavior. The guiding theory for this study is Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning, one of the premiere adult learning theories, and will be used as the rubric to evaluate if veteran transformative learning indeed occurs. The central research question is what is the transformative learning experience of criminally charged military veterans who participate in veterans therapeutic courts? To adroitly capture these veterans’ voices, a criterion-based group of 10 justice-involved Washington State VTC members were individually interviewed, passively observed during their court sessions, and their court mandated reflection essays analyzed. The inductive analysis, including potential countervailing explanations, followed the case study analytical protocols of Creswell and Poth and Yin including impactful word and phrase analysis leading to emergent, related, and significant themes. Summarily, the study confirmed that transformative learning did indeed occur during the veterans therapeutic court journey and three resultant key themes. First that relationships, familial and extra-familial, including mentors, were critical to this journey. Second, vision-casting, whether internally or externally generated, was a key component for the successful journey. Third, a focused rebluing, which included skills and knowledge were essential for the veterans to continue their successful transformative journey.

Keywords: veteran, therapeutic jurisprudence, transformative learning, mentoring
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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to veterans, both those who successfully transition from the military to civilian life, and to those who do not. You and your brothers and sisters have indeed changed the world through your service. However, your mission is not done, continue to stand the watch, and use your God-given talents to make the world a better place through your words and service. The world still needs you to transform, to learn, and to practice new skills and knowledge. The world still needs you to mentor others in your embraced disciplines. However, whatever path you take, rest assured, you are not alone; we, your fellow veterans, appreciate what you have done and continue to do for our country and our world. We just sometimes have trouble expressing our gratitude adequately.
Acknowledgments

Just like in the military, few significant activities are accomplished by a singular individual. Completing a dissertation is no different. I could not have completed this journey without my team. First, I would like to thank my family, Ashley, Noah, and Carson. They strolled along side of me during this laborious journey, often in silence, as I contemplated my work, but frequently serving as cogent sounding boards and editors as I framed, reframed, and polished my research. Next, I would like to thank my extended family and friends, who were a constant source of encouragement, especially when I was tired, discouraged, or just ready to move on to the next challenge.

Finally, but most importantly, I want to thank God. He has blessed me far beyond what I could ever imagine (Ephesians 3:20, New International Version). I pray this work is an honor to Him, and is a source of encouragement to others, veterans and non-veterans alike. Regardless of the path chosen, God is with us, wants to direct us, and most importantly wants to love us, and as Saint Paul reminds us, “love never fails” (1 Corinthians 13:13). When I eventually stand before God, He will not be concerned with what letters I have after my name, but if I was a good steward of the resources He entrusted to me and the calling He gave me—to teach and mentor. I pray such stewardship is indeed the case here and there will be an eventual eternal “well done good and faithful servant” (Matthew 25:21) for His glory alone.
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List of Abbreviations

Alcoholics Anonymous (AA)
Washington State District Veterans Treatment Court (WSDVTC)
Deoxyribonucleic Acid (DNA)
Institutional Review Board (IRB)
Narcotics Anonymous (NA)
Non-Commissioned Officer (NCO)
Post Traumatic (or Post-Traumatic) Stress Disorder (PTSD)
Project Management Book of Knowledge (PMBOK)
Sad, Angry, Scared, Happy, Excited, Tender (SASHET)
Therapeutic Jurisprudence (TJ)
Transformative Learning (TL)
Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)
Veterans Therapeutic (or Therapy or Treatment) Court (VTC)
Urinalysis (UA)
CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Veterans comprise 5.7% of the U. S. population but approximately 8% of the U. S. prison population (Bronston et al., 2015; U. S. Census Bureau, 2019). Before a veteran’s separation from service, the U. S. has called upon the veteran to liberate, protect, and defend people worldwide from natural and human-made disasters. However, such military actions extract a mental, physical, and moral cost on service members (Grimell, 2018; MacLeish, 2020). Upon leaving the military, it is common for ex-service members, now veterans, to struggle with a loss of mission, identity, and comradery, and frequently experience societal adjustment challenges and even incarceration (Finlay et al., 2019; Khambari, 2019).

Fortunately, when veterans are arrested, there is an emerging judicial alternative, the veteran therapeutic court (VTC). Literature also uses the term therapy and treatment interchangeably with the term therapeutic. While each term is acceptable, the term therapeutic will be afforded a preference but not exclusivity for this work. Since 2008, VTCs have emerged as one of the fastest-growing specialty courts in the United States (Douds & Hummer, 2019). These VTCs, founded upon therapeutic jurisprudence theory (Wexler & Winick, 1991), afford veterans a chance to go through an engaging, restorative process to develop coping skills, adroitly wean from illicit substances, and become fully integrated, lawful members of society (Baldwin & Rukus, 2015). Yet, the spectrum of success for VTCs is varied, debated, and nascent (Douds & Hummer, 2019; MacLeish, 2020), with one particular void the lack of describing the veteran’s potential VTC transformative learning journey. This chapter will provide the reader with background information that led to this study’s focus on the transformative learning void. Additionally, my connectivity is discussed, as well as succinct problem and purpose statements.
for this endeavor. Finally, the study’s scholarly significance and focused research questions are included as cogent boundaries to identify what will and will not be included in this study.

**Background**

The foundational underpinnings of this study are captured in the following historical, theoretical, and social sections. These sections are essential to understand the genesis and synthesis of this study adequately. Notably, the boundary conditions that encapsulate this case study will be expounded on in future chapters and be used to guide future research.

**Historical**

During their military service, veterans are often exposed to mental, physical, and moral trauma not experienced in civilian settings (Frankfurt & Frazier, 2016; Grimell, 2018; Gustavsen, 2016). If left untreated, such trauma, including Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), can increase the risk of maladjustment behavior, including substance abuse, other illicit activities, and even incarceration. Such behaviors challenge the veteran’s successful integration into post-military life, especially if veterans also struggle with a loss of mission, identity, structure, and camaraderie (MacLeish, 2020; Slattery et al., 2013). In 2008, disturbed by veteran maladjustment statistics and related subsequent impacts on local justice-involved veterans, a Buffalo, New York court decided veterans deserved a different justice experience (Buffalo Veterans Treatment Court, n.d.). Modeled after Wexler and Winick’s (1991) therapeutic jurisprudence (TJ) theory, TJ underpins specialty courts, such as mental health, substance abuse courts, and veterans therapeutic courts. For example, the veterans therapeutic court assesses individual veteran cases and develops veteran-specific recovery plans of action and new conceptual frameworks (Mezirow, 1991) as the veteran develops new decision-making protocols.
These individualized plans also help veterans access federal and local assistance programs, including substance abuse, medical, educational, and vocational services.

Since 2008, the number of veterans therapeutic courts has blossomed to over 400 (Douds & Hummer, 2019), with over 11,000 veterans served. Although the number of courts can be an interesting metric, such a count does not adequately measure risk assessment, risk impact, or mitigation (Woods, 2011). But one measurement does assess risk impact; a Washington State VTC indicated they possess over 40 personal essays from VTC veterans claiming the veterans would have committed suicide but for the veterans therapeutic court program. Still, the efficacy of VTCs is in question (Douds & Hummer, 2019; Erickson, 2016; Lennon, 2019). Further, local policies and procedures allow wide latitude in how veteran therapeutic courts are orchestrated, including whether or not a mentor, who is also a veteran, is assigned. The resultant common service experience fosters instant connections based on standard lexicons, mission challenges, comradery, and life experiences, helping veterans in their transformative learning (Mezirow, 1978b). However, scholarly research addressing such VTC variances is missing, nascent, or still evolving. More specifically, to date, no scholarly literature has been found that addresses the link between transformative learning and experiences of justice-involved veterans in a veterans treatment court.

Although the first official veterans treatment court was established in Buffalo, New York, on January 15, 2008 (Lennon, 2019; Buffalo Veterans Treatment Court, n.d.), its structural framework emerged from Alaska. In 2004, Alaskan veterans were allowed to take advantage of a specific Veterans Administrative program that offered behavioral problem treatment as a viable option to the normative jurisprudence processes to reduce recidivism (Smith, 2012). Since 2008, VTCs have been one of the fastest-growing problem-solving specialty courts (Hartley &
Baldwin, 2019), focusing on helping veterans reintegrate into society after legal engagement (Slattery et al., 2013). However, with over 400 such specialty courts spread throughout the United States, some scholars have advocated that the rapid growth of VTCs has outpaced the scholarly research, arguing such results should be used to guide VTC expansion (Lennon, 2019). Also, while there are national (Baldwin 2016, 2017; Johnson et al., 2016, 2017; Tsai et al., 2017) and local (Douds & Hummer, 2019; Erickson, 2016) studies, there are still identified research gaps (Frederick, 2014; McCall et al., 2018; Stacer & Solinas-Saunders, 2020), such as researching Washington State VTCs and the impact of transformative learning in veterans therapeutic courts.

In conversations with Mr. Miller, a Washington State district veterans treatment court (WSDVTC) founding member, he addressed the WSDVTC’s historical genesis (A. Miller, personal communication, August 11, 2020; August 12, 2020). According to Mr. Miller, the veteran court familial precursors included a local drug treatment court and a mental health court. From a statutory perspective, in 2014, a local public safety tax was passed in part to support therapeutic courts. In 2017, after advancing and shoring up the local mental health court, veterans therapeutic court stakeholder meetings were conducted to discuss the merits of starting a local VTC, with the proposed construct modeled after a more established veteran court in Spokane WA. These meetings were used to develop logistics, funding profiles, accounting protocols, acceptable criminal profiles, and court procedures. During this iterative process, one key WSDVTC advocate and court official relocated from Spokane, where he was also an avid supporter of Spokane’s veterans treatment court. Finally, an official memorandum of agreement to create a veterans therapeutic court was approved, funded by public safety tax revenues, with defendant referral considerations beginning on April 4, 2019.
The WSDVTC was purposefully started with a more conservative criminogenic focus as to which felony and misdemeanor types and levels would be allowed into the court. However, court officials continually reassess risk tolerances with respect to acceptable criminal offenses allowed in court to serve as broad a spectrum of veterans as possible. Notably, pleased with the court’s success to date, Mr. Miller noted the mentor program had been one of the critical reasons for the program’s success (Arno, 2015). In addition, the court celebrated its first graduation celebration in 2020.

Social

As with other criminal engagements, the ripple effects of criminogenic activities impact a wide swath of society -- including the victim(s), the criminal, extended families, and society at large. Further, communities invest precious resources, including funding specialty courts, to protect their governance and civilian populations. Although encouraging studies show that such investments, including specialty courts, are indeed worth the communal resource investment (Lennon, 2019), such programs’ efficacy varies (Baldwin & Rukus, 2015; Yang, 2017). However, one noteworthy recidivism reduction construct involves criminally charged, also referred to as justice-involved, participants retooling their thought processes, especially if hampered by physical, mental, or moral injury (Frankfurt & Frazier, 2016; Grimell, 2018; Lucas, 2017). One promising way to retool thought processes in adults involves reflective thinking, developing new social groups, and developing new mental maps, all tied to transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1978b, 1991). Further, according to Slattery et al. (2013), 87% of successful veteran court graduates attributed all or some of their success to developing a new social support system, their mentor. Such support has resulted in veterans graduating from the
program, avoiding recidivism, petitioning to serve as a mentor, and giving back to the program and society, which are key transformative learning and military core values.

**Theoretical**

As discussed in more detail in Chapter Two, Mezirow’s (1981) theory of adult transformative learning (TL) is the key theoretical focus of this study. The first step in transformative learning, according to Mezirow, is a disorienting dilemma, and incarceration and involvement in the VTC can fulfill this stage. As transformative learning occurs, new mental maps or cognitive reshaping (Watkins et al., 2018) are built through self-reflective activities, such as VTC reflective essay writing. Such cognitive reshaping is a critical component of transformative learning, allowing the veteran to make and exercise different decision trees.

While Mezirow’s transformative learning is the foundational theoretical underpinning for this study, Wexler and Winick’s (1991) theory of therapeutic jurisprudence (TJ) is a bounding theory for this case study, as the most accepted theoretical foundation of specialty courts. TL advocates the judge’s direct defendant engagement and development of personalized therapeutic and non-therapeutic strategies. Such direct engagement is contrary to a more traditional courtroom engagement where a judge directs and receives communications from the attorneys. Such personalized strategies also mirror Mezirow’s courses of action espoused in transformational learning.

Another supportive theory includes Kalbfleisch’s (2002) mentor enactment theory, which describes the communicative manner that mentors and their protégés engage in to ensure effective mentoring. The overlap between effective mentoring and transformative learning has been researched in school, coaching, and medical settings (Bickmore & Davenport, 2019; Wycherley, 2012; Zanchetta, 2017), but not in veteran therapeutic court settings. Finally,
perceived organizational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986) is important in VTCs. If there is a perception that the organization does not support the mentoring effort or the veteran’s transformative learning journey, a distinct lack of effectiveness and organizational trust can be fostered (Eisenberger et al., 1986). This trust breach can be observed in veterans treatment courts, where a combination of crime-hardened cynicism, substance abuse paranoia, and military culture and trauma experiences can reinforce a propensity to distrust leadership. Trust must be continually earned and is an essential component of Mezirow’s transformative learning stages when the participant is developing and trying out new roles and relationships and will be discussed in more detail in subsequent chapters.

**Situation to Self**

I approached this research from a social constructivist paradigm perspective. Specifically, I gathered data from volunteer criminally charged veterans who were members of the veterans therapeutic court. Each VTC veteran brings a unique story shaped by various societal factors, including their criminogenic choices, judicial system experiences, support groups, and service history. After gathering each veteran’s input, I analyzed and constructed their experiences into a representative story addressing their transformative learning journey.

Recognizing and reflecting on potential research biases are foundational to effective qualitative studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2016). Adroit reflection must address axiological, epistemological, and ontological perspectives. From an axiological perspective, I view human nature as a retired military member and veteran’s court mentor. Resultantly, I lean towards the subjectivity end of the spectrum, that values can and in many cases should influence research. Some values certainly influence research. This influence can be seen in this study through embracing the values espoused by the veterans court, which are an extension of military
core values. Values, such as service before self, integrity, and leaving no member behind indeed flavor research analysis, as decisions are made, such as evaluating the veracity of transformative learning progression.

From an ontological perspective, I lean more subjective in my view of the reality of the veterans engaged in veterans therapeutic courts. While, in many ways, it would be easier to view veterans through an objective lens, it became quickly apparent to me each veteran is unique in their view of reality, whether shaped by trauma, substance abuse, or support group interaction. Finally, from an epistemological perspective, I tend more towards the subjectivity end of the spectrum. I believe some things cannot be empirically proven and that correlation does not indicate causation. As a Christian, this is easy for me to embrace as I agree with the Psalmist in Psalms 139 that there are things that I cannot prove.

Finally, recognizing how each of the previously mentioned personal biases helps shape my worldview afforded me increased connectivity with the veterans. Such connectivity assisted in obtaining access and understand the court, mentors, and veterans. More importantly, recognizing these factors helped me adroitly capture this study’s beneficial impacts (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2016).

**Problem Statement**

The problem is that nationally veterans, who have difficulty adjusting to life after the military, often chose criminogenic pathways, but there are countervailing theories addressing how to break those cycles. Veteran therapeutic courts appear to be a specific and growing option to help break the criminogenic cycle, but the efficacy data are inconclusive or unresearched, such as the impacts of transformative learning (Baldwin, 2016; Logan & Link, 2019; Weinrath et al., 2019). Transformative learning has been researched in some settings, such as the medical and
educational fields, but not in veterans therapeutic courts. Therefore, any transformative learning which potentially helps break the criminogenic cycle is not synthesized and evaluated for potential impact. Notably, transformative learning is recognized as a dominant and adroitly researched adult learning theory (Casebeer & Mann, 2017). Although some research on veterans in prisons (May et al., 2017) and transformative learning in prison settings exists (Keen et al., 2016; Sandoval et al., 2016; Tønseth, 2019), no transformative learning study was found involving criminally charged veterans in veterans therapeutic courts. Relatedly, no studies could be found that address transformative learning for individuals on parole, a more apt correlation to criminally charged veterans in a veterans therapeutic court. However, as Shannon et al. (2017) found, a fundamental difference for veterans in veteran courts compared to individuals on parole is that veterans are more prone to proactive, positive engagement with court members when participating in therapeutic jurisprudence.

Veteran criminal involvement and recidivism are a challenge, as veterans are incarcerated at a 40% higher rate relative to other demographics (U. S. Census Bureau, 2019). This disproportionate incarceration rate is reflective of the veteran’s criminal journey, which is often exacerbated by service-related trauma. Fundamentally, VTC veterans predisposed to making illicit choices need to proactively learn how to make different choices and develop new coping skills, which often effectively break a continued spiral of criminal justice engagement. As previously mentioned, a key outcome of veterans therapeutic courts is to help the veterans break their criminal engagement cycle. One of the fundamental ways to do so could be through transformative learning. This study addresses the effects of transformative learning captured during a veteran’s VTC journey. Resultantly, veterans’ voices are heard and analyzed, so
impactful lessons learned can be distilled and disseminated to help disrupt the criminogenic cycle.

**Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this holistic, multiple-case design case study is to describe the transformative learning journey of a select group of criminally charged veterans assigned to a Washington State veterans therapeutic court. At this stage of research, the phenomenon is described as transformative learning occurring with criminally charged VTC veterans during their court-supervised rehabilitation journey. The principal theory guiding this study is Mezirow’s (1981) transformative learning theory. Mezirow’s theory is a valuable way to evaluate the development of VTC veterans as they progress through the various learning stages of the theory, for example, experiencing disorienting dilemmas and developing plans of action. Yet a veteran may not experience all of Mezirow’s 11 stages during their VTC experience.

**Significance of the Study**

The significance of this study is captured through the following empirical, theoretical, and practical lenses. The resultant sections outline the support lattice for capturing the veteran’s transformative learning experiences while participating in the veterans therapeutic court, potentially breaking their criminogenic cycle, increasing their transition to societal productivity, and addressing a notable void in the current academic literature.

**Theoretical**

Mezirow’s transformative learning (TL) theory is one of the leading theories addressing adult learning (Biasin, 2018; Jeffers, 2019; Knight, 2015; Owen, 2016; Richardson et al., 2019; Tett, 2019). Transformative learning has been researched internationally (Thavinpipatkul et al., 2016) in diverse professional fields and limited judicial settings (Hansen et al., 2008; Kane,
2013; Keen, 2016; Sandoval, 2016; Rodríguez Aboytes & Barth, 2020). However, Mezirow’s theory has not been researched against veterans as they migrate through veterans therapeutic courts. This omission is theoretically interesting and impactful. If TL does indeed occur, a transformation of the veteran occurs from criminogenic activities. This study’s theoretical significance will expand the understanding of adult transformative learning in veterans therapeutic courts, specifically how the various identified stages of transformative learning bolster the veterans’ recovery, such as new frames of reference, new roles, or societal influencers.

**Empirical**

There are relatively few studies to date that include Washington State veterans therapeutic courts (Baldwin, 2017). Further, as previously noted, there is a sparse but developing body of literature addressing transformative learning and veterans (Hasio, 2010). Additionally, there is a limited body of scholarly work with prisoners and their transformative learning journey (Barrett et al., 2019; Keen & Woods, 2016). However, to date, there is no scholarly work found that addresses the transformative learning of a criminally charged veteran in a VTC. But a lack of scholarly inquiry does not signify empirical significance. Because of their military encounters, many veterans experience service-related trauma that feeds into a counter-societal pattern and too frequently results in incarceration. If a veteran does not receive help, including changing patterns of thoughts and behaviors, the cycle, including incarceration, is likely to continue and devolve (Timko et al., 2014). However, if the veteran can receive the help needed, they can become an effective member of society and help themselves and others (McCall et al., 2018). One potentially effective way to help veterans change their thoughts and behaviors includes
transformative learning as veterans develop new frames of reference and productive courses of action that mitigate the effects of their service-induced trauma (Mezirow, 1981)

**Practical**

The results of qualitative studies are rarely generalizable to larger populations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, even with this study’s unique geographical setting (Williams, 2011), there are potential transferable findings for application to other areas contemplating implementing similar veterans therapeutic courts, mentor programs, and understand criminally charged veterans’ transformative learning journey. Further, the county supporting the Washington State VTC is supported by a time-limited tax referendum. Thus, this study’s results could be used to assist in deciding if such funding of the veterans therapeutic court should continue and if any court-specific lessons learned should be embraced. Fundamentally, even with the latitude in implementing VTC programs, the identified themes discovered as veterans reflect on their learning journey should yield suggestions on how to walk beside a criminally charged veteran and help transform their life, breaking their criminogenic cycle.

**Research Questions**

To address the scholarly research gap in transformative learning of criminally charged veterans in a veterans therapeutic court, one central and three sub-questions are addressed. Each question is grounded in the transformative learning literature (Mezirow, 1981) and Clark and Wilson’s (1991) three transformative learning goals and are addressed more robustly in Chapter Three. However, the brief literature grounding of these questions introduced here provides a supportive context for the research questions.
Central Research Question

What is the transformative learning experience of criminally charged military veterans who participate in veterans therapeutic courts?

This question and each of the following sub-questions will be assessed through the lens of Mezirow’s eleven stages of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1981). Notably, there is no guarantee that a complete transformative learning journey, or experiencing all 11 stages, will occur during this study or if transformative learning results will even be positive (Schnitzer, 2020). However, TL migration can assist in breaking a veteran’s criminogenic spiral. Therefore, the sub-questions, and the substantive interview questions found in the Methodology chapter, will help establish if transformative learning stages are encountered during the veteran’s VTC journey.

Sub-Question One

How do military veterans describe their self-perception relative to their veterans therapeutic court journey?

Clark and Wilson’s (1991) three goals of transformative learning bracket the sub-questions and were foundational in other educational studies (Guarneri & Connolly, 2019). For sub-question one, self-awareness and perception are essential parts of changing behaviors and judgments (Casebeer & Mann, 2017) and are associated with the first stages of transformative learning. Such transformations are critical in changing criminal activity as the first step in cognitive reshaping (Watkins et al., 2018) and in many treatment programs where a person admits they have a problem (Henshaw et al., 2019; Sandoval et al., 2016; Slobogin, 1995).
Sub-Question Two

How do military veterans describe their belief system relative to their veterans therapeutic court journey?

Sub-question two affords the veteran the opportunity for critical reflection on their belief system and noteworthy changes precipitated by interactions with mentors, friends, court officials, and care providers (Elbers et al., 2012; Hansen et al., 2008; Kalbfleisch, 2002).

Sub-Question Three

How do military veterans describe their lifestyle habits relative to their veterans therapeutic court journey?

Sub-question three addresses lifestyle changes which can be refined through specialized treatments, including substance abuse treatment and anger management. Such active changes are key later stages in transformative learning (Hansen et al., 2008; Mezirow, 1981). Further, lifestyle changes are a vital component of military life and therapeutic jurisprudence models (Baktir et al., 2018; Robertson & Brott, 2014; Wexler & Winnick, 1991). Combined, transformative lifestyle changes can lead to more productive life changes and reduced recidivism (Baldwin, 2016, Easterly, 2017; Johnsen & Robertson, 2016).

Notably, Kerins et al. (2019) espoused that Mezirow’s early stages, stages one through six, may only apply in limited duration studies such as this one. Furthermore, Kerin postulated that later stages, such as trying out new roles, may not have time to be fully germinated during a limited duration evaluated segment, such as the data collection span of a veteran’s VTC journey. Still, Mezirow’s later stages were not be omitted in advance and were assessed during the interviews, observations, and personal essay analysis. Further, since the transformational learning stages do not have to occur linearly (Mezirow, 1989; Sands & Tenant, 2010), some later
steps could indeed be observed, even if earlier stages are not. Summarily, all three sub-questions involve personal reflection, foundational to transformative learning.

**Definitions**

1. *Criminally Charged Veteran* – a veteran who made a counter-lawful choice resulting in criminal charges, also referred to as a justice-involved veteran, or a veteran criminally involved with the justice system (Tsai et al., 2018).

2. *Moral Injury* – Broadly, Frankfurt & Frazier (2016) and others referred to these as transgressive acts, defined as “perpetrating, failing to prevent, bearing witness to, or learning about acts that transgress deeply held moral beliefs and expectations” (Litz et al., 2009, p. 700).

3. *Therapeutic Jurisprudence* – Each legal action is evaluated for its individualized positive and negative therapeutic impact, and further, specifically tailored to and succinctly agreed to by the justice-involved participant if found competent to make such a decision (Wexler & Winick, 1991).

4. *Transformative Learning* – based upon Mezirow’s theory (Kitchenham, 2008; Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b, 1981, 1989, 1991), defines how adults learn, especially with respect to forming new mental images; and such new images can be demonstrated through actions such as personal essay writing.

5. *Veteran* – a person who “served in the active military, naval, or air service and was discharged or released from service under conditions ‘other than dishonorable’” (Department of Veterans Administration Veterans Health Administration Directive 1601A.02., 2018, p. 3).
6. *Veterans Therapeutic Court* – also referred to as a veterans treatment court or veterans therapy court and abbreviated VTC, is a type of specialty court (Washington State Court, n.d.), built on the theory of therapeutic jurisprudence (Wexler & Winick, 1991), and specifically formulated to help veterans correct underlying challenges that result in criminogenic actions.

**Summary**

Nationally there are four primary problem-solving or specialty courts: drug treatment court, mental health court, Driving While Impaired court, and veterans therapeutic, or treatment, court (Douds et al., 2017). Since 2008, over 400 VTCs have emerged in the United States (Douds & Hummer, 2019), and local jurisdictions are given broad leniency in organizing and implementing their VTC programs. But the question remains, are these courts effective, especially in transformative learning leading to constructive re-engagement with society? There is a recognized literature gap as several veterans treatment court studies produced countervailing results on veterans treatment courts efficiency, especially in reducing recidivism (Lennon, 2019; McCall et al., 2018; Tsai et al., 2018). With diverse municipal, district, and superior VTCs (Washington State Court, n.d.), Washington State has been overlooked in many studies to date (Easterly, 2017; Lucas, 2017). Further, there is an observed paucity of studies addressing specific aspects of the VTC, such as the mentoring program and adult learning, both critical elements of reducing recidivism. A case study approach was conducted to help ameliorate this research gap to capture the veterans’ key Washington VTC transformative learning encounters. By capturing each veteran’s journey, essential themes collected from their transformative learning experiences are explored, identified, codified, and presented. Such presentation will expectantly spur other
researchers and other VTCs to potential solution analysis, deliberation, further study, and implementation.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A veterans’ transformative learning journey is the product of choices made and experiences encountered before, during, and after military service (Ahlin & Douds, 2016; Huskey, 2017; May et al., 2017). Unfortunately, this transformative journey too often includes suicide and depression thoughts, criminogenic and court engagement, and societal adjustments (MacLeish, 2020; Mastin et al., 2020; Sands & Tenet, 2010; Vaughan et al., 2019). While helping veterans is a desired outcome, this study’s principal focus remains how to effectively assess a veteran’s transformative learning, specifically within the bounds of a veterans therapeutic court. To address this void, this review assessed prominent adult learning theories, specifically Mezirow’s evolutionary transformative learning theory. However, given the complexities of an individual veteran’s journey and the dynamics of the veterans therapeutic court, mentoring, perceived organizational support, and therapeutic jurisprudence are also reviewed to understand their impact on the veteran’s veterans therapeutic court transformative learning journey.

Theoretical Framework

Casebeer and Mann (2017) subjectively graphed eight prominent adult learning theories (Figure 1) using transformation and learning as their comparative axes. While care must be exercised when attempting to display and analyze subjective graphing (Casebeer & Mann, 2017; Tufke, 2001), this graph served as an initial bounding for this academic work, with the center point of the graph chosen as the analytical starting point. This decision to avoid outlying theories was justified given the unique and diverse but also in some ways universal criminogenic journey each veteran travels and the spate of academic literature addressing the issue of transformative
learning in a veteran or drug treatment court (Hansen et al., 2008; Hasio, 2010). Two theories, psychodevelopmental and psychocritical, Casebeer and Mann’s label for Mezirow’s theory, occupied the most central positions on Casebeer and Mann’s chart. Mezirow’s, the most prominent of Casebeer and Mann’s selected theories, offered a well-researched, personalized, and universally applied theoretical basis (Barakat et al., 2019; Biasin, 2018; Campbell & Brysiewicz, 2017; Casebeer & Mann, 2017; Cragg & Andrusyszyn, 2005; Kitchenham, 2008; Lundgren & Poell, 2016; Sands & Tennant, 2010; Taylor, 1997). Such broad applicability is advantageous to this study given the diversity associated with veterans treatment courts (Brown et al., 2013; Duffy, 2011; Jones, 2013, Lens, 2016; Slobogin, 1995). While also centrally located, Kegan’s (1994) psychodevelopmental theory was more narrowly focused on relational impacts on learning (Casebeer & Mann, 2017). However, based upon early criticism of a lack of social dynamics consideration, Mezirow added relational emphasis, stage 9, (Collard & Law, 1989; Illeris, 2014; Kitchenham, 2008; Nohl, 2015; Mezirow, 1991). Relationships, including mentoring and circle of influence changes for criminogenic veterans, are an important consideration for this study (Benoit et al., 2017; Brill et al., 2014; Lozinak, 2016; Nyanjom, 2020; Rottmann et al., 2016; Sands & Tennant, 2010; Vaughan et al., 2019). Therefore, because of its inclusivity, Mezirow’s adult learning theory was selected to bracket this seminal study of the veterans’ journey in a veterans treatment court.
Building on work by Kuhn, Freire, and Habermas, Mezirow developed, introduced, and evolved his theory focusing on key stages, or phases (Table 1), to help explain transformative learning in adults (Bainbridge & Del Negro, 2020; Beer, 2019; Chang, 2017; Davies et al., 2018; Fleming, 2018; Keen & Woods, 2016; Kitchenham, 2008; Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b, 1981, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1994, 1997, 2000; Mezirow & Taylor, 2009; Tett, 2019; Zanchetta et al., 2017). While listed sequentially, Mezirow noted that transformative learning does not have to occur in a linear procession (Mezirow, 1989, Sands & Tenant, 2010). Additionally, Mezirow noted a vital component of this theory was transforming problematic individualized frames of reference to
embrace new information and, more importantly, adopt a willingness to change incongruent frames of reference (Keen & Woods, 2016; Kitchenham, 2008; Mezirow, 2000, 2003). Frames of references are the personalized mental sieves through which adults process new information. According to Chang (2017), transformative learning can be distilled into experience, assumptions, and reflection. The experience can be disorienting, stage 1, such as incarceration, leading the individual to challenge and change their assumptions. Change of assumptions, executed through the process of changing frames of reference, forces participants to reflect critically on new experiences, underlying precepts, and form new meaning and habits (Chang, 2017; Clark & Wilson, 1991; Kitchenham, 2008; Keen & Woods, 2016; Mezirow, 1981, 1991, 2000). Further, Mezirow (1991) stated that transformative learning focused on helping adults become more critically reflective and develop more discriminative and inclusive meaning perspectives. Mezirow encapsulated such informative processing change with the term critical reflection (Mezirow, 1997, 2003; Owen, 2016; Taylor, 1997).

Critical reflection, the basis of emancipatory learning, incorporates frames of reference and additional information based upon factors such as postulates, analysis, and opinions (Mezirow, 1991). Brooksfield (1995) defined critical reflection as a person’s attempt to explore and disclose baseline rational, regulatory, and instrumental assumptions that frame how a person functions. When processed by the individual, such first-order thinking helps change how personal meanings are developed, perceived, and applied (Brooks, 1992; Mezirow, 1991). Brook’s three components of critical reflection, reflection-in-action, reflection on ethical issues, and strategic planning (Brooks, 1992; Mezirow, 1991; Schön, 2017; Smith, 2011) serve as a promising academic guide for accessing critical reflection and mirrors key components for helping the specialty court members succeed, especially when the veteran focuses on ethical- and
action-reflection. Such reflection is evident when a veteran contemplates suicide, self-injury, or depression recovery steps (Bohnert et al., 2017; Elbogen et al., 2018; MacLeish, 2020; Mastin et al., 2020; Sands & Tenant, 2010; Vaughan, 2019), or completes a written sanctioning activity (Canada et al., 2015) and reflects on the ethical “why” of their actions. Additionally, when a veteran stands before a veterans therapeutic court judge and discusses corrective thoughts and action plans, Mezirow’s stage 6, to ensure such criminogenic actions are not repeated, critical reflection is demonstrated (Chang, 2017; MacLeish, 2020; Shannon et al., 2017; Tsai et al., 2017).

Table 1

Veterans Therapeutic Court Examples of Mezirow’s Transformative Learning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Veterans Therapeutic Court Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1</td>
<td>A disorienting dilemma</td>
<td>Incarceration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>Self-examination with feelings of shame or guilt</td>
<td>Reflecting remorsefully on dishonoring their service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 3</td>
<td>A critical assessment of assumptions</td>
<td>Realizing that one mistake doesn’t necessarily completely define a veteran’s experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 4</td>
<td>Recognition that others have traveled the same transformative path</td>
<td>Listening to and discussing with other VTC members, including lessons learned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 5</td>
<td>Exploration of new roles, relationships, and actions</td>
<td>Consideration of what it means to be a veteran and changing interactions with social circles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 6</td>
<td>Develop a new course of action</td>
<td>Goals for new ways of interaction with society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 7</td>
<td>Acquisition of knowledge and skills needed for implementing plans</td>
<td>Honing new anger management skills</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Phase 8  Provisionally trying out new roles  Executing new anger management skills in different stressful settings

Phase 9 (new phase)  Altering present relationships and forging new relationships  Changing a peer group from those who have a tendency towards substance abuse or criminogenic activity

Phase 10  Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships  Accepting a leadership or mentor role in a substance abuse group

Phase 11  Reintegration of new perspective into life  Using new coping skills during daily life engagements such as driving

Note: As adapted from Kerins et al., 2020; Kitchenham, 2008; and Mezirow (1978a, 1978b)

Given the prominence of mentoring in many veterans treatment courts, including the studied court, mentoring interaction must be addressed. Although not precisely mirroring veterans therapeutic court mentoring programs, typical mentoring engagements include the mentor sharing identified skills in a confidential setting, which provides the mentee a safe environment to discuss, practice, and acquire tailored, needs-based skills (Evans, 2018; Hunt & Michael, 1983; Johnson, 2018). This structure aligns directly with transformative learning and therapeutic jurisprudence guidance by providing a fertile setting for veterans to grow and develop new skills (Kane, 2013; Mezirow, 1981; Wexler & Winick, 1991). Kabakci et al. (2010) produced one of the few scholarly articles highlighting the intersection of transformative learning and mentoring (Kabakci et al., 2010; Nyanjom, 2020). Such engagements also demonstrate the importance of perceived organizational support exemplified by the mentor, who is viewed as representative of the organization by way of positional power instilled by the organization. Therefore, as success is gained, trust in the mentor and reflectively in the organization increases (Bolman & Deal, 2017; Kurtessis et al., 2017). Such reflectivity is significantly important as
veterans work through trust issues and demonstrate and reintegrate new mind habits into their daily activities, Mezirow’s stages 10 and 11.

Related Literature

While Mezirow’s transformative learning theory is the foundational adult learning theory for this study, several other impactful theories tied to veterans treatment court are addressed in this section. As previously mentioned, Wexler and Winnick’s (1991) therapeutic jurisprudence theory serves as the basis for how the veterans therapeutic court is structured and will be probed in more detail. Further, Eisenberger et al. (1986) perceived organizational support is discussed as it applies to veteran’s perception of veteran court’s structure and personnel, especially as engaging new relationships, are a key factor. Also, given the mentor engagement found in this study’s veteran court, Kalbfleisch’s (2002) support structure is also examined, especially from the mentoring perspective. However, more importantly, the related theory section will begin with addressing the mechanics of the veterans therapeutic court and the veteran’s transformative learning journey while participating in the veterans therapeutic court.

The Veteran’s Transformative Learning Journey

Reflective of veterans therapeutic courts, Sands and Tenant (2010) asked a seminal question, does transformative learning produce a healthier, more self-aware, and even improved person? If yes, such improvement is also at the heart of therapeutic jurisprudence (Jones, 2013; Lennon, 2019). Veterans uniquely can experience a biased view of others, especially non-veterans (Ahlin & Douds, 2016), and can be pejoratively biased against non-veterans (Brown et al., 2013). Such biases can produce systemic problems in veterans courts because not every veteran court team member is a veteran. If an individual bias exists towards non-veterans, a habit of mind transformation is required as veterans accept judicial pronouncements, develop critical
autonomous thinking skills, and embrace new frames of reference, resultanty producing transformative learning and positive societal actions.

New habits of mind (Kitchenham, 2008; Mezirow, 2000) are developed as veterans struggle with past trauma and new moral-ethical, philosophical, and aesthetic engagements. In addition, new habits of mind can occur when a person experiences continual stimulus, such as immersion into a culture, such as a legal or post-military culture. Resultantly, habits of mind re-processing allow the individual to be more comfortable engaging in a veterans treatment court. Combining these transformations can spur transformative learning, and this is where criminally charged veterans’ educational renovation expectantly occurs, as the veteran proactively engages and changes biases. Still, the complexities of the journey require a deeper review of the various pieces of the veteran’s veterans therapeutic court journey.

**Veteran Trauma and Issues**

One hundred eighty thousand veterans are incarcerated each year, with over 50% of these incarcerations related to violent offenses, yet these numbers may be underestimated (Finlay et al., 2019; Hartley & Baldwin, 2019). As of 2012, approximately 8% of the federal, state, and local incarcerated population had veteran ties (Bronsson et al., 2015). As a possible confounding variable, veterans experience traumas rarely experienced by the civilian populace. For instance, veterans can experience physical trauma, such as sharing a loss or significant functional reduction of a limb or sense; and mental trauma, such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI; Buchholz et al., 2017; Eakman et al., 2016; Tsai et al., 2018). Further, veterans often deal with moral trauma, defined as a disconnect between morals and actions, including reflecting on ethical dilemmas encountered by peers (Grimell, 2018; Wilt et al., 2019). Some veterans chose to address, or suppress, these traumas by reenlisting, or finding
solace in the company of kindred souls, despite the potentiality of further aggravating their trauma. However, once the member does separate, either through voluntary or involuntary actions, the veteran can encounter a loss of mission focus, identity, and camaraderie, resulting in transition difficulties (Albertson, 2019; Robertson & Brott, 2014).

Although many traumatized veterans can make successful transitions to civilian life, some are unable to; frequently, those veterans opt to self-medicate their service-related traumas (Lan et al., 2016; Lubens & Silvers, 2019; Slattery et al., 2013). Such self-medication can amplify a depression cycle, especially if exacerbated by unaddressed psychological trauma and other substance abuse (Norman et al., 2018). Such trauma impacts the veterans, their intimate circle, and society at large (Brown et al., 2013; Buchholz et al., 2017; Johnsen & Robertson, 2016). Unfortunately, too many traumatized veterans, oppressed by the military warrior culture and substance abuse, choose suicide (Brown et al., 2013; Bullman et al., 2018; Mastin et al., 2020). Other veterans frequently make illegal choices and end up facing a “perfect storm” (Brown et al., 2013, p. 1) of the unique pressures of the military socio-culture and psychological impacts accompanying physical, mental, and moral traumas. Often the veterans’ trauma is intensified and mediated by their brothers in arms bonding. If not understood and treated, such trauma can frequently lead to difficult societal transitions after leaving the military and ultimately entanglement with the judicial system (Bennet et al., 2018). Unfortunately, this destructive cycle often repeats, especially if the underlying factors exacerbating the judicial involvement are not assuaged. Further, Hartley and Baldwin (2019) posited that, from a historical perspective, it is not uncommon for cases to peak 30 years after the trauma. Therefore, the United States can expect an increase in treatment needs of the over 2 million servicemen and women participating in Iraq and Afghanistan operations since 2001, especially since many of
these service members have been deployed more than once (Brown et al., 2013; Grimell, 2018; Vaughan et al., 2019).

**Veterans Treatment Courts**

The first official veterans treatment court stood up in Buffalo, New York, on 15 January 2008 (Lennon, 2019; Buffalo veterans treatment court, n.d.), but court-related DNA can be tracked to Alaska. In 2004 veterans living in Alaska were allowed to take advantage of a specific Veterans Administrative program to treat behavioral problems. This new venue was recognized as a viable option to traditional jurisprudence procedures, including conventional incarceration (Smith, 2012). Since 2008, veterans therapeutic courts have been one of the fastest-growing problem-solving specialty courts, focusing on helping criminally charged veterans face and reintegrate into society after completing their legal sanctions (Hartley & Baldwin, 2019; Slattery et al., 2013). With over 400 such specialty courts spread throughout the United States (Finlay et al., 2019; McCall et al., 2018), many scholars have advocated that the speed of the court has outpaced the scholarly underpinning, which could be used to support the unusual expansion of such courts (Tsai et al. 2018). While scholarly interest has increased, with a resultant number of national (Baldwin 2016, 2017; Johnson et al., 2016, 2017; Tsai et al., 2018) and localized veterans treatment court studies rising (Douds & Hummer, 2019; Erickson, 2016), there are still identified gaps (Frederick, 2014; McCall et al., 2018; Stacer & Solinas-Saunders, 2020), as discussed in the next section.

Jurisdictions, such as municipal, district, and superior courts, are given broad leniency in organizing and implementing veterans treatment court programs. But, given the diversity of oversight and administration, such latitude makes it extremely difficult to quantify effective impacts (Arno, 2015). Such effects resultantly lead to a fundamental question -- are veterans
therapeutic courts effective (Hartley & Baldwin, 2019; Jones, 2013; Tsai et al., 2018)? In one poignant article, Douds and Hummer (2019) crafted their qualitative report around an actual failure of a veterans treatment court, specifically, the suicide of one of the members, and the challenges uncovered in various facets of the program such as mentoring and lack of organizational support. Even though veteran suicide is a national challenge, its prevention is not the only metric. Another indicator is recidivism, but correctly measuring and even defining the term is difficult, especially given the self-reporting sensitivities associated with certain assault crimes (Brown et al., 2013; Eaglin, 2017; Langan & Levin, 2002; Scurich & John, 2019). For instance, in their study of a large urban veterans treatment court, Hartley and Baldwin (2019) initially found no statistically significant difference in veterans treatment court veterans’ recidivism rates. However, further analysis of data revealed that the cohort who completed the veterans treatment court program, as opposed to combining their results with those who disenrolled from the program, did indicate a lower recidivism rate than the comparable general court system (Hartley & Baldwin, 2019; Tsai et al., 2017). Still, even with a robust sample size (Gall et al., 2007) of 300 veterans, Hartley and Baldwin (2019) noted it was difficult, if not impossible, to experimentally control confounding factors such as age, education, and other impactful life experiences. Given these challenges, positive reintegration, not recidivism, may indeed be the best metric. Yet, in a veteran’s case, sometimes the veteran has never initially integrated into society before experiencing a service-related trauma that accompanied the criminogenic activity, and critical transformative learning is essential. Equally important is understanding how different people define success (Heidemann et al., 2016). Such success is easily identified and iterated as veterans develop, refine, and execute their planned courses of action found, for example, in stage six of their transformative learning progression.
Additionally, since the veterans therapeutic court program can extend over two years, validated experimental design is challenging to develop as internal programs, treatments, history, ecological, and population changes and validity challenges arise (Gall et al. 2007; Timko et al., 2014). For instance, Tsai et al. (2017) found that veterans who experienced previous legal entanglements were more likely to recidivate than those with no prior history. But such entanglements are not limited to veterans, as adolescent children of deployed service members also have a higher propensity to experience legal troubles (Brown et al., 2013). Even though recidivism is a valid statistical factor (Langan & Levin, 2002), it is challenging to assess the root cause of why a veteran chooses a different path. Douds et al. (2017) accessed the 17 veterans treatment courts in Pennsylvania, the state with the largest number of veterans treatment courts at the time of the study, to determine the ten quintessential features of the Pennsylvania courts common to each of the Pennsylvania veteran courts and in many other veterans treatment courts (see Table 2).

### Table 2

**Ten Key Elements of Veteran Courts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Action</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Integrate substance abuse and mental health treatment into justice system case processing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Non-adversarial engagement with the participant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Early identification and placement of the participant into therapeutic court</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Access to a broad and complete array of substance, medical, and other therapeutic treatment and rehabilitation services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Frequent substance abuse testing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6 A coordinated strategy managing the participant’s compliance with policies and procedures

7 Continual interaction between the participant and the judicial team

8 Monitoring and analysis of program effectiveness

9 Continuing interdisciplinary education

10 Forging partnerships among relevant agencies and community organizations

Note: Adapted from Buffalo Veterans Treatment Court, n.d.; Douds et al., 2017; Jones, 2013

These ten common veteran court outcomes were based upon the drug treatment court protocols, which germinated from therapeutic jurisprudence theory (Douds et al., 2017; Jones, 2013; Lutze & van Wormer, 2014; Wexler & Winick, 1991). For instance, step two, where the prosecuting attorney and defense counsel use non-adversarial engagement to balance public safety with protecting due process, is a direct match to Wexler and Winick’s guidance of engaging the defendant in treatment options and not let therapy overshadow judicial necessity. Likewise, elements six and seven, which advocate a coordinated strategy and ongoing judicial interaction with each participant, mirrored Wexler and Winick’s guidance to tailor treatment plans for the individual and reflect Mezirow’s (1991) guidance for developing individualized action plans for transformative learning (i.e., Stage 6).

Douds et al. (2017) also found six general features (Table 3), different from the ten key elements among the veterans treatment courts (Douds et al., 2017; Jones, 2013), which also had common roots with Therapeutic Jurisprudence and ties to Therapeutic Learning. These standard features begin with a process of identifying who is eligible to participate in the veterans therapeutic court, and again there was diversity. Some veterans treatment courts operate a very structured veteran identification protocol executed during a veterans’ in-processing. Others relied
on self-identification (Douds et al., 2017; Lennon, 2019). Further, some courts accessed veteran court eligibility based upon the type of discharge, such as honorable versus dishonorable discharge (Jones, 2013), often relying on a Veterans Administration support officer to help review military service records. A second common feature involved a process for accessing which charges were allowed to be brought into the veterans treatment court. Some courts restricted criminal involvement levels to misdemeanor charges and did not accept violent veterans with felony charges. Other courts managed their case acceptance on a case-by-case, or resource limitation, basis. Douds et al. (2017) found a third common tenet was empaneling a specialized team that held meetings to discuss the various veteran cases. The specifics of the team composition will be elaborated further in a later section.

Table 3

Six Commonly Found Features of Veteran Courts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Feature</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A process for identifying eligible veterans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Specific criteria for court acceptance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Specific court team members and designated meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Individualized treatment programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Individualized progress tracking processes to include data collection and management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Incorporating a veteran mentor program</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: As modified from Douds et al., 2017

The fourth commonality identified by Douds et al. (2017) focused on individual treatment programs. In this case, individualized programs for each justice-involved veteran
included medical prophylaxis and life skills training such as anger management. Notably, each veteran’s plan is tailored to meet the veteran’s needs in keeping with therapeutic jurisprudence protocols (Wexler & Winnick, 1991). The fifth major item was the development of personal action plans, including a process to track and access a veteran’s progression through the program, recognizing successes and setbacks, also a key part of transformational learning (stage six, Kerins et al., 2020). As expected, some courts, such as Pennsylvania, are more synchronized and standardized in sharing data as a closely coordinated group of Veteran Administration service officers service the courts. In contrast, other courts, such as those found in Washington State, share and store data more intermediately.

Finally, the sixth significant commonality identified by Douds et al. (2017) discussed the accompanying mentor program. However, as previously mentioned, the Douds et al. (2017) study was restricted to the State of Pennsylvania; and not every veterans therapeutic court offers a mentor program, including some courts in Washington State where this study was conducted. Further, diversity in how mentor programs are administered is often underscored in how mentors are assigned, such as because of a similar branch of service, gender, or service history, and monitored. A mentor coordinator pairs some mentors and mentees, but other courts allow the veterans to choose their mentor after interviewing potential mentors personally. Allowing the veterans to engage in mentor selection, although more labor-intensive, is a recognized vital component for increasing mentoring program success as identified by the mentor enactment theory (Kalbfleisch, 2002).

**The Veterans Treatment Court Support Team**

As previously mentioned, the veteran therapeutic court team composition varies but usually involves distinct core team members (Douds et al., 2017; MacLeish, 2020). For example,
the Veteran Administration frequently resources Veteran Justice Officers, who engage with veterans therapeutic courts to confirm a veteran’s service history, and then help the veteran obtain earned Veterans Administration benefits. However, additional benefits do not necessarily translate into successfully mitigating challenges, especially for mental trauma or substance abuse problems (Yang, 2017). In addition, even though a key component of many VTCs are mentors and the mentor coordinator, yet despite approximately 75% of the veterans treatment courts across the United States having or developing mentor programs (Douds et al., 2017; McGuire et al., 2013), according to Douds et al. (2017) “very little is known about how these programs operate or what value they add” (p. 743). Such questions about the mentor program are not unique to Pennsylvania and constitute a noted gap in the literature but one that continues to be researched.

Veteran Justice Officers and mentors are not the only principal team members of the veterans therapeutic court. As previously mentioned, of the team members, the presiding judge is central to ensuring justice is served (Douds et al., 2017; Senjo & Leip, 2001; Vaughan et al., 2019) but is also a key participant in perceived organizational support as well as transformational learning, supporting Mezirow’s fourth stage, among others. However, Duffy (2011) noted that the judge’s role could be counterproductive, perhaps negatively impacting recidivism, especially if the judge shifts from an unbiased to a biased arbitrator. Such a bias challenge is also a challenge embraced more widely in therapeutic jurisprudence as the judge must maintain an appropriate balance between therapeutic and antitherapeutic mitigation while engaging the defendant (Johnsen & Robertson, 2016; King & Batagol, 2010; Lens, 2016; Wexler & Winnick, 1991). Further, Easterly (2017) found that the most prominent factor impacting veterans treatment court communal acceptance was the judge’s military background, as opposed to other
descriptive features, such as local homeless rates and the number of proximal military units, impacted the development of veterans therapeutic courts. Even though a judge’s military experience, to include vicarious experiences through close family members, indeed did influence the communal acceptance rate of new veterans therapeutic courts, other potential confounding factors such as military involvement of a judge’s non-familial influencers, such as close friends, or mentor involvement were not addressed. In several courts, the judge’s potential bias is mitigated through team meetings and group recommendations for assignment of sanctions or incentives, such as essay writing or journaling (Canada et al., 2015), community service tasks, or even placing the veteran into correctional custody. Such actions are frequently first proffered by the prosecuting attorney for reflection and discussion by the team before being decreed to the veteran by the judge.

Other team members include the defense council, who works in conjunction with the rest of the team, and advocates for the defendant, and the prosecuting attorney, who advocates for the state. The final core team member is the caseworker, also referred to as a social worker, who maintains the most frequent contact with the veteran and is charged with principally orchestrating and managing the veteran’s program progression. Additional team members frequently include other administrative experts and treatment specialists (Douds et al., 2017; Vaughan et al., 2019). Many of these team member monikers are the same as found in traditional court proceedings. However, their function is slightly different based upon the specialty court’s charter, often built on therapeutic jurisprudence. For instance, for charters built on therapeutic jurisprudence, instead of an adversarial interaction between the prosecuting attorney and defense counsel, both strategize together to produce the optimal therapeutic balance for the veteran and
society, but such balance is often challenging to maintain (Arno, 2015; Jones, 2013, Vaughan et al., 2019; Wexler & Winick, 1991).

**Theory of Therapeutic Jurisprudence**

Therapeutic jurisprudence is focused on ensuring “legal rules and procedures promote the physical and psychological well-being of people” (Senjo & Leip, 2001, p. 1). In 1991, Wexler and Winick produced their seminal therapeutic jurisprudence work addressing legal practices impacting mental health. Notably, they advocated ensuring pivotal treatments surrounding death row inmates’ mental health issues were not coercively applied. Otherwise, they argued that the defendant would experience a significant decrease in care quality (Wexler & Winick, 1991). According to therapeutic jurisprudence guidelines, its goal is to highlight and encourage the judicial system to embrace, incorporate, and evaluate the positive and negative impacts of judicial decisions from the accused perspective; while not ignoring the societal and legal effects (Johnsen & Robertson, 2016; Wexler & Winick, 1991). The resulting emergent scholarly therapeutic jurisprudence work advocated such novel, at the time, concepts as hearing directly from the defendant and acknowledging that the defendant’s personal choices concerning treatment options should be accepted as frequently as feasible. In fact, Winick advocated for the “therapeutic value of choice” (Slobogin, 1995, p. 194; Winick, 1994, p. 106), which remains a crucial plank in therapeutic jurisprudence. Fundamentally, therapeutic jurisprudence and the resultant specialty courts that spring from this theory focus on the individual’s dignity (Perlin, 2017; Rotman, 2008). Wexler and Winick (1991) posited that therapeutic jurisprudence uncovered previously undervalued choices that, once included, could rightly sway judicial considerations towards a more constitutionally correct and humane application. Drawing on psychological underpinnings, Wexler and Winick advocated competency-based incentives, tying
such rewards to goals established by the court, the defendant, if competent, and the support experts, such as social workers and mental health experts.

Such corporate goal plans, also called “treatment plans” and “contingency contracts” (Wexler & Winick, 1991, p. 998; also plans of action, Mezirow, stage six, Kitchenham, 2008), embraced the therapeutic benefits of such actions and led to other applications besides mental health courts. Notably, therapeutic jurisprudence theory recognizes that, as with most humans, positive reinforcement often produces more receptive and beneficial outcomes when compared to more antitherapeutic actions, including sanctions such as essay writing in veterans therapeutic courts or other forms of punishment (King & Batagol, 2010; Maag, 2019; Senjo & Leip, 2001). For criminally charged veterans in veterans therapeutic courts, sanctions often involve writing self-reflective essays. Self-reflection, as captured in writing, is a key component of Mezirow’s transformative learning construct (Seyed Abolghasem et al., 2020).

“Cognitive restructuring” (Wexler, 1993, p. 763), which Wexler acknowledges is a foundational step in mental health treatments, is accomplished by having the patient personally acknowledge the foundational conduct and effects of their personal choices. This cognitive restructuring is a focal point for therapeutic justice outcomes and, similarly, is a critical component of veterans therapeutic courts. This restructuring is also a crucial component of transformative learning by creating new mental maps (Kitchenham, 2008; Mezirow, 1981, 1991; Watkins et al., 2018). However, there are preferred limitations to such actions. As noted by Wexler, therapeutic actions and actors are more efficacious in more temperate mental illness areas such as the defendant not legally certified insane, as when defendants can indeed fractionally and cogently understand, accept, and change their actions. Success formed by personal reflection led to the expansion of therapeutic jurisprudence into drug treatment, and
subsequently, veterans therapeutic courts with the primary goal of positively changing the accused. Further, positive ripple effects expand into the accused’s circles of influence, such as family, friends, and society (Senjo & Leip, 2001).

However, the foundational application of therapeutic tenets is varied (Logan & Link, 2019; Perlin, 2017; Weinrath et al., 2019), as therapeutic jurisprudence practitioners focus on ensuring the dignity of the individual is maintained, which is not always a principle focus of other courts. For example, different courts sometimes concentrate on restorative justice, where shaming is accepted (Perlin, 2017; Rotman, 2008). Resultantly, therapeutic courts’ overall theoretical premise and efficacy is a frequently debated concept (Johnsen & Robertson, 2016; Logan & Link, 2019; Weinrath et al., 2019).

The primary judicial theory competing with therapeutic jurisprudence for effective veterans therapeutic court practices is still being debated. Huskey (2017) noted that although many scholars support therapeutic jurisprudence as the paradigmatic foundation for veterans treatment courts, some scholars advocated restorative justice as a possible counter-underpinning theory (Huskey, 2017; Johnsen & Robertson, 2016). Yet a scholarly search of the key terms “restorative justice” and associated “veterans treatment court” search terms for the last five years produced only five tangentially related articles. Expanding the search to include dates to 2008, when veterans treatment courts first emerged, yielded no additional scholarly results. However, citation numbers do not correlatively translate to academic impact. Searching for the term “therapeutic jurisprudence” and associated veteran therapeutic court terms only yielded eight scholarly articles. While a 60% increase in results, these articles did overlap with the previously found restorative justice articles. Still, many scholars assumed therapeutic jurisprudence to be the optimal judicial foundation for veterans treatment courts (Huskey, 2017; Perlin, 2017).
Given the literature search results and the apparent overlap of these two theories, some principal differences allow both to coexist in practice. For instance, therapeutic jurisprudence courts focus on three principles – legal rules, legal procedures, and legal actors, with the judge playing an increasingly prominent role of the interactive arbitrator (Henshaw et al., 2019; Huskey, 2017; King & Batagol, 2010; Lens, 2016). Scholars noted that the veteran court mission was a seminal match to the therapeutic jurisprudence focus of achieving actual therapeutic outcomes through the legal profession (Huskey, 2017; Weinrath et al., 2019). Huskey further surmised that whereas therapeutic jurisprudence relies on the state’s power to persuade compliance, restorative justice is more focused on ameliorating the harm by bringing all parties, including victims, together to develop an agreed-to catharsis action plan. Although victims are not overtly excluded in veteran therapeutic courts (Rotman, 2008), they are infrequently actively recruited for participation in developing treatment plans. In therapeutic jurisprudence, specifically in veteran therapeutic courts, the treatment is primarily focused on problem-solving with the justice-involved veteran versus focusing on society or victims as found in other court systems (Davis et al., 2017; Shannon et al., 2017).

Wexler and Winick (1991) were quick to acknowledge that, even though semantically the word therapeutic is listed first, they did not advocate that jurisprudence should be subservient to therapeutic actions. Nor did they advocate legal precedence or judicial ruling be decremented to a secondary role compared to clinical offerings; in other words, therapeutic actions do not trump legislative procedures in veterans therapeutic courts (Rotman, 2008). Instead, just as Wexler and Winick (1991) advocated, decision-makers must understand the complexities of interdisciplinary therapeutic offerings, as well as the intricacies of judiciously and judicially applying the law both universally and individually (Weinrath et al., 2019, Wexler, 1993). But universal adoption and
engagement strategies include having the judge speak directly to the defendant and discuss personalized courses of action, rather than the judge speaking through the prosecution and defense council. Such engagement allowed personal buy-in of the developed therapeutic plan, which is also a key component of developing personalized action plans (Mezirow’s sixth stage, 1991). Further, mentoring engagement theory (Kalbfleisch, 2002) and organizational support theory (Eisenberger et al., 1986) will be addressed later in the related literature section of this chapter and help shore up an understanding of both transformative learning and therapeutic jurisprudence.

Senjo and Leip (2001) researched the expansion of therapeutic jurisprudence into drug courts in Florida and its four key components -- court monitoring, drug treatment, criminal procedures, and the defendant’s personalized situation. These four are also vital in the veterans therapeutic court. For instance, criminally charged veterans are subject to frequent and randomized drug screenings and routinely attend life skill development sessions such as substance abuse treatment, counseling, and anger management protocols (Lennon, 2019; Lens, 2016; Senjo & Leip, 2001). Notably, and as previously discussed, although personal characteristics can have a definitive impact on personal successes in specialty courts, the band of brotherhood veteran connection, and not wishing to let their mentors, comrades, or service down, adds another important personal dynamic not experienced in other specialty courts (Douds et al., 2017; Baldwin & Rukus, 2015). Such court and mentor connection perhaps supports lower recidivism rates in veterans treatment courts but has not been empirically verified.

Even though Wexler and Winick expected therapeutic jurisprudence to impact a wide swath of jurisprudence and academic disciplines (Wexler, 1993; Wexler & Winick, 1991), its expansion and advocacy also uniquely gives a voice to the defendant. Further, validation and
voluntariness (Ronner, 2002), and embracing the beneficial interactive power of a single, engaged judge allowed therapeutic jurisprudence to migrate and be integrated into many fields, including education, finance, sociology, and psychology (Jack, 2010; Perlin, 2017; Wexler & Winick, 1991). This migration assisted in founding specialty courts such as mental health, drug treatment, and veterans therapeutic courts. Further, the migration impacted other legal fields such as commercial law and physical disability law, where marginalized individuals were again provided dignity, a voice, and allowed to participate in their treatment protocols and life goal determinations (Lens et al., 2016; Lucas, 2017; Perlin, 2017; Weinrath et al., 2019). Markedly, both therapeutic jurisprudence and transformative learning activities are globally recognized (Adolphe et al., 2019; Gal & Schilli, 2017; Ibusuki, 2019; Jones & Kawalek, 2019; Perlin, 20017; Traghetto & Guimaraes, 2020; Weinrath et al., 2019), but, again, their overlap has been researched on a minimal basis.

With its goal of identifying root causes, resolving the causal effects, and reintegrating the veteran into society sans future criminogenic behaviors (Baldwin & Rukus, 2015), veterans therapeutic courts have experienced dichotic success (Finlay et al., 2019; Tsai et al., 2017). What is vital from both a therapeutic justice and restorative justice perspective is the focus of addressing primary and secondary effects resulting from the intersection of military trauma and criminal activity (Lennon, 2019). Veteran therapeutic courts frequently mitigate homelessness and educational issues through Veterans Administration benefits, which are not often available to non-veteran defendants (Baldwin & Rukus, 2015; Tsai et al., 2017). Even though there is conflicting research on the efficacy of some social support programs (Yang, 2017), leveraging Veteran Administration resources, such as funding outreach officers, who are often members of the VTC team, and medical treatments for military-related trauma, allows municipalities to
fiscally leverage federal support for specialty courts including veterans therapeutic courts (Douds et al., 2017; Lennon, 2019).

**Organizational Support**

Transformational learning has been studied in various organizational settings, including dysfunctional attitudes and critical reflection (Brooks, 1992), organizational safety and cultural support (Gladman et al., 2015), alcoholics anonymous (Hansen et al., 2008), enhancing organizational health (Thavinpipatkul et al., 2016), and engagement in medical activities (Ige et al., 2017). Although there is some commonality with social exchange theory (Frieder, 2018), the principal focus of organizational support theory, also referred to as perceived organizational support (Shanock et al., 2019), is principally on transactional effects between the employee and the organization. Thus, organizational support theory focuses on the employees’ perceptions of why actions are occurring within their organization (Kurtessis et al., 2017; Shanock et al., 2019).

In their seminal study of the effects of employees’ perception of organizational support and absenteeism, Eisenberger et al. (1986) researched how employees’ perception of organizational support impacted their actions; in other words, the effects of employee perception on productivity. Of the 31 supportive statements used to measure perceived organizational support, four of the highest correlated statements can apply substantially to veterans therapeutic courts. Those comments included “the organization cares about my well-being,” “the organization shows very little concerns for me,” which was reverse coded, “the organization cares about my opinions,” and “the organization takes pride in my accomplishments at work,” (Eisenberger et al., 1986, p. 502). For instance, in a VTC, it is not uncommon for spontaneous applause to break out in court when a struggling veteran reaches a programmatic milestone,
which also reinforced the veterans’ recognition that they are not traveling this journey alone (Mezirow, 1991).

In their subsequent literature review of organizational support, Rhoades and Eisenberger (2002) used four deliberative categories to evaluate over 70 studies analyzing perceptions of organizational support. The categories included fairness, supervisor support, organizational rewards/job conditions, and personal characteristics. Perhaps not surprising, fairness posted the highest weighted correlations, with procedural justice, including voice and interactional components, strongly influencing the weightings. Voice, which is the perception of the individual to being heard (Hasio, 2010), and being treated fairly and judicially (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002), also tie into veterans therapeutic court activities, as mentioned in the previous section, and by Winnick and Warner (1993) and Mezirow (1991). The veterans are involved in their treatment plan and afforded more liberty and engagement as they successfully progress through the program and is a key component of transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991). A lack of such support is a recognized reason for failure in veterans therapeutic courts (Douds et al., 2017).

Organizational support theory and its derived perceptions address key employee factors such as esteem and affiliation (Shanock et al., 2019). Notably, lack of affiliation is one frequently noted veteran characteristic discussed in veterans court. As previously mentioned, many veterans sense they have let down their fellow service members and service because of their judicial entanglement and, therefore, feel no longer worthy of being affiliated with their respective services (Douds et al., 2017; Litz et al., 2009). However, organizational support actions increase affiliation, increasing socioemotional engagement and driving increased connectivity with the organization, which can be tied to Mezirow’s (1991) recognition that the
veteran is not traveling their VTC journey alone. Notably, such connectivity increases employee commitment and lessens counter-cultural challenges (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). It follows that increased commitment translates into better task performance, even more so in employees with higher socioemotional needs (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Understanding and reflecting on socioemotional needs ties into transformative learning, especially in stages three and four, as veterans critically review their assumptions and recognizing others have traveled the same path (Mezirow, 1991).

The socioemotional need is where traumatized veterans can be especially susceptible and may struggle to regain a camaraderie (Ahlin & Douds, 2016; Lennon, 2019), again, tying directly to the transformational learning journey (Mezirow, 1991) as new connections are made. Interestingly, demographics and personal characteristics were not significant factors in the perceived organizational support (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). However, caution must be exercised in positing such generalized statements. Shanock et al. (2019) highlighted such global cultural impacts as they intentionally noted that Human Resources experts should customize engagement plans to embrace cultural norms as much as possible when applying for perceived organizational support. In other words, understanding and applying cultural norms during therapeutic, among other, engagements is especially noteworthy in veterans therapeutic courts, given the veterans’ unique cultural experiences (Gustaven, 2016).

Whereas the industries and cultures explored by Shanock et al. (2019) did not include military nor veterans, veteran culture is impactful in veterans therapeutic courts given the complexities of the military’s culture (Brown et al., 2013; Douds & Hummer, 2019; Gustaven, 2016; Harding, 2017; Hobbs, 2008; Vaughan et al., 2019). Further, Shanock et al. (2019) recommended embracing sincerity, such that if omitted, it can lead to an erosion of perceived
organizational support. Ahlin and Douds (2016) noted that veterans are attuned to and averse to false flattery, the antithesis of sincerity. Such actions result in a loss of trust or psychological contract breaches (Kurtessis et al., 2017; Shanock et al., 2019). The effect of such violations can be exacerbated if a veteran is predisposed to anti-trust issues, especially if jaundiced by mental trauma, moral trauma, or substance abuse-induced psychosis (Buchholz et al., 2017; Grimell, 2018). The transformational learning journey is stunted if the assessment filter of the veteran’s relationships and actions is not reassessed (Mezirow, 1991).

Such organizational support theory thinking, which focuses on the employees’ perceptions of how the organization values and cares about the employee, is now fully ingrained into managerial and human resources actions (Eisenberger et al., 1986; Kurtessis et al., 2017; Shanock et al., 2019). However, such thinking is still emerging in veterans therapeutic courts. Still, as previously mentioned, several constructs of organizational support theory have direct ties to veterans therapeutic courts and transformational learning. These constructs include the concept of perceived fairness and its tripartite components of first, distributive justice, or results delivery. The second component is procedural justice, or how management and leadership decided to distribute the results. The final component is interactional justice, such as how employees are treated. These concepts produced the highest weighting factor when evaluating relative importance among the perceived organization support (Kurtessis et al., 2017). Not surprisingly, this judicial fairness concept most closely aligns with both therapeutic jurisprudence and veteran therapy courts. However, some have argued that fairness may vary depending on the situation and the treatment variabilities (Arno, 2015; Gal & Schilli, 2017; Johnsen & Robertson, 2016).

**Mentoring Enactment**
According to Mezirow, didactically, transformative learning can be compared to a mentor helping a mentee understand and manage a significant life issue (Mezirow, 1991). Nyanjom (2020) further coupled mentoring to transformative learning. Throughout history, mentoring, face-to-face and virtually, has been embraced by various cultures to pass along knowledge, skills and talents -- artisans and apprentices, surgeons, coaches, and even major professors and their doctoral candidates (Brill et al., 2014; Cochran et al., 2019; Denny, 2016; Evans, 2018; Hunt & Michael, 1983; Irby & Pugliese, 2019; Johnson, 2018; Knouse, 2001; Rose, K, 2014). Further, the mentoring development spectrum includes military and major corporations, for-profit and not-for-profit entities, often with a goal of the current leadership to infuse corporate vision catalytically, develop talent, and build the profession (Hezell, 2005; Hunt & Michael, 1983; Johnson, & Andersen, 2010; Kunich & Lester, n.d.). Although numerous mentoring models and theoretical constructs exist, a systematic literature search uncovered surprisingly few articles overarchingly addressing mentoring theory. However, there are multiple theories found in literature associated with key aspects of mentoring. For clarification, those being mentored were referred to as protégés, or protégées, the feminine version used to delineate gender-specific relationships, mentees, and mentors. For this work, the term mentee is preferred but not used exclusively. Yet, further clarification is needed to address the mentor relationship. Notably, the reasons for mentoring vary, such as professional advancement or altruism; still, there are three distinct parts of a mentoring relationship (Hunt & Michael, 1983; Mansson & Myers, 2012).

The first principal component is the mentor, the person where a particular skill or knowledge is expected to reside and, equally important, one who is willing to share this experience. The second is a mentee who is desiring or required to acquire the mentor’s offered talent (Lozinak, 2016). And finally, the mentor and mentee have a proximal relationship in
which engagement can occur. Although these three items are universal, mentoring formats vary in conduct and dynamics as the relationship develops. Several studies (Hunt & Michael, 1983; Mansson & Myers, 2012) examined four distinct mentorship phases. Even though the actual terminology varied, those semantic variances are considered negligible for this study, with the identified four stages being: initiation, cultivation or protégé stage, separation or breakup, and redefinition or lasting friendship.

Interestingly, many mentor studies do not summarily address the negative ramifications of mentoring, such as when the protégé emerges as a personal threat to the mentor’s success. Such threats are often mitigated by what Levinson et al. (1978) viewed as a necessary age differential of 8 to 15 years. A more significant age differential could result in the relationship being viewed more as a parent sibling engagement, and less than eight years more of a peer relationship. This 8 to 15 years differential provided recognized familial expertise without overtly accelerating the mentee’s advancement to the possible detriment of the mentor’s career. However, many mentoring relationships often reflect a power differential tension (Hunt & Michael, 2012) that is continually part of the mentoring relationship. This power differential is a key component as to why the mentor-mentee relationship is so unique. According to Shapiro et al. (1978), mentor-mentee relations are the most emotionally charged relationships compared to other work interactions such as sponsors, guides, and peers.

Such intensity is not surprising when viewed through Kalbfleisch’s (2002) mentor enactment lens, as mentors and mentees emotionally invest in each other to develop and advance their symbiotic relationship through traditional transactional actions and, more importantly, transformational learning engagement. While Kalbfleisch’s theory is not robustly espoused in recent research (Mansson & Myers, 2012; Yang et al., 2016), her nine mentor engagement theory
tenets help frame engagement found in veterans therapeutic courts. For instance, the first tenet focuses on the postulate that the mentor will be more likely to reject advances from the mentee, especially during the early stages of the relationship, because the mentor has more to lose in terms of time, resources, political cache’, etc. However, tenet six, that protégés must invest more energies into the mentoring relationship than mentors (Yang et al., 2016), is not exactly mirrored in veterans therapeutic court mentoring programs, as veteran mentors frequently invest disproportionately more energies to maintain the relationship. Further, Kalbfleisch focused on the relationship’s interactional dynamics, noting that often, mentoring relations are viewed as stagnant, neglecting the constructive and destructive interactions that often accompany any human relationship. Still, the key to Kalbfleisch’s theory was effective communication between the mentor and mentee, which is also reflected in therapeutic jurisprudence, perceived organizational support, and transformative learning.

Mentoring relationships, like trust, must be continually honed and earned (Kunich & Lester, n.d.). Part of that honing involves what Mansson and Meyers (2012) referred to as notable relational maintenance behaviors, such as control and communication, and efforts tied directly to Kalbfleisch’s (2002) significant components. For example, Mansson and Myers’ tenet nine – mentors can be more invested in the mentoring relationship. If so, mentors will invest more effort in mentoring communication strategies -- the tenet most powerfully linked to veterans therapeutic court. As this may be self-evident for veteran therapeutic court, this effect is bolstered by adding the band of brotherhood paradigm of leaving no fellow veteran behind.

Similarly, tenet three noted that if the mentor had engaged with a third party and agreed to be a mentor, the mentor had more buy-in. Such buy-in is primarily seen in the Washington State veterans therapeutic court when potential mentors self-select into the program and
voluntarily complete mentor training. Further, as previously mentioned, mentor training involves all phases of the mentoring cycle, including initiation and maintenance, and such training and knowledge span cognitive, skill-based, and affective domains (Hezlett, 2005), which, while aligning with Mezirow’s (1991) transformational learning, also aligns with traditional military education and training programs that each veteran has personally experienced. Finally, as previously noted, scholars (Hezlett, 2005; Mansson & Myers, 2012) indicated that much mentoring research often focuses on the positive aspects of mentoring and avoids researching antisocial behavior. Thus, understanding and countering antisocial behavior is a fundamental focus of therapeutic jurisprudence and key for transformative learning, and one that still needs to be researched as the mentoring programs in veterans treatment courts continue to blossom.

Mentoring and the Veterans Court

Mentoring encompasses the transformative learning areas of actions, attitude, mental, and emotional engagement. Further, therapeutic transformative learning, specifically critical reflection, mirrors more traditional mentoring relationships, as the judge and defendant or the veteran and their mentor discuss courses of action (Kitchenham, 2008; MacLeish, 2020; Mezirow, 1989, 1997).

From a military mentoring perspective, in 2003, the United States Chief of Naval Operations mandated a mentor for each sailor (Johnson & Andersen, 2010). Likewise, senior industry officials are often charged with identifying, developing, and retaining staff who will prolong and advance corporate objectives, policies, and vision (de Haan, 2019; Johnson & Andersen, 2015; Matarazzo & Finkelstein, 2015). However, mentoring can be viewed negatively, as needless administrivia (Johnson & Andersen, 2015), useless if a person does not think they need the assigned mentor’s engagement (Kumar, 2018), or producing undue
favoritism, especially by those not chosen to be mentored. However, such views can often be mediated by other non-traditional, less formal engagements (Allen & Finkelstein 2003). Understandably, many military members have experienced mentoring during their service. Military training often incorporates formal and informal mentors, including near peers, to conduct on-the-job training and evaluate mentee’s procedure and protocol competencies. Frequently mentor relationships involve differential power levels between the mentor and mentee. Such power differences are not always found, especially in peer-mentoring relationships, which can also have a marked positive impact on recidivism, especially if the mentor and mentee share key common experiences (Ahlin & Douds, 2016; MacLeish, 2020; Sells et al., 2020; Stacer, & Solinas-Sanders, 2020). However, Sells et al.’s (2020) mentoring criteria was not an exact match for veterans court, with deliberate, structured engagement with the mentee’s family and a mentor who personally experienced the criminal justice system; but not necessarily having to have shared the same life experiences as the mentee. However, Ganser (1995) noted that if mentee skill development is a focus, the mentor has to possess the transferable skill at a demonstrably superior skill level than the mentee (Beattie et al., 2014).

Mullen and Klimaitis (2019) identified nine different types of alternative mentoring styles, but formal, informal, and peer mentoring most closely map to mentoring found in veterans therapeutic courts. However, what Mullen and Klimaitis refer to as electronic mentoring, called virtual mentoring, is currently frequently used in Washington State veterans therapeutic courts due to state-wide COVID-19 mandates. A type of mentoring not explicitly listed is blended mentoring, a combination of the different mentoring types like formal mentoring using virtual technology. Mentoring, broadly viewed, is a critical component of both military and corporate engagement and involves transformative learning in career development
and psychosocial interaction (David, 2011; Johnson & Andersen, 2010; Kram, 1983; McCann & Johannessen, 2010; Young, 1979).

In corporate or military mentoring, disorienting dilemmas, stage one of transformative learning, may not be as impactful or time-punctuated as being incarcerated. Further, motivation might also be different (Keen & Woods, 2016), with criminally charged veterans potentially having more to lose depending on the severity of the charged crime. New points of view and mental maps, or frames of reference, are developed as new knowledge, skills, and talents are nurtured and exercised. Unfortunately, mentoring endeavors are not always successful, even in veterans therapeutic courts, and Douds and Hummer’s (2019) identified lessons learned are good reminders for successful rumination for mentoring programs, especially when viewed through the lens of transformative learning. However, many of their lessons learned are not necessarily reflective exclusively of the veteran mentoring program but are more in line with mentoring challenges in traditional mentoring engagements. For instance, mentoring involves setting personalized goals and transformationally learning new skills (Ghosh et al., 2019; Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b). Goals that are incongruent with corporate, military, or veterans court protocols will produce divergent points of view and potentially, if not rectified, yield reference frames that result in counterproductive engagements (Keen & Woods, 2016; Kitchenham, 2008; Mezirow, 1997).

Summarily, veteran mentors do not need to share identical military experiences but must have a credible commonality of experience and goal attainment to ensure effective mentorship (Ahlin & Douds, 2016; Ghosh et al., 2019). Such goals can include the veteran receiving psychosocial support (Kram, 1983) and developing technical and non-technical talents (Gallus et al., 2013; Mezirow, 2003; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002; Sells et al., 2020). An example of a
non-technical talent is developing effective citizenship. Citizen development is an active tenet of the veterans therapeutic court by helping the veterans become more productive members of society.

Even though community involvement was stressed by Sells et al. (2020), and such community involvement is a significant focus for veteran court, there are veteran-specific challenges concerning community that veteran mentors can help assuage. As previously mentioned, the veteran community is bolstered by the military warrior ethos of leaving no member behind and helping to ensure veterans feel valued as part of the veteran community (Ahlin & Douds, 2016; Vaughan et al., 2019). However, as previously mentioned, sometimes criminally charged veterans think they have never earned or lost the right to be part of the veteran community (Brown, 2013; MacLeish, 2020). Such feelings can stem from survivor’s guilt, discrediting their service through their legal troubles, mental trauma, or even being discharged under less than honorable conditions. In such cases aligning veteran mentoring with transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991), mentor enactment theory (Kalbfleisch, 2002), and therapeutic jurisprudence (Wexler & Winick, 1991) is even more critical (Bernardy, 2011; Law, 2016; Stayton et al., 2018).

Sells et al. (2020) also analyzed other critical engagements of the veterans therapeutic court program. For instance, the mentors were encouraged to engage early with the mentee in alignment with the theory of therapeutic jurisprudence (Wexler & Winick, 1991) and to develop and foster a nurturing relationship using effective communication between the mentor and mentee, a fundamental tenet of mentor enactment theory (Kalbfleisch, 2002; Yang et al., 2016). However, effective mentoring communication is often based upon the unique mentoring dyad,
which is developed through continual transformative experimentation, honing the mentoring relationship, and deeply held convictions (Kalbfleisch, 2002; Nyanjom, 2020).

Even though studies abound about the effectiveness of mentoring in corporate and military settings, and there are many foundational and career field-specific characteristics essential for effective mentoring (Cochran et al., 2019), the literature is extremely sparse concerning how to evaluate veterans therapeutic court mentoring programs effectively. To mitigate this challenge, David (2011) outlined key factors for effective mentoring relationships, and Brodeur et al. (2015) developed and validated a scale to enhance mentor support engagement. Still, I have uncovered no other studies capturing the voice of the criminally charged veteran addressing the impacts of transformative learning in general, especially when data gathering included unique veteran court components such as mentoring programs.

Summary

United States military members have been called upon to serve in some of the most challenging situations and face some of the most horrific inhumanities to protect and preserve life, liberty, and property. During such service, the members are often exposed to physical, mental, and moral traumas. After separation, these veterans, often due to such exposures, experience systemic psychosocial adjustment challenges, with a number of the veterans making counter-lawful choices resulting in legal problems. Regrettably, if the underlying factors are not addressed, the unlawful cycle frequently habitually recycles. Building on other problem-solving courts’ success, veterans therapeutic courts, which began in 2008, have attempted to address and treat specific veteran challenges. Unfortunately, there are conflicting scholarly results as to the efficacy of veterans therapeutic courts. Further, the ethical challenges of conducting accurate experimental studies and the abbreviated timeline since veterans therapeutic courts emerged to
restrict detailed longitudinal studies. Finally, each veteran therapeutic court exercises a measure of independence in program administration, member selection, sanctions, and mentor program management, making didactic evaluations challenging.

Still, if Hartley and Baldwin (2019) are correct, the United States has not seen a peak of veterans needing help given the numbers of soldiers, sailors, airmen, marines, and members of the Coast Guard who have served during the Iraqi, Afghanistan, and other military campaigns and efforts. Justifiably, some needed help must come from the legal system, such as veterans therapeutic courts. However, with the current countervailing and neophytic information, more general and focused studies are needed to help break the veteran’s criminogenic cycle. Therefore, after a careful literature review, Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning will be the primary sieve through which veterans’ experiences are captured for this study. Although the factors impacting veteran choices are varied, capturing these experiences emerge as a way to give a voice to the veteran as they work to overcome legal challenges and regain communal trust.

In summation, this related literature review looked at the historical development of and application of Mezirow’s theory of transformative learning. Additionally, case study literature boundaries included synthesizing Wexler and Winnick’s overarching therapeutic jurisprudence theory, which serves as a foundation to most specialty courts, including veterans therapeutic courts. Further, given the extraordinary impact of mentors in the veteran court system, mentor literature was explored, including the mechanics of and personnel involvement in veterans therapeutic courts. Finally, perceived organizational support was briefly addressed as an influential organization tenet, especially if criminogenic veterans are inclined toward distrust. In all cases, the theories’ links to transformative learning were explored.
Resultantly, such bounding uncovered a unique but notable literature gap. Specifically, a thorough literature search produced no qualitative nor quantitative academic studies capturing veterans’ voices as they experience transformative learning while participating in a veterans therapeutic court program. Further, while empirical studies, specifically quantitative studies, showcase the challenges of effectively controlling for a myriad of variables, such control would be specifically difficult in veteran therapeutic court studies, as will be expanded upon in the next section. Further, qualitative studies uniquely provide an effective and essential venue for capturing the participants’ voices. Focusing on the veteran transformative learning experiences of one Washington State veterans therapeutic court is the construct underpinning this systemic study. The resulting scholarly discourse will capture the individual veteran’s journey and proffer further exploratory engagements. Such a journey possesses an end goal of helping more veterans to, once again, answer the call of positive societal engagement support.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

New ways of thinking are a critical component of Mezirow’s transformative learning theory and a key component to help reduce recidivism through therapeutic jurisprudence (Wexler & Winnick, 1993). Such new ways of thinking factor into the central research question: What is the transformative learning experience of criminally charged military veterans who participate in veterans therapeutic courts? This chapter outlines why the case study methodology was selected to effectively capture veterans' voices to adroitly address this central research question (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Further, protocols and data gathering techniques for interviews, observations, and personal essays are discussed to bolster transparency and replicability. Finally, this study's qualitative data analysis protocols (e.g., Yin, 2016, 2018) are presented and underpin the study’s trustworthiness, which is also bolstered in the credibility and ethical considerations sections. In sum, the activities in the chapter substantiate capturing the voice of the criminally charged veterans who potentially experience a transformative learning journey while a part of a veterans treatment court in Washington State.

Research Design

The research problem drives the selection of the research methodology (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). Specifically, the immaturity of the research involves the nexus of transformative learning and the veterans treatment court. The individualistic what and how nature of this study’s research questions dictate qualitative design choice instead of quantitative (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Further, qualitative research captures the participants’ voices (Creswell & Poth, 2018), and the focus of this study ensures veterans’ experiences are captured in vivo through different data modalities (Yazan, 2015). Additionally, multi-sourced data capture
veteran voices in the situational environment and helps to elucidate, situate, and accentuate the individual experiences (Yin, 2018). Once captured in natural settings such as a courtroom, veteran voices were analyzed for robust, recurrent, and significant themes, thus allowing the analysis of the veterans’ transformative learning experience based upon their communicative experience between the veteran, mentor, and court officials. These written, verbal, and non-verbal cues are key qualitative protocols (Yin, 2018).

Even though it was apparent that a qualitative study was an obvious fit, further due diligence was conducted to see if a quantitative study would be a near-peer contender. Unfortunately, it was not for several reasons, including a lack of statistically validated transformative learning measurement tools (Romano, 2018; Stuckey et al., 2013; Walker, 2018), limited sample size, and a lack of recognized rigorous experimental protocols. For instance, to obtain an adequate valid sample size (Gall et al., 2007), several veterans treatment court populations would need to be aggregated. However, such aggregation would dilute the disparate voices and settings found in veterans therapeutic courts, negating the detailed comparison of critical variable differences, a foundational determinant for selecting quantitative research (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Therefore, given the subject phenomenology of criminally charged veterans’ transformative learning experiences in veterans therapeutic courts, qualitative, instead of quantitative, was again determined to be the appropriate study design criteria.

Once I chose the qualitative study track, I next had to select one of five qualitative approaches -- ethnography, grounded theory, phenomenology, narrative, or case study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). After evaluating the five types and using Creswell & Poth’s (2018) assessment rubric, I selected the case study as it “provide[s] an in-depth understanding of a particular case or cases” (p. 67). Additionally, given the VTC’s historical connection to legal case theory, the
linkage of veteran trauma to medical case studies, and the treatment case study protocols effectively used in VTC programs (Arno, 2015: Finlay et al., 2019; MacLeish, 2020), I confirmed case study methodology as an appropriate qualitative research approach for this study.

Yin (2018) traced case study development through 15 different academic disciplines and provided a historical perspective of case study development, citing Mitchell’s 1991 sociological work as the first such study. Further, Yin focused on educational case studies but added a more detailed appendix listing of case study development in the field of psychology. However, Yin did not discuss legal case studies other than acknowledging Gerring’s 2004 political science work. Separately, Creswell and Poth (2018) detailed the historical development of case studies through the lenses of psychology, medicine, and law.

While legal jurisprudence case studies use some protocols and analytical steps that are different than those outlined by Yin (2018), the overlap does buttress case study consideration for the criminally charged veterans, especially given Wexler and Wick’s (1991) individual case-focused theoretical foundation. Further, Yin (2018) noted three statements that must be satisfied before selecting a case study methodology. First, is the research in question phrased to answer what, who, why, or how? In this study, the research question and sub-questions are indeed phrased appropriately to answer both what and how (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). Second, does conducting the research require control over behavioral events? For this study, the answer is no, as the desire is to capture the participants’ unfettered discourse in natural settings instead of artificial limitations found in experimental designs. Finally, according to Yin, the research must focus on contemporary events instead of a historical framework. This research is a current, real-time description of the lives of criminally charged veterans participating in a veterans therapeutic court. As a secondary confirmation of properly selecting case study methodology, given the
desire to understand criminally charged veterans’ journeys, Creswell and Poth’s (2019) rubric for selecting from among five different qualitative designs was used, and case study methodology emerged again.

There are different case study types (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2016, 2018). Specifically, Yin (2018) identified four different types of case studies. Since this study identifies each veteran as a separate case design within the setting of one Washington State VTC, Yin’s case study types that only involved single case studies (types 1 and 2) were omitted. Further, this case study only addresses one unit of analysis, as each VTC veteran is exposed to the same qualitative rigor. Other potential embedded units of analysis, such as the impact of mentors or different court officials or court protocols, will not be addressed in this study. Therefore, after careful analysis, a holistic, multiple-case design case study (Type 3, Yin, 2018) was selected to evaluate the phenomenon of the veterans’ transformative learning journey during engagement in a veterans treatment court. Finally, Creswell and Poth (2018) note an intrinsic case study focuses “on the case itself… such as evaluating a student having difficulty” (p. 99), which has direct application to transformative learning in a veterans therapeutic court. Evaluating a veteran’s learning journey makes the Washington State veterans therapeutic court case study an ideal selection.

Finally, a critical factor in successful case studies is bounding (Yin, 2018), to include spatial, chronological, and sample size. These factors are forthrightly bounded in this study. Spatially, this study is confined to a specific location, a Washington State VTC. Chronologically, this case study is framed by criminally charged veterans who are currently enrolled in the veterans therapeutic court, as opposed to prisoners, veterans who are considering entry into the program, participants terminated early from the program, or VTC graduates. Further, the
minimum of ten voluntary participants is less than 50% of the court population, allowing additional recruiting if qualitative analytical saturation is not achieved. Such bounding allows an in-depth, fruitful, and robust analysis and reporting of veterans’ experiences.

**Research Questions**

Central research question: What is the transformative learning experience of criminally charged military veterans who participate in veterans therapeutic courts

SQ 1: How do military veterans describe their self-perception relative to their veterans therapeutic court journey?

SQ 2: How do military veterans describe their belief system relative to their veterans therapeutic court journey?

SQ 3: How do military veterans describe their lifestyle habits relative to their veterans therapeutic court journey?

**Setting and Participants**

While most veterans therapeutic courts have a similar outcome focus, with over 400 veterans therapeutic courts across the nation, there can be wide-variance in setting and participants. Therefore, to further codify the boundaries associated with this study, the following sections delineate the location and participants used in this research.

**Setting**

Veterans therapeutic courts’ success, and the resultant success of the veteran participants, are strongly linked to community attributes and features (Easterly, 2017). For instance, district and municipal courts, as opposed to superior courts, embody a localized focus and reinforce critical components of perceived organizational support and transformative learning (Eisenberger et al., 1986, Mezirow, 1981). Therefore, courts that included district or municipal courts were
considered for this study. Further, even if the court was listed as a district or municipal court, it was deleted from consideration if it was set in a large urban setting. Court size is also an important study feature, as interviewing a court participant from a pool of extremely limited volunteers decreases the likelihood of maintaining anonymity. Resultantly, the potential of attribution of comments to an individual veteran increases, so only those courts with participant totals above 14 were considered. Also, even though mentor programs occupy unique importance in corporate and military engagements, such programs are under analyzed in veterans treatment courts (Douds & Hummer, 2019; Johnson & Andersen, 2010; MacLeish, 2020; McCann & Johannessen, 2010; Rottermann et al., 2016; Shannon et al., 2017). Therefore, the decision was made only to consider VTCs offering a viable mentoring program.

Next, some VTCs limit veteran access based upon the type of discharge or crime committed. For example, some courts do not assess veterans charged with felony crimes. To avoid artificially limiting the veteran’s voices, the decision was made to exclude any VTC that limited veteran participation based upon service discharge or criminal activity. Further, courts have the option of limiting when and how people are accepted into the program, referred to as pre-adjudication and post-adjudication. To ensure maximum accessibility, only VTCs that offered pre-adjudication and post-adjudication were accepted. Finally, the current academic literature is extremely limited in evaluating any veterans treatment court in the northwest United States, specifically in Washington State (Douds & Hummer, 2019; Lennon, 2019). Therefore, conducting a case study addressing transformative learning in a Washington State VTC will allow potential best practices tied to transformative learning to be identified, distilled, and presented to intra- and interstate veterans therapeutic courts.

While national data is essential, local data is more critical to this study. After carefully
considering the previously mentioned factors, of the 12 Washington State veterans therapeutic courts, only two met all of these criteria. One Washington State district veterans therapeutic court (WSDVTC) located in southeastern Washington State met all the criteria and was selected for this study. This WSDVTC, referred to as VTC-Alpha, was established in 2019 and is set in a balanced urban and rural setting. The chosen court is located in a very military-friendly section of Washington State, with military support roots extending back to helping end World War II (Williams, 2011). This promilitary setting, rural and urban diversity, and focused Washington State programs that enhance veteran’s ability to recognize and obtain earned benefits motivate many military members to relocate to this area which factors into successful VTCs (Easterly, 2017). Such relocation increases veteran population density, affording a robust selection pool of VTC participants. The other potential veteran court was located over 70 miles away in a large urban county, and served as the template for developing VTC-Alpha. This second court did not occupy a balanced rural and urban setting and only had 14 enrolled in the program but met all of the other criteria. This court will serve as a source of participants only if thematic saturation is not obtained after exhausting the pool of VTC-Alpha participants (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

VTC-Alpha court leadership includes one judge, as the current caseload allows one judge to administer all of VTC-Alpha’s cases effectively. Similarly, one prosecuting attorney, one defense attorney, and one social worker oversee all VTC-Alpha’s cases. A discussion of the cases with the veteran and mentor occurs in the district court building. When face-to-face meetings are allowed, the social worker, also referred to as the caseworker, meets with the veteran to discuss goals, accomplishments, and challenges. Because travel availability can be a significant consideration for veterans, data collection will minimize the veteran’s inconvenience.
In the event individual interviews were not possible, the interviews were conducted telephonically or virtually using WEBEX™ or other court-recommended synchronous videoconferencing software. Due to the COVID-19 Washington State-mandated safety procedures, the court requested most veterans to participate virtually in the veterans therapeutic court. However, if instead of virtual interviews physical individual interviews were allowed to collect data for this study, the interviews were scheduled to optimize participation and ensure quality data was obtained.

**Participants**

While the only screening criteria for participation in this study is active membership in VTC-Alpha, VTC-Alpha does incorporate prescreening standards such as veteran status and criminal charges under the court’s jurisdiction. VTC-Alpha’s participants are richly diverse, including both sexes, multiple ethnicities, all branches of service, varied combat and traumatic exposures, and military specialties and service durations. However, to avoid possible retriggering effects that could arise from this study, the caseworker was contacted to determine if any VTC-Alpha veteran should be omitted from the study.

Next, the selected veterans were contacted physically or electronically and asked if they wished to volunteer for the study. It was made clear that their participation was voluntary, and their participation, or lack thereof, in no way impacted their progression in VTC-Alpha’s program. A minimum of ten veterans, based upon Liberty University’s Doctoral program guidance, were purposefully selected through opportunistic, snowballing, or combination sampling (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2016) from this pool; however, data collection continued until thematic saturation occurred (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). To reduce potential bias, none of the veterans I mentor participated in
the study (Gall et al., 2007). Pseudonyms, based randomly on the phonetic alphabet, were used to protect the veterans’ identity but allowed for connectivity tracing of emergent themes.

Once veterans confirmed their volunteer status, they were further stratified and purposefully selected from recommendations of the caseworker, other court officials, and the veterans mentor coordinator to accommodate veterans with a broad range of life experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2016). As variation was desired for this case study, court professionals and I made a judgment call if any study volunteer’s characteristics were excessively similar. If so, another volunteer veteran was picked to increase variability richness. However, maximum variability is not the focus (Creswell & Poth, 2018), as persons occupying such extreme or corner conditions could have experienced more traumatic situations. In addition, Justice-involved veterans already occupy a rarefied statistical population. For example, incarcerated veterans are approximately 8% of the prison population while less than 6% of the U.S. population (Bronson et al., 2015; U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). Although such populations are already subject to small sample size biases (Gall et al., 2007), each individual would still represent a unique individualized voice (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Additional consideration were that the veterans selected are in the later phases of the VTC program, as this would increase the likelihood of experiencing more transformative learning stages. Yet, Mezirow’s stages can occur at any time (Mezirow, 1981; Kalbfleisch, 2002); therefore, veterans from phases one and two would not be omitted if the veteran mentor coordinator or court officials strongly advocate for inclusion. Finally, descriptive data for the study participants was collected, tabularized, and analyzed to produce initial descriptive statistics, including age, gender, time in the VTC program, sanctions, relevant criminal history, branch of service, service vocation, and brief service history.
If a veteran chosen for this study failed to complete program requirements and was subsequently incarcerated at the time of data collection but not removed from the program, the veteran’s participation in this study would be stopped and subsequent discussions held with court officials for possible suspension or termination from the program. No data was collected while the veteran was incarcerated. Finally, because a justice-involved veteran could struggle with retriggering trauma, the interview questions posed were vetted with the social worker to minimize the exacerbation of a veteran’s trauma. The question discussions occurred before the final veteran selection to ensure the veterans are a safe and optimal match for the study.

No published survey was used to gather data. However, protocols outlined in Kerins et al. (2020) and Rose (2003) were used as a guide to evaluate learning and mentor enactment. In sum, data was gathered from a minimum of ten justice-involved, criterion-selected veterans who were active participants in VTC-Alpha. The expected engagement with the participants during each data gathering modality will be expanded in the following section.

Procedures

Before any data is collected, institutional review board (IRB) approval was obtained through Liberty University’s official IRB process. Appendices A through D capture IRB-related material, including permission from VTC-Alpha, informed consent letters, and a recruitment flyer. Before Liberty University IRB approval was granted, specific VTC-Alpha approvals required for access to, interviews of, observation of, or receipt of personal essays written to the court from VTC-Alpha personnel, was obtained and presented to the Liberty University IRB. Once IRB and VTC-Alpha approvals were secured, all interviews were conducted voluntarily, including any needed follow-up discussions. In addition, signed consent forms were obtained, consistent with both Liberty University’s and VTC-Alpha’s protocols. At a minimum, both raw
and processed data, electronic and written, will be pseudonymized and safeguarded with two protection levels, such as double locks for written materials, password-protected files, and virtual private network encryption for electronic materials. Expectantly, any received or transmitted electronic files was monitored for malware. Finally, stringent efforts were made to protect the participants’ identities, including following Federal guidelines (Department of Energy Manual 471.3, 2011) for protecting personally identifiable information. However, complete anonymity could not be ensured.

All VTC-Alpha veterans were notified of the study during a social worker meeting. If interested in participating was expressed, I contacted the veteran, as directed by the caseworker, and supplied a consent form. Once the consent forms was completed and returned to me, the selected justice-involved veterans was provided a signed copy of their consent form. In each case, veterans were reminded that their voluntary participation in no way impacted their standing in the veterans treatment court. If a veteran participant later chose to self-withdraw during the study, again, no ramifications occurred. Although the above statements capture the general procedures for this study, each data source requires additional distinct protocols because they constitute three unique data sources. Therefore, the following sections capture those specific procedures.

**Personal Essay**

Using the same purposefully selected veterans, any court-directed personal essays written by the veterans were requested, protected, and analyzed against Mezirow’s 11 stages of transformative learning (see Appendix E). While these essays result from a sanction, moving from one phase to another, or applying for program graduation, it is not expected any single essay will include all 11 stages. However, these essays should allow insights into particularly
impactful transformative learning understanding and help bound interview discussions. If a physical copy of the personal essay cannot be obtained, a transcript of the court session where the essay was read to the court was obtained and used in lieu of the physical copy. Regardless of the collection method, this data was assembled, synthesized for emergent themes, and used to augment and clarify the interview protocols. Because these essays are purposefully read by the veteran during public court proceedings and are recorded as part of the public record, no official release was required, but a copy of the consent form was provided to the court, as notification of the use of these personal essays was included as part of the consent form (Appendix D).

Personal essay analysis, especially sentiment analysis, is challenging, especially given the variance in language choice and motivation (Zeng, 2019). However, because of the foundational questions, such as what was the most difficult portion of the journey, the responses provided critical information to address the central research question. Essay writing affords the veteran a different modality to discuss their journey. These essays map directly to Mezirow’s transformative learning stages, such as identifying new action plans and developing new relationships. Secondly, the essays allow iterative refinement and personalization of the open-ended interview questions to clarify the veterans’ journey. Third, because the essays were read in court, and some were read during the court observation phase, these essays allow triangulation of the words in the essays with the observations seen in court and the discussions proffered in the interviews.

Physical copies of veteran participant scribed essays will be requested from the court administration throughout the data collection phase. If required by the court, the essays were sanitized before the I received them. Because it is impossible to know ahead of time how many essays a veteran may have available for analysis, care was taken to ensure undue weighting was
not afforded to a single individual voice if they had a disproportionate number of essays. Further, syntax, composition, primary language, and even word and character choice can impact semantic understanding (Zeng et al., 2019). To reduce potential biases from me or the participant, including Dunning Kruger effects (Pennycook et al., 2017; Plohl & Musil, 2018), if clarification is needed, interpretation will be discussed either during the scheduled interview or during a formal or informal follow-on session scheduled through the social worker.

**Interviews**

The same purposefully selected veterans will be used for the interviews. Once the veterans have agreed to participate, interviews will be conducted at a convenient time and place for the veteran and the interviewer. The interviews will be conducted singularly and chronologically separated to reduce the possibility of inadvertent identification of veteran participants. Physical, as opposed to telephonic or virtual, engagement is preferred to capture body language that a limited field of view camera might not capture. However, if external factors prevent physical engagement, virtual interviews will be conducted using synchronous, virtual meeting tools such as ZOOM™ or telephonically. In each case, the veteran will be notified that the interview will be recorded for future analysis. The interviewer will also record descriptive and reflective field notes (Creswell & Poth, 2018) during and after the interview. Even though the focus is on engaging the veteran, minimally intrusive notetaking efforts will be necessary to capture significant actions such as if a veteran struggles to answer a question, is emotional, or has a particular non-verbal reaction to a question.

**Observation**

Using the same criterion selected veterans, the participants will be purposefully but unobtrusively observed (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Yin, 2016, 2018) during VTC-Alpha court
sessions throughout the data-gathering phase. The non-participatory observations will be limited to the veteran’s interaction with the court officials and mentor during the veterans’ time before the court. These observations will be electronically recorded, and salient interactions will also be manually noted. One program phase characteristic includes how often the veteran is required to stand before the court. While it is not expected that any single court appearance will demonstrate each of Mezirow’s 11 Transformative Learning stages, each appearance will likely provide understanding into the veteran’s transformative learning journey. These semi-structured courtroom observations will occur from strategic locations, in-person if allowed or virtually, where the observer can see and unobtrusively assemble field notes of veteran engagements when the veteran is summoned to discuss their weekly activities. These observations, bounded by the actual time the veteran is standing before the judge, include court officials, the mentor, and the veteran discussions addressing assignments, challenges, mentor enactment, and any sanctions that need to be assessed. These observations will be unscheduled as it is difficult to accurately predict when an individual will appear, as such appearance schedules are dependent upon the program phase and other engagements. For instance, for VTC phase two, the veteran appears before the court approximately two times a month. It is possible there could be a different number of court appearances for each of the selected veterans. Given these events’ dynamic scheduling, the observations are expected to continue throughout the data gathering cycle. Notably, these observations will be informed by the essay analysis and help inform the interviews and triangulate the data findings further.

When appropriate, in addition to interacting with the court officials, veterans read their court-sanctioned personal essays during the court sessions. Following the protocol outlined by Kerins et al. (2020) and Yin (2016), the observer will record verbal and visual field observations,
including those related to transformative learning. These field notes will capture data such as the veteran’s observed demeanor, emotions, court official engagement, including positive and negative sentiments, mentor engagement, and new assignments. The same pseudonyms will be used to protect the veteran’s identity. Because observers frequently make notes during court sessions, such actions should be viewed as part of the typical court engagement. Further, the court is open to the public. I regularly attend the court as a mentor to other VTC-Alpha members; therefore, my presence and actions should not cause any perturbations in veteran or court engagement (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Finally, after the court session, I will take time to reflect, clarify, and augment the collected field notes (Yin, 2016).

Individual observation field notes (Appendix F) and reflections will be analyzed for emergent themes. Multiple sessions for an individual veteran will be analyzed for unique, direct interpretation, as well as convergent themes, divergent themes, and patterns (Creswell & Poth, 2018, Yin 2018). Such word-for-word, in vivo coding (Saldaña, 2016) will be repeated for each participant veteran to develop emergent themes. Once all individual veteran’s observations have been analyzed, the resultant emergent themes will be compared inter-veteran to determine salient convergent, divergent, and pattern-based themes. This data will also be evaluated to determine if natural generalizations or important lessons learned should be captured (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Fundamentally, though, this data collection allows me to answer the central research question of what is the transformative learning experience of criminally charged military veterans who participate in veterans therapeutic courts?

The Researcher’s Role

As the chief and only investigator, I conducted each interview, gathered the essays, and accomplished the observations. Such actions were consistent with a role I have fulfilled while
participating in investigations during military assignments. Further, I was the sole investigator analyzing the interview, personal essay, and observation data. Having led several different analysis organizations, a single investigator can be problematic, especially when subconscious biases are possible. Such bias is mitigated through rigorous reflective, transparent, and triangulated inductive analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Miles et al., 2020; Parkhurst, 2017; Yazan, 2015; Yin, 2018), and are addressed more fully in the Trustworthiness section of this chapter. Having served in the military and been involved in veteran issues for decades, I am biased towards helping veterans. Such biases could impact the data analysis when it is analyzed for positive trends.

Additionally, I serve as a mentor in the court where the data was collected. My mentor job affords me a certain level of rapport and access, but such familiar engagement could additionally bias the findings. Therefore, reasonable care was taken to identify and mitigate my potential biases by reporting positive and negative comments to reduce possible confirmation bias (Yin, 2016). Additionally, since I attend various veteran court activities for select cases, I may have limited social interaction with participants. Even though such exchanges may have occurred because the participants are volunteers and are discussed with the caseworker before final selection, any selection bias I could exercise will be bracketed (Yin, 2016). Further, if the veteran deferred to me when asked a question, I redirected the question back to the veteran. Redirecting questions back to the veteran help mitigate VTC veterans from trying to answer as they think I, or court, would prefer them to answer, as well as being patient and letting them continue to talk (MacLeish, 2020). In these situations, I consider emotive conjugation, also called Russell conjugation, and Dunning Krueger effects (Pennycook et al., 2017; Plohl & Musil, 2018) to measure if preferential word choices are occurring. Finally, I continually focus on the
categorically charged veteran by consciously listening more than talking. Importantly, when field notes are collected, purposeful reflective time, as previously mentioned, is taken to reflect on the observations profoundly and broadly, including to determine if biases are present.

Throughout my veterans treatment court involvement, positive results occurred when veterans embrace the courts’ methods and activities. Given this perspective, it is possible that my biases towards veterans generally and veterans therapeutic courts more specifically could skew the data collection and research towards synthesizing positive, confirmatory results. To minimize such biases, a qualitative study in general and an intrinsic case study, in particular, is specifically helpful. The case study focuses on transformative learning, ensuring the participant’s voice, and not mine is captured (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Once the data is collected, emerging salient themes will be condensed and codified. Such themes will be triangulated by comparisons with other data sources found in veterans’ essays and observations, ensuring any data analysis biases are minimized (Miles et al., 2020).

During the interview section of the data collection and analysis, I will be part of the interview hermeneutic circle (Yin, 2016). Thus, the focus continually shifts from a holistic to singular, thought to phrase to word, or lumping and splitting (Saldaña, 2016), coding and then reversed. Notably, general awareness is a critical first step, and reflective memoing and analysis after each interview, such as reviewing Creswell & Guetterman’s 2019 interview checklist, will intentionally be conducted to unearth biased influences, especially those that could significantly impact data analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Miles et al., 2020).

Finally, two key overarching factors are forefront during this study. First, because I have served as a scientific analyst, led, and personally conducted numerous analytical studies, I am very familiar with many styles of analysis protocols. Therefore, I must be careful not to get
careless or complacent as the project progresses. Such complacency is especially true during the data storage and filing, as is common to many project management phases (PMBOK Guide, 2017), so I can ensure evidentiary custody of data protocols (Yazan, 2015; Yin, 2018) and accurately trace initial data sources back and forth through themes to final report findings. Second, I can be expressive. Yin (2018) noted that I need to remind myself to listen to the veterans purposely and objectively evaluate the data. Further, I need to be present, not daydream during observations or interject in interviews, and let the data speak. Such actions will be mitigated through the case study design and protocol adherence, such as found in Appendices E, F, and G, and allow me to accurately capture what the veterans say, not what I, perhaps even subconsciously, want them to say.

**Data Collection**

A seminal aspect of qualitative inquiry is accurately and precisely capturing the rich, thick participant’s voice (i.e., an emic perspective, Yazan, 2015). Such accuracy and precision are only possible through rigorous and varied data collection techniques. This study uses four primary data sources. The first data source is the volunteer veterans’ demographic information, collected from the social worker, such as the veteran’s service history, criminal history, age, military operational specialty, and duration in the VTC program. This data is used to build the quasi-statistical demographic data set of the participants. Discussions with the social worker will occur if excessive commonality is discovered, such as identical military service, operational specialty, or criminal history. These discussions will determine if extenuating circumstances justify keeping the veterans in the sample or if different volunteer veterans with different experiences should be selected to increase the veteran sample population’s diversity. The chosen veterans can also be discussed with the social worker to ensure goodness of fit and no personal
or social trauma challenges exist that could impact interview discussions or other data gathering activities. The other three data sources used to directly capture the veteran’s voice are personal essays, interviews, and observations. In later sections, each source will be discussed in greater detail and in the expected order of occurrence.

Separately, the interview questions were discussed with the social worker to ensure the questions proposed for use during the interview are clear, cogent, and capable of accurately and precisely capturing the data the questions are intended to capture. This iterative process was continued until the questions were determined to be acceptable for data collection. Once official data gathering commenced, if a selected veteran was removed or self-selected out of the study, an iterative, purposive, emergent sampling strategy (Gall et al., 2007; Yin, 2016) involving the social worker or court officials was planned to be used to select a new veteran participant. If this step was required, care would have been taken to align the new veteran selection with previous opportunistic criteria, such as a similar branch of service, time in the program, criminal history. Notably, the key criterion was that the veteran can voice a robust veterans therapeutic court experience. Finally, if essential data is missing or incomplete, a follow-up interview with the veteran would be scheduled, or a discussion with the social worker conducted to obtain the missing data.

**Personal Essay**

The Washington State veterans therapeutic court assigns essay writing to veterans who fail to perform assigned court-imposed actions, such as urinalysis (UA). Additionally, the court levies essays as part of phase advancement and program graduation. These experiential essays represent an effective but often untapped, cogent source of the veterans’ experiential voice. Therefore, a formal request was made for a copy of the purposefully selected veterans’ essays. It
is expected these essays will offer salient insight into a veteran’s reflective thinking at critical program junctures. Documents, such as personal essays, can provide an unobtrusive, unique snapshot into the criminally charged veterans’ thinking (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin 2018). Such first-person personal reflection can highlight the various stages of individual learning (Kerins et al., 2020).

Because the court orchestrates its essay assignment policy, and each veteran brings different educational, cultural, language, and societal factors to their writing, an expected wide variety of communicated experiences will be voiced in the essays. Regardless, such first-person data will provide an essential authentic voice of the veteran’s journey (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Each essay will be reviewed for references to transformative learning enactment cues, either negative, neutral, or positive, using the template located in Appendix E. Subsequently, emergent themes will be inductively combined and coded following Yin’s (2016), Miles et al. (2020), and Braun and Clark’s (2006) protocols, which will be discussed in more detail in the analysis section. The essays may serve as the first data source. If clarification of what was written is needed, such clarification will be conducted during the interview portion of the data collection program or requested through the social worker or follow-up interview with the veteran.

**Interviews**

The second data collection method will be individual interviews. The interviews will follow Creswell and Poth’s (2018) procedures for preparing and conducting interviews. Specifically, in addition to determining the research questions and interviewees beforehand, the interview questions listed below are open-ended and were continually refined until delivered through iterative expert engagement. Logistically, the interviews were conducted at a mutually agreed to time and space and were expected to be completed over four weeks. Expectantly, any
individual interviews will be conducted in the court building’s natural setting, in an area identified by the caseworker, or other agreed to location, helping to lessen any potential unintended release of information. If physical interviews are not allowed, virtual interviews will be conducted. All participants were reminded they are volunteers and not required to participate but that their responses will help further understand adult transformative learning in the VTC setting. The interviews often occurred after the essays and some court appearances have been assessed so that those data streams will inform the interview process.

Data gathering was conducted through semi-structured interviews, in a courteous conversational manner (Yin, 2016), with the listed questions serving as a general guide for the interview. To effectively capture data addressing the veteran’s justice-involved journey, transformative learning questions were based upon Mezirow’s learning stages (1981), as informed by Kerin et al. (2020) when evaluating non-technical skills development. Although Mezirow identified 10 and 11 steps in his theory (Mezirow, 1981, 1991), the later stages more closely align to efforts that might occur after the veteran graduates from veterans treatment court, such as provisionally trying out new roles or building new competencies. Kerins et al. (2020) took such a path and focused on the early transformative learning stages. However, for this study, all phases will be addressed during the interviews. Resultantly, salient information for each of Mezirow’s stages may not be discussed during every interview.

Salient protocols are discussed at the beginning of each interview, including the veteran’s volunteer and anonymous status. Further, discussions include that the interviews will be recorded and last approximately one hour. Additionally, the veterans were afforded the opportunity to review the transcribed recording for accuracy. During the discussion of interview protocols, the recording device was started. As the goal was to clearly and richly hear from the veteran, the
interviewer reminded the veteran that the interview will follow a conversational tone, structured to give the veteran ample time to speak and not rush through a list of questions (Yin, 2016).

Finally, any procedural questions the veteran has will be addressed, and then the interview will be conducted as follows, also found in the interview protocol located in Appendix G:

1. Please tell me about your military service history, branch of service, military job or specialty, length of service, and assignment history.

2. Walk me through your journey from when you left military service to today.

   I would now like to focus our discussion on your journey in the veterans treatment court. This will be mapped against three broad areas: addressing your self-perception, beliefs, and lifestyle habits, all relative to the veterans therapeutic court. Feel free to ask for clarifications if needed, but most importantly, I am interested in hearing from you about your experiences.

3. Part of an adult’s learning journey often involves particularly impactful experiences with which your core thinking changes, often referred to as disorienting dilemmas, such as the first morning of boot camp. When you reflect on your time in the veterans therapeutic court, please describe an experience that caused you to rethink how you would have acted before veterans court.

4. How would you describe your emotional journey during your time in veterans therapeutic court?

5. As you consider your journey, how would you describe changes in your assumptions from when you started the VTC until now?

6. What else would you like to add concerning how your self-perceptions have changed during your veterans therapeutic journey?
Now I would like to shift to a discussion of beliefs, which can be introspective, such as beliefs about yourself that have changed and beliefs about others concerning how opinions towards other groups have changed.

7. Transformational learning frequently includes an influential experience when a person is inspired by another to continue the journey, to not quit. This influence can be anyone, including those who went before and achieved success. How would you describe the impact of others during the process of veterans treatment court?

8. When you consider your VTC journey, oftentimes, there are changes in roles, relationships, and actions. How would you describe changes to your relationships during your journey?

9. When you consider your VTC journey, how have your roles changed?

10. When you consider your VTC journey, how have your actions changed?

11. As you think towards the future, what role, relationship, or action, are you most looking forward to changing?

12. One of the potentially challenging parts of this veteran court journey is understanding the past, current, and future you. If you could say one thing to yourself from five years ago, what would you say?

13. What else would you like to add concerning how your personal beliefs have changed during your veterans treatment journey?

   We will now shift the questioning to the final section, habits that may have changed throughout your veterans court journey.

14. Often, this journey involves creating a new plan of action; how would you describe your current plan of action compared to plans you had before entering the VTC?
15. To execute a new course of action, new knowledge and skills are frequently required, just like when you learned your job in the military. How would you describe the process of acquiring new knowledge and skills in the veterans therapeutic court as compared to what you experienced in the military?

16. One of the goals of the VTC is to reduce recidivism. As you think about your veterans therapeutic court experiences, describe specific tools or techniques that you have found valuable in helping reduce the likelihood of recidivism of veterans.

17. In the military, supervisors often encouraged members to experience new roles, and the same is true in the VTC journey. How would you describe your experience of trying new roles during your journey?

18. As you try out new roles, how would you describe your attitude towards these new experiences during your veterans treatment court journey?

19. How would you describe your relationships now versus relationships before you joined the veterans therapeutic court?

20. As you progress through the veterans therapeutic court, there are opportunities to integrate or reinforce new skills and perspectives into your life. Reflecting on this, how would you describe your integration journey?

21. When you think about your experience in the veterans therapeutic court, consider five years from now, how would you envision your situation, including social interactions and vocation?

22. Is there anything else you would like to add concerning how your habits have changed during your veterans therapeutic journey?
23. We have covered many topics during our brief time together, and I appreciate the engagement you have shown. One final question, is there anything else you think would be important for me to know about your experiences during your veterans therapeutic court journey?

How the above questions are grounded in the literature will now be discussed. The first question is stage setting or ice-breaking (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This question is designed to confirm the demographic data collected from the social worker and establish rapport. If rapport is not established in the interviewer’s opinion, probing questions about military service could be explored.

Question two is the first self-reflection question and is purposefully broad. The veteran may wish to discuss criminal activities, but they may also want to discuss family, vocational journey, or other self-reflective impacts. Self-reflection is a critical component of transformative learning (Kerins et al., 2020; Mezirow, 1981).

After question two, the interview structurally shifts as the interview is bracketed to address each sub-question. Overarchingly, questions three through six focus on the veteran’s perceptions (Clark & Wilson, 1991). Further question three, based upon Bergh et al.’s (2016) review of transformative learning, addresses the first step in Mezirow’s transformative learning matrix and is, perhaps, a challenging question for the veteran, especially if recidivism or family trauma is revealed. However, as such events precipitate transformative learning (Kitchenham, 2008; Mezirow, 1981), potential disorienting dilemmas must be addressed. A disorienting dilemma can be a punctuated single event or culminating tipping point over a more extended period of time (Keen & Woods, 2016; Mezirow, 1981). Given the discomfort that can arise when discussing such events, the interviewer will embody heightened awareness for increased stress
signals (Mersino, 2003). If the veteran’s stress appeared to be escalating, the interviewer was prepared to progress to the next question or terminate the interview and discuss steps forward with the case manager.

Question four addresses Mezirow’s second transformative learning stage. According to Mezirow, self-examination often accompanies strong emotions such as guilt or shame. For example, frequently, justice-involved veterans reflect their emotions through feelings of letting down their service or comrades (Baldwin & Rukus, 2015; Douds et al., 2017). This “emotional rollercoaster” (Watkins et al., 2018, p. 262) can reflect moral injury, especially shame and guilt (Frankfurt & Frazier, 2016). But such experiences can also play a key role in enriching mentor relationships (Beltman et al., 2019; Hollywood et al., 2016) and adult learning (Mezirow, 1981). However, even though Mezirow initially focused on shame and anger, Kerins et al. (2020) found other emotions can be involved in learning. Therefore, in this study, the interviewer will also capture other expressed emotions such as sadness, anger, fear, happiness, excitement, and tenderness (Mersino, 2013).

Question five addresses stage three of Mezirow’s transformative learning journey, assessing assumptions. Reflecting on assumptions affords the veteran the opportunity for perspective transformation and changing frames of reference (Keen & Woods, 2016; Taylor, 2008). Further, recognizing and discussing assumptions provides insights into what has occurred through self-reflection and what is possible. Therefore, it is especially crucial for the interviewer to remain unbiased but probing during this question (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Yin (2016) noted that an interview section’s effective closure is critical to maintaining rapport and flow. Question six signals the self-perception section’s closure while allowing the veterans to reflect and comment on any other self-perception aspects. This type of question
affords the veteran a chance to steer the conversation back to a previous comment effectively or in a completely different direction. Even though bounded by the veteran’s self-perception, such analysis was expected to yield especially salient lessons to be considered, a key consideration of intrinsic case studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The interview now shifts to the second of three primary goals of transformative learning (Clark & Wilson, 1991) and is tied to research sub-question two. Personal beliefs can be reflected inward, as personal beliefs, or external, towards people or groups. This section also allowed the veteran to discuss the unique mentoring and court structure found in veterans therapeutic courts.

Question seven addresses Mezirow’s stage four insight, where a learner understands that their journey is not unique (Mezirow, 1981). This reflection can arise from hearing other court members discuss their struggles. If the veteran decided to discuss a fellow veteran’s journey in question seven, this insight should capture aspects of veterans’ unique military-forged bond, which is not found in other special treatment courts. The question is purposefully broad in case the veteran wishes to project their experiences onto a comrade, allowing the veteran to continue to give back to his comrades. For example, such reflection exemplifies the United States Air Force’s second core value of service before self. Notably, military inculcation can produce both positive and negative impacts (Ahlin & Douds, 2016). Most veterans have experienced a “shared misery” moment, whether in basic military training, deployments, or assignments. Recognizing that others faced similar challenges is critical in understanding that the veteran’s situation is not unique and further acknowledges that it is possible to successfully navigate the VTC program (Kerins et al., 2020). If, when responding to question seven, mentors are addressed, according to
mentor enactment theory (Kalbfleisch, 2002), such discussion will allow evaluating mentor and mentee dyadic buy-in, essential to engagement success.

Questions eight through ten are natural follow-ons to question seven, as justice-involved veterans become more comfortable with new roles, actions, and relationships that are developed and tested (Mezirow’s stage five, 1981). Although roles, relationships, and actions are combined in Mezirow’s steps, these statements were separated into separate questions to circumvent the problem of combining multiple questions into one expansive question (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Questions eleven and twelve allow the veteran to assess roles, relationships, or actions through the chronology lenses external to veterans therapeutic court. However, the transformative learning process is not always linear (Durant et al., 2017; Mezirow, 2000; Sedivy-Benton et al., 2018; Zhu et al., 2020). Therefore, these questions are purposefully broad and could also be situated under other phases of transformative learning. They were aligned with stage five because the roles, relationships, and actions are often changed during internal critical reflection (Chang, 2017). According to Mezirow, “critical reflection is not concerned with the how or the how-to of action, but with the why, the reasons for and the consequences of what we do” (Mezirow, n. d., Critical Reflection, para. 3). The etiology of such reasoning brackets is expected to emerge during questions eleven and twelve.

Question thirteen again offers effective closure of an interview section. As previously noted, it is critical to maintaining the interview’s rapport and flow (Yin, 2016) while allowing the veterans to reflect and comment on any other tangential belief facets.

The interview next shifts to the third of three primary goals of transformative learning (Clark & Wilson, 1991), that of personal action. Mezirow’s sixth step addresses planning new
courses of action, fundamental to training and substance abuse treatment plans, as the participant plans for the future (Lennon, 2019; Watkins et al., 2018). Finally, question fourteen allows the veteran to express their personal process.

A plan developed but not resourced is destined to fail. Part of those resources include human resource development (PMBOK Guide, 2017). Further, individualized treatment plans, with participant buy-in, are a foundational principle of therapeutic jurisprudence (Lennon, 2019; Wexler & Winick, 1993). However, although demonstrated competencies include oral communication, initiative/motivation, attitude, and critical thinking (Lacher et al., 2015), the veteran may not actively recognize these tools’ existence, depending on where they are in their transformative learning journey. Question fifteen allows the veteran to critically reflect on their skills compared to a standard frame of reference, their military transformative learning journey.

Question sixteen addresses stage seven of Mezirow’s eleven stages. Effective execution of a plan requires the acquisition of personal resources through knowledge and skill development. Developing knowledge and skills is key to job training, especially in the military. This question also addresses a key goal of therapeutic jurisprudence, reducing recidivism by helping members obtain and use new tools (Hartley & Baldwin, 2019). Recognizing how and when to use these new tools enables the veteran to break the criminogenic cycle. As the veteran experiences different substance abuse and anger management treatments tied to Mezirow’s stage seven, these experiences should afford additional techniques to handle criminogenic enticing endeavors effectively. This question is used to assess how the veteran recognizes these tools.

Questions seventeen and eighteen capture Mezirow’s stage eight, which builds on previous experiences by discussing experimentation and trying out new roles considered during stage five. Even though the questions could be combined, these two questions were again
separated to ensure singular focus to correctly capture the veteran’s experience, attitude, and integration of new skills. Question eighteen specifically captures the veteran’s attitude during this stage. Allowing the veteran to voice their experiences can influence building self-confidence (Hildreth et al., 2014). Such experimentation is common in military training, such as on-the-job training and various mentoring scenarios (Hunt & Michael, 1983).

Mezirow’s stage nine, which was incorporated in 1991 by Mezirow (Kitchenham, 2008), discusses altering present relationships and building new relationships. For veterans, previous relationships often include criminogenic influencers. To break the criminogenic cycle, veterans often need to change their relational support structure. Question nineteen captures how personal relationships have changed and affords another opportunity for the veteran to discuss peer, court official, and mentor influencers and how other associations, such as family, have changed. As noted, early on, Mezirow neglected relationship impacts on transformational learning, but these are extremely powerful influencers in corporate and military settings (David, 2011; Johnson & Andersen, 2010; Mansson & Myers, 2012; McCann & Johannessen, 2010; Young, 1979); and in reducing recidivism (Hartley & Baldwin, 2019). If mentors were mentioned, according to Eisenberger et al.’s (1986) perceived organizational support, mentor programs, when a formal part of an organization, are helpful in predicting individual success and commitment to the organization’s mission and values, including reduction of impacts such as turnover or corporate recidivism. This question can serve as a gauge in determining the veterans’ perceived organizational support. Organizational support, including mentor feedback, provides a fertile ground for transformational learning (Kalbfleisch, 2002; Kram, 1983; Mullen & Klimaltis, 2019; Thavinpipatkul et al., 2016).
Mezirow’s stage ten addresses building self-confidence and competencies. Question twenty ties back to previous stage three (Mezirow, 1981) and addresses personal growth. This question probes if the veteran is reevaluating personal mental maps, which is a key indicator that transformative learning may occur. Additionally, the interviewer listens for comments about discussing such changes with others, such as other veterans, family members, or mentors, reinforced by how they chose to integrate these new skills. A possible further probe could involve discussing the veteran’s comments from their written essays or court appearances.

Stage eleven of Mezirow’s matrix focuses on ensuring the transformational perspective is wrought by actively integrating new skills developed during the journey (Kitchenham, 2008). Such integration is expected to be a long, engaging process. Yet, question twenty-one allows not only insight into the veteran’s progress and process but also probes if the veteran is reevaluating personal mental maps, a key indicator that transformative learning may be occurring (Mezirow, 1981). Additionally, the interviewer will listen for comments made about other potential influencers, such as other veterans, family members, or mentors.

Questions twenty-two and twenty-three are closing questions, and once again, allow the veteran to steer the conversation or clarify any previous comments. To align with other interviewing best practices (Creswell & Poth, 2018), this is also a time for the interviewer to ask any final probative or clarifying questions about the veteran’s comments.

After the formal questions are complete, the interviewer will discuss the next steps, including a reminder that the veteran will be offered the opportunity to review the transcript once complete. Further, after the interview, if the veteran reflectively wishes to add or clarify any comment, the veteran can contact the social worker or the interviewer to capture these new comments accurately. Finally, because the exit can be the most important part of the interview
(Yin, 2016), the veteran was thanked, and cordial conversations continued until the veteran departed. Once the veteran left, the audio recording device was stopped and all field notes secured. Afterward, the interviewer, as previously stated, conducted a period of self-reflection using Creswell & Guetterman’s (2019) interview checklist to review potential bias in data collection, field note clarifications, and potential areas for improvement (Appendix E).

**Observations**

The VTC-Alpha court sessions are conducted weekly in the district court building or, more recently due to COVID-19, using synchronous videoconferencing technology. These sessions provide an opportunity to observe, as a non-participant, the dynamic therapeutic jurisprudence interactions between the veteran, mentor, and court officials. Such observations, averaging several minutes in duration and part of the official court process, offer a unique, fertile, non-intrusive data collection source. As I often attend the weekly sessions, I could sit and passively observe, record, scribe, and sketch descriptive and reflective field notes as selected veterans engaged with the court. The schematic observation protocol, Appendix F (modified from Yin, 2016), was used and refined iteratively during data collection. During these observations, transformative learning (Mezirow, 1981) cues will be captured. Further public audio recordings of the court session will be requested. In addition, observer field notes allow triangulation of the observations with the interview and essay data sources (Miles et al., 2020). For example, if a selected veteran read a phase change essay during a court session, these observations allow capturing of tone, facial expressions, and any other body language, such as informal support cues with the mentor, not captured in the other data sources. Given the observations’ non-invasiveness, it is expected they will occur routinely throughout the data gathering and analysis cycle. Therefore, when I am in court during the data gathering session, I
will attempt to gather multiple unscheduled, non-participant observations of the selected volunteer veterans. Because a veteran’s frequency of appearance depends on many facets, such as treatment appointments, work schedules, and their phase in the program, a different number of observations can occur for each selected veteran. Even though different amounts of individual participant data are discouraged in quantitative analysis, in qualitative studies, multiple observation sessions can reduce the possibility of bias by allowing more in-depth reflective analysis sessions (Yin, 2016). Additionally, clarifying comments and questions will be captured on the protocol sheet found in Appendix F during the observation, reflection time, or even when memoing during iterative data analysis.

**Data Analysis**

Consistent with data analysis procedures listed in Yin (2016), once the data is compiled, the data will be deconstructed, analyzed, reconstructed, analyzed, and presented through an iterative, recursive process (Yin, 2016). During each analytical data review cycle, the interview transcripts, observation field notes, and personal essays are reexamined for specific emergent themes, patterns, and concepts (Yin, 2018). As will be discussed in more detail later, the 15 thematic analysis steps outlined by Braun and Clark (2006, see Appendix H) and Schnitzler (2020) will serve as another analytical anchor during the data analysis phase. These steps start with being intimately familiar with the gathered data, which is accomplished through iterative reading, merging, and correcting data collection notes and transcripts to ensure accuracy. Next, data reflection and analysis include developing initial codes produced through individual word and phrase analysis. These codes are further assessed individually and as a collective to determine emergent themes. Finally, through iterative, repetitive, and refined coding (Creswell & Poth, 2018), prominent themes are captured and synthesized to determine if the themes should be
combined, omitted, subsumed, or kept individually as more veteran voice data streams are reviewed and incorporated. Individual efforts addressing each data stream will be described in more detail in the sections that follow.

**Personal Essay**

The essays are semantically and inductively analyzed, starting at the word then phrase level, for transformative learning expressions, as seen in Appendix E. Given the potential variances in syntax, if clarifications are needed, they will be discussed during the individual interviews or follow-on meetings. Once the initial phase coding is accomplished, the essays are reviewed holistically for consistent thoughts and significant words and phrases. This macro and micro review also provide validity assessments of the essays and transformative learning codes. The codes are then inductively analyzed to form emergent themes (Yin, 2016). Next, if other essays are provided from the same veteran, each will be coded by the same process and compared against and for each transformative learning stage. Such analysis determines if new or consistent themes add richness and thickness to existing themes. Finally, the emergent themes are inductively compared for higher-level and broader themes, consistent with Creswell and Creswell’s (2018) and Yin’s (2016) guidance of inductive coding. This process is repeated for each participant’s essay for each transformative learning phase. After all essays are processed using Appendix E and iteratively coded, the themes are compared across all veteran essays to determine if there are consistent or emergent higher-level themes. Although one comment may be seminal and therefore not necessarily discarded, patterns and explanation building are sought (Yin, 2016). Finally, any clarification questions will be captured for asking and documenting during the interviews.
Interviews

The recorded answers to the interview questions are transcribed using an independent transcription service and reviewed for accuracy by the interviewer and participant. The approved transcript is then compared and against field notes and reflections, including disfluencies or verbal space fillers, to provide interesting contextual insights and beneficial communication information and analyzed (Gotthelf, 2014). Using multiple-level coding (Creswell & Poth, 2018), each salient phrase or meaning unit (Creswell & Poth, 2018) is next coded for ease of reference through a communication matrix. An official check sheet (Rose, 2014) will be used to capture the phrases, and each collection of phrases will be subsequently coded into themes.

These codes are additionally distilled into coherent emerging themes, which are also be marked with identifying tags, continually cross-checked, and placed into a data matrix, ensuring inductive analysis is maintained (Yin, 2016). In keeping with Agile Project Management best practices (Mersino, 2013; PMBOK Guide, 2017), the iterative and spiral data refinement ensures that the most important concepts are refined and rise to the inductive top and are not lost in semantic nuances.

Additionally, individual statements are evaluated for their relationship to Mezirow’s transformative learning stages (1991). Although these are not the only themes of potential interest, such a lattice affords a common reference point between the interviews. Further, and more importantly, this data provides relevant responses to assess the central research and sub-questions.

As mentioned previously, the process is repeated for each participant interview, starting at the granular level, looking for specific phrases or words. Once the first-level codes are assembled (Yin, 2016), the identified codes are reassessed to determine if more generalized
themes emerge (Yin, 2016). After the process is complete, the codes are reviewed, and final codes will be categorized and reevaluated for overarching themes. Similarly, and separately, all multi-level transformative learning-related themes are reviewed corporately to determine if they possess overarching holistic themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Notably, if salient themes are found but seem out of place, consistent with system analysis and brainstorming best practices (Tilley & Rosenblatt, 2017; Rose, 2014), these themes are collected in a separate bin for further analysis and reflection. Before publication, the themes will be shared with the social worker for clarification, consistency, and security, which will trigger additional external audits if necessary (Creswell & Poth, 2018). If requested, the reviewer will be provided the supporting documentation to assist in the analysis (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

This process and resulting information provides me with consistent experiential themes from the interviews. In addition, the resulting themes richly and deeply capture the veterans’ voices during their VTC journey. Thusly, the information provides a robust, validated encapsulation of the experiences lived by the selected veterans (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018) and allow triangulation with the other data sources.

**Observations**

The observations are electronically recorded and professionally transcribed, as previously discussed. Field notes, including schematic data, Appendix F, from the non-participant observations are reviewed for accuracy compared to the electronic record. Once validity is ensured, the field notes are reviewed for insights into veteran relations transformative learning and emerging themes compared to the layered themes gleaned from other data source analyses (Yin 2016). If the observations support the emerging themes, the new data will be added to increase the richness of the supporting data. If the emerging themes are inconsistent with those
determined from the other data sources, the interview themes are reassessed for rectification. Finally, if the themes captured during the observations represent new insights, these are cataloged separately. In each case, the data is reassessed continually for convergent, divergent, or new themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

**Codified Analysis**

Once all data sources have been gathered and iteratively coded, the themes are triangulated for cross-modality accuracy, consistency, diversity, and commonality of codes and themes (Miles et al., 2020; Yin, 2016). Consistent themes will be a focus of additional refinement. Vitally, all “unrelated” single occurrence codes are reviewed to determine possible binning or if the single occurrence is a significant stand-alone pivotal theme that should be noted. Additionally, all forms of data, including essays, observations, and field notes, are iteratively reviewed for theme convergence, divergence, or creation of a new code or theme. Care is taken such that analysis follows delineable paths from the data source through the coding to emergent themes, including textual and structural description credibility (Creswell & Poth, 2018) to ensure what is presented accurately captures the veteran’s transformative learning experience.

Further, given the potential for bias that could occur given my veteran involvement background, the analysis is continually reflected on to ensure my predispositions do not unduly impact the research, as discussed in more detail in the next section of this chapter. Although limited electronic qualitative analysis software tools may be used for transcription and analysis, most of the analysis will be manually coded, analyzed, and inductively produced from the individual code, at the word- then phrase-level, to the emergent macro theme level.

In summary, when considering all data sources, consistent themes are reinforced, and those themes are captured, packaged, and supported by direct quotes in the final report. If
significant codes are found in only one or two data sources, they are evaluated for richness and importance. If such relevant codes cannot be combined by reassessing other themes, then these bi- or mono-angulated, as opposed to triangulated, codes are evaluated for significance and possible inclusion so that the voice is still captured (Miles et al., 2020).

**Trustworthiness**

For this study, trustworthiness is accurately capturing, analyzing, and presenting the veterans’ voices. The information gathered, analyzed, and processed is consistently cross-checked for accuracy at each data analysis -- data recording, transcription, coding, triangulation, and presentation. Further, Yin’s (2016) guidance of heuristic and questioning attentiveness is adhered to, as is his interpretive depth recommendations to enhance process rigor and trustworthiness. This is shown explicitly through the piloting of the interview questions with the social worker. Such piloting ensures the items are clear and effectively capture the veteran’s experience (Yin, 2016, 2018). Finally, the following sections will describe in detail how trustworthiness is bolstered in this study.

**Credibility**

According to Yin (2016), credibility can be defined as how expert peers assess each other’s actions, which in this study captures veterans’ experiences. The key to truthfully capturing the veteran’s reality starts with accurate data gathering of their experience. Therefore, after the interview is completed, the file will be submitted to an official transcription service. Once the file has been transcribed and returned, the supplied transcript will be read while listening to the audio recording, and any omissions or corrections will be noted. All relevant communications, including space filler phrases, e.g., “ahs” and “uhs,” will be captured. Notably, any explanatory or prominent information, such as reaction from other veterans or “tell” type
actions such as protracted verbal pauses, loss of eye contact, or continual reaching for water, will be gleaned from the field notes for an adroit merger with the transcript. As previously noted, this transcript is made available to the veteran for review.

After field note collection, purposeful time will be taken for an interview and self-bracketing reflection. A principle thought-piece includes if personal biases are positively or negatively impacting the data gathering. My background in veterans issues, systems analysis, and quality management (Rose, 2014; Tilley & Rosenblatt, 2017) will be used as a framework for assessing bias and bracketing the evaluation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Although bracketing is often more closely associated with phenomenological studies, the concept of continually purposefully evaluating biases is equally essential for this case study (Yin, 2018). As appropriate, discussions to assess any external bias impacts will include court officials, participants, or experts not involved in the program. Each of these steps increase the study’s reliability and rigor to reflect the participants’ thoughts rather than my distracting opinions or perceptions (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

After the data gathering has been completed and confirmed, the analysis follows inductive coding procedures for case study data analysis (Yin, 2016). As a recognized leader in the case study analysis, Yin’s methods have been frequently used, and more importantly, embraced in the case study community. Relying on Yin’s protocols allows instant connectivity and systematic checking should a peer wish to do so.

Additionally, triangulating, using multiple data sources to verify and corroborate results (Miles et al., 2020; Yin, 2016), and spending prolonged time in the field increase the credibility of the results, and both are used to improve this study’s credibility. Critically, any potential bias I possess is continually assessed during data analysis and report generation to ensure that the
veteran’s voice is not eclipsed by mine, effectively capturing the reality of the veteran’s experiences.

**Dependability and Confirmability**

These two traits address the consistency of the research and results. Peers should be able to link the final results consistently back through the data analysis to the original data. This chain of analysis connectivity ensures that whoever analyzes the data can consistently produce similar results. Using Yin’s (2016), Saldaña’s (2016), Miles et al. (2020), and Braun and Clark’s (2006) coding methodology consistently for each data source is enforced. Yin’s inductive coding methods are followed for all data sources, and internal theme consistency is continually assessed for sub- and supra-connectivity from data to themes. This connectivity ensures themes emerge from and are supported by the data, and conversely, themes can be traced back to the veteran’s original voice and data.

As previously mentioned, one of the key consistency questions is the impact of my bias injection, such as through field notes captured during the interviews or data analysis. To mitigate this potential bias, post-observation and post-interview reflective memos and thoughts will be captured critically by reflecting on my perceptions, proclivities, biases, and style. Self-reflection questions captured using the final section of Appendix F are assessed after each observation and interview to aid in this endeavor. Notably, given the interview process’s immersive nature and my interest and potential bias in data gathering, changes in perceptions may occur. However, care is taken to ensure appropriate weighting is given to all data, with additional rationale provided when deviations are incorporated. This type of quality check is critical to ensure neither glacial erosion nor interview biases distract from the experiential essence of the captured veterans’ voice. Additionally, analytic memos (Miles et al., 2020; Yin, 2016) and reflection
cross-checks help ensure each voice gets a fair weighting and a chance to communicate their story and not be slanted by one excessively vocal or charismatic participant or me.

**Transferability**

Although generalization is a crucial feature for quantitative studies, care must be taken when transferability is considered with qualitative studies, especially in case studies (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Ruddin, 2006). For instance, the purposefully, non-randomized participant selection automatically injects statistical challenges in generalizing results to broader populations. Further, the type, setting, programs, and administration of veteran courts vary significantly. However, transferability can support prominent lessons learned that could be considered for other applications. Therefore, the sample of volunteer veterans chosen to participate are purposefully selected to ensure demographic and life experience diversity. Critically, strong consideration is given to submitting pre-published summary results to the court officials, mentors, and veterans for review, comment, and approval—if confidentiality can be maintained. Once approved, these actions will provide one final accuracy check of the veteran’s voice and indicate if the results can apply to other VTC-Alpha veterans, mentors, or court officials, and even externally to other courts. Consequentially, the results will be written for use consideration by other court personnel (Ruddin, 2006).

Another possibility of transferability includes any emergent mentoring program themes that produce key insights impacting the veteran’s transformative learning journey in a VTC. If found and applicable, a court may consider changing, or implementing, a mentoring program. Similarly, if a court does not assign essays, have a mentor program, or understand new transformative learning development, and such lessons are positive, those lessons learned may be
considered by other courts. But such transferability must always consider the voice of the veterans and should allow the magnification, not the minimization of those voices.

**Ethical Considerations**

There are several major ethical items to consider. First, while not incarcerated, an Institutional Review Board (IRB) or the court may consider the veterans therapeutic court criminally charged veterans as a semi-vulnerable population, requiring an additional IRB or court oversight, such as having the social worker monitor the interviews. I contacted the court to discuss the concept and court requirements, which included the IRB documents and guidance, and, more importantly, adhered to in this study’s execution. A second ethical consideration is if the interview questions trigger a strong service-related adverse emotional reaction for the veteran. As previously noted, the interview questions will be discussed with the social worker before the interview.

Further, the interviewer is cognizant of the interviewee’s emotional interaction, and the interviewee’s overall psycho-social demeanor as a consideration in selecting interviewees. Finally, the previous considerations also address the overarching question of whether studying adult transformative learning in such a population is ethical, which Mezirow (1991) addressed. Mezirow concluded such efforts are ethical as long as I fully inform the participant of the study’s purpose and ensures that the transformative learning interviewees are not experiencing significant psychotic, neurotic, or sociopathic disorders. Therefore, to minimize this potentiality, in addition to prescreening, if an interviewee’s emotional state appeared to be negatively amplified during the interview, the interview would be rerouted or terminated. The experiential details would then be discussed with the social worker and assessed for the next steps.
It is possible that a participating veteran could commit another crime, resulting in incarceration and changing the veterans’ status to that of a prisoner. If such incarceration occurs, the veteran would not be included in the data-gathering portion until they are no longer a prisoner. If the veteran’s imprisonment runs past the acceptable data-gathering phase, another volunteer veteran would be sought to replace the incarcerated veteran in the data cohort.

Additionally, there could be a perceived differential power distribution between the interviewer, a retired military senior officer, and the interviewee. This issue, much like technology, can present both positive and negative implications. On the positive side, identifying myself as a retired senior military member, when appropriate, will afford me some instant credibility with the veterans in the therapeutic court. However, there could be some Halo, Hawthorne, or other biased reflection (Gall et al., 2007) from veterans based on previous military experiences, including a senior officer summarily discharging the veteran. Initially, this power difference can be mitigated by not mentioning my background, purposefully using non-biased language (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019), and listening to the veteran while gathering data to support this study. This potential power differential will further be mitigated by the semi-structured interview process and conversations with the court social worker. If a discussion of my background arose in an interview, the conversation would be reflected back to the interviewee. However, my personal experiences cannot be wholly divorced from the process and are an important piece of this qualitative study.

From a data security perspective, confidentiality will be maintained to the maximum extent possible for the site and participants using pseudonyms. A master encryption list will be maintained by me and closely held under a double lock protocol. Security will follow federal guidelines to protect personal private information based on the Department of Energy’s For
Official Use Only guidelines (Department of Energy Manual 471.3, 2011). The raw data and master encryption list will only be shared on a validated need-to-know basis. Electronic and paper data sources will be maintained under double lock protocol (e.g., password protection, encryption, door locks) when not actively collected, analyzed, or reported. Transportation security will include not leaving the information unsecured and minimizing the time from collection to storage. When data is being analyzed, locations will be chosen to reduce inadvertent exposure to anyone who does not possess a valid need to know. Additionally, computer backup files will be stored separately and under the same double lock protocol and in different locations for the master and backup files to minimize the possibility of catastrophic loss. Finally, study-related data will be destroyed after three years, as identified in the signed consent form. Paper copies will be cross shredded or burned, and electronic copies will be effectively degaussed or physically destroyed depending on the most effective method as determined by me. Such effective project closure is also in keeping with qualitative studies and project management best practices (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; PMBOK Guide, 2017; Yin, 2016).

Appropriate forensics will be conducted if a data breach occurs, and impacted court officials and veterans will be notified. The forensics will include determining whether the breached data is viable for use or should be discarded. Additionally, lessons learned will be captured and applied to minimize any such future occurrence.

Final published data will be anonymized to the maximum extent possible. Subsequently, it is possible negative information could be distilled from this study; therefore, pertinent data will be shared with salient court officials and the veteran’s mentor coordinator and discussed before release to determine if additional sanitation measures are needed. If such steps are warranted, the
key stakeholders, including my dissertation committee, will be informed, the ramifications discussed, and appropriate steps charted.

**Summary**

The procedures outlined in this chapter capture the methodology, data collection, and analysis protocols needed to record justice-involved veterans’ voices related to transformative learning. Specifically, four primary veteran distilled data sources are used to ensure the voice of the veterans involved in VTC-Alpha are accurately and cogently captured. The first data source is mined primarily outside the veterans’ purview as demographic data, and participant selection will be determined in discussion with court officials. Then, given the selected population, analysis of their personal essays, individual interviews, and observations of their interactions in court are accurately captured, reflected, coded, triangulated, and reported to distill the essential essence of the veterans’ voice. In other words, these procedures depict the veterans’ complex transformative learning journey, bounded by their involvement in the veterans therapeutic court, from their perspective (Yin, 2016).
CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this holistic, multiple-case design case study is to describe the transformative learning journey of a select group of criminally charged veterans assigned to a Washington State veterans therapeutic court. The central research question was: what is the transformative learning experience of criminally charged military veterans who participate in therapeutic courts? The sub-questions included how military veterans describe their self-perception, belief system, and lifestyle habits relative to their veterans therapeutic court journey. This chapter begins with a distilled description of the participants. These participants, members from a single Washington State veterans therapeutic court, VTC-Alpha, were purposefully and criterion-based sampled. Data were collected from these participants through personal interviews, non-participatory observations, and court-directed personal essays. This chapter focuses on analyzing the data from an individualistic and corporate perspective and concludes with a corpus of significant findings.

Participants

Of the 23 potential VTC-Alpha participants available during the 4-week data-gathering phase, 16 were approved by the social worker and contacted by the researcher for possible voluntary participation in the study. Of these, one initially indicated a willingness to participate but then withdrew from the study. Another four did not respond to the initial inquiry. Further, one, while indicating a willingness to participate, did not complete the informed consent form, resulting in 10 participants, equating to 43% of the available VTC-Alpha population. Table 4 provides a more granular demographic data breakdown on the 10 participants, but additional demographics include a breakout of 20% women and 80% men. The average age of the cohort
was 46.5 years old. The average length of military service was 6.7 years, which exhibited a positive or left-modal skew due to one service member having served 26 years. For this cohort, the median service length was 5.5 years, and the most frequent, or mode, length of military service was six years. A participant's time in the VTC program was obtained from essay documents or court officials and reflected an average of 1.2 years, ranging from a little more than three months to almost two years. The data cohort included members who served in the U.S. Air Force, U.S. Army, U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Marine Corps, and a State component of the National Guard. Finally, the participants' ethnicity included one Hispanic, one Native American, and eight Caucasians, which generally mirrored the population of the larger VTC-Alpha court population.

As discussed in Chapter Three, pseudonymized names of the participants were used and generally assigned following the military phonetic alphabet in an order decided by the researcher.

Table 4

Veteran Treatment Court Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Veteran Participant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Length of Military Service (years)</th>
<th>VTC Phase</th>
<th>Time in VTC Program (years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruce</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlie</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gena</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Haley  33  5  4  1.7
John   62  4  3  0.6
Ken    46  4.5 2  0.9
Mike   62  6  3  1.7
Nick   51  3  2  0.3
AVERAGE 46.5  6.7  N/A  1.2

Results

As veterans navigate their therapeutic learning journey, consistent, significant, and generalizable themes were expected to emerge from their individual and collective in vivo experiences. As a start, to confirm transformative learning occurred during the veteran's court journey, a thematic saturation examination was made. Appendix I outlines the protocol and affirms that the individual veterans were experiencing transformative learning during their therapeutic court journey. Then, building on that confirmation, extracting, distilling, and coding of the data from the three disparate data sources was conducted, using methods outlined in Chapter Three, Yin (2016), Saldaña (2016), and in Appendix H. Using each of the data sources, the veterans' statements were coded by summarizing each sentence or complete thought. The summaries consisted of singular words or short phrases and were then binned and inductively synthesized into themes. These themes, including in vivo supporting data from the various data, are discussed in later sections. Of note, if there is a direct quote, the quotation was rarely grammatically modified to ensure the original veteran's experiences were captured.
As discussed in Chapter Two, when veterans separate from the military, they often experience a loss of mission, identity, and camaraderie. While not identical, three symbiotic, common experience themes inductively emerged from the data: relationship engagement, vision-casting, and rebluing. These three helped to vocalize the veteran's journey as they experienced transformative learning.

**Relationship Engagement**

Relationships were expected to play a significant role in a veteran's transformative journey, given the role of camaraderie in military service and the particular focus in Mezirow's exploration and competency stages (stages 5 and 10). This recognition even supported the research design of this study, as the researcher chose the modified 11 transformative learning step process (Kitchenham, 2008; Mezirow, 1991) -- highlighting the stage of altering present relationships and forging new relationships (stage 9). Such cleaving and cleaving of relationships was especially important when the veterans' toxic peer or family relationships needed to be terminated or when relationships needed to be created or rebuilt due to the veterans' successful therapeutic court journey. Simply put, some of their relationships needed to be started, stopped, or continued.

For this study, many veterans acknowledged relational troubles, like Gena, when she recognized that before her therapeutic court journey, her relationships were non-extant. She even mentioned that she purposefully destroyed relationships as people tried to get close to her. However, as this theme ripened, two sub-themes emerged, those relationships focused on family and those external to the family. Also, as discussed later, the term family, just as in the military, morphed into a term much broader and sometimes stronger than blood relations.
**Familial Engagement.** During the veterans' journey, restoration of relationships, especially with children, was paramount. For instance, Gena lost her family relationships because of continual drug addiction challenges. For a time, Gena felt rejected by her family, stating they accepted her husband's denial of abuse, believing "him more than me. You know, so I felt kind of like rejected, isolated." Ken discussed how he had harmed relations as well. When talking about wanting to build a relationship with his daughter, he said, "her mom just doesn't trust me. You know, and rightfully so." When talking about broken trust, Edward commented, "like my parents, so many people that are close to me, no one trusted me, I burned every bridge I had." This included his former spouse, who encouraged Edward to build a relationship with their daughter, but his former spouse had one caveat: he could not impaired when he talked to his daughter. Regrettably, Edward lamented he had previously chosen drugs over relationships. However, because of his VTC journey, Edward is now enjoying a blooming relationship with his daughter. For Adam, he admitted that his family relationships were often toxic. Sometimes the family relational challenges were communicated by someone other than the veteran.

During one of Bruce's appearances in court, when discussing how Bruce distanced himself from a toxic family relationship, the judge stated, "it's tough with family. Right? They're always your family, no matter what; you can't just get rid of them. But sometimes, you have to make those hard decisions. And I'm pleased that that's what you're doing." Similarly, Haley, who had faced her own relational challenges, including the specter of losing her children as she focused more myopically on her own drug needs, was experiencing an especially difficult estrangement from her mom. Nevertheless, when Haley was discussing why she was ready to move into Phase Four with the court, she said that she was "moving forward with my life in a manner that is healthy for me and my whole family."
**Extra-Familial Engagement.** Often mentors and court officials were revered as family members, sometimes revered more than blood relatives. Frequently in a surprisingly positive light. For example, VTC-Alpha’s preceding judge was mentioned by seven veterans during their interviews. As discussed in Chapter Two, the judge was considered the central person in assuring effective judicial mitigation (Douds et al., 2017; Senjo & Leip, 2001; Vaughan et al., 2019). John’s interaction with the judge was especially noteworthy as he described how the judge took time to engage with John on a personal level (see Appendix I). John commented that the judge "is one of the best people in your corner to anyone in that court."

Similarly, the social worker, who often also functions as a parole officer, was mentioned by 80% of the veterans interviewed, and another veteran discussed the social worker’s support in his essay. Each noted how the social worker was there for them, often on their speed dial, believing in them and helping them move forward. Haley went so far as to call him her "friend," which even surprised Haley. Even the prosecutor was spoken of positively, with Haley noting most of the time the prosecutor is more of a disciplinarian, but in the therapeutic court, he is indeed looking to balance what is best both for the court and the veteran. Further, Mike noted his engagement with the prosecutor was his turning point when he discussed a conversation with the prosecutor saying, look at "’what veterans court has done for you; you got a place to live.’ You know, I mean, [the prosecutor] pointed it out. And that’s where the turning point was for me."

Mentors were also mentioned. As discussed in Appendix I, Edward noted that he felt his mentor would "take a bullet for him." Nick stated that since his mentor was a "fellow Marine," Nick put extra pressure on himself not to let his mentor down. Haley even noted that her mentor was one of the first people she attempted to contact after being approved for a home loan. These types of relationships were especially prevalent in their transformative learning journey as
veterans reassessed old and built new relationships. Building these non-family relationships helped to rebuild broken trust. For instance, Adam admitted that he had broken trust not just with his family but with everyone. However, Adam's relationships were changing, stating, "everybody's starting to realize … I'm more trustworthy because I wasn't as trustworthy, not even close, you know before I started to try to change my life."

However, the developed relationships were not just human. Both John and Gena admitted their dogs prevented them from completing their suicide plans. In Gena's case, she admitted she was worried that if her body were not found, the food left for her dog would run out, and given the dog provided her unconditional love, she could not risk the dog's possible death. Similarly, John mentioned that when he seriously considered suicide, a picture of his dogs flashed through his mind. It was this thought that precipitated seeking help and starting his veterans court journey.

**Vision-Casting**

Goal-setting was a significant part of both therapeutic jurisprudence and transformative learning. However, the theme of vision-casting (i.e., seeing the end goal versus just steps towards the goal) encompassed and eclipsed traditional goal setting, incorporating the critical concept of believing the goal is achievable. Manifestations of this theme were triangulated in essays, observations, and interviews. Especially noteworthy were answers to what the veterans would say to themselves five years ago and where they see themselves in five years. The five-year timeframe was important because it was before any veteran started VTC-Alpha's program. Further, the timeframe extended well beyond when any participant would be expected to still be in VTC-Alpha’s program. Analogous to the previous theme, two substantial vision-casting sub-themes emerged, resulting in an internal and external focus.
**Intrinsic-focus.** The first sub-theme involved the veterans focusing internally on their personal journey. For some, this focus was more metaphysical, such as when Gena stated, "I figured I was lost soul that never had a family or life to look forward to. And now I do." However, for others, it was more concrete. For example, Haley provided vision-casting insight into her situation when asked what she would say to herself five years ago. She stated, "I would say that there's hope that things can change. You're just going to have to work for it" and expected to be even more successful five years from now, including finishing school to teach and see herself as a teacher because "I'd love to teach little kids."

Mike was asked what he would say to himself. He said, "God looked out for me, and I'm in the veterans court. And I'm so glad." Casting forward, Mike went on to say he expected to live longer because of the tools, techniques, and support he received through veterans therapeutic court. Similarly, Adam, serially jobless before veteran's court, envisioned getting and retaining a good-paying job. Keeping this vision allowed him to weather the storm of missing a job opportunity, stating, "my most difficult moment … was hands down not getting to work." However, due to the support he received and his persistence, Adam believed his employment vision was possible and could secure a job and did. Further, Adam envisions that in the future, he will not only have a job he loves but "be happy with what I'm doing. And not wake up and dread" his life. Gena, age 61, who had not had a driver's license since she was 16, pragmatically envisioned obtaining a driver's license once again. Such goal-setting and resultant vision-casting is a critical step in transformative learning, reflected in Mezirow's stage five. Further, Gena vision-casted for her situation through emotionally recounting her dream:

I hope to be a real old lady with a nice big old farmhouse and some land there and trees, and I envision this. I have this dream, and I'm sitting up on the bench upon the hilltop,
looking down, we're having a family barbecue. All my kids with my grandkids and, and their spouses, and they're part of that. It's all there with everyone's busybody around the picnic table, barbecuing, kids playing games, and I go, this is my life, and they're carrying out through me.

Finally, perhaps Ken had the best vision-casting summation when asked what he would say to himself five years ago said, "don't be an idiot. Like, this is a dead-end path dude, you know what? Get out. Get out of it. Now, before you're dead or in prison." Looking forward, he stated, "I hope to still be involved with veterans work as a mentor … to still be involved with the [veterans therapeutic court] program for as long as I can … helping other guys and gals."

**Extrinsic-focus.** Sometimes it is more valuable for someone else to vison cast, especially if the veteran does not want to, does not see it, or is embarrassed to share a vision. For instance, the defense attorney told the court, "[Ken] told his mom, if he got a second chance, he was going to finish this program with flying colors. And he doesn't lie to his mom. So, he was like, I told my mom, I was gonna do this, and I can do it." For Nick, the presiding judge noticed his progression and commented, "well, you seem to have just the best attitude. Every week in here we see you. And I mean, you seem really grateful for your life, really grateful for your job. Really grateful for everything that you're creating for yourself."

Frequently, others can envision a brighter future, even when the veteran could not. Communicating this vision was often accomplished through court officials and mentors, where the officials or mentors had more confidence and belief in the veterans than the veterans had in themself. For instance, during an interaction with Adam, the presiding judge noted, "I know you can do this." Likewise, Ken's mentor stated, "I know, you're going to continue on even outside of this program; you're going to continue, continue killing it." Finally, Edward's mentor vision-
casted for Edward as well as himself when commenting, "I'm proud of [Edward] … and where he's going. And, you know, the interaction this week actually inspired me to get back on my bicycle."

**Rebluing**

Rebluing is a process used to repair a firearm's worn, protective finish. The rebluing technique is both subtractive, in that oxidation is removed, and additive, as a new protective coating is applied. The end result of rebluing is to help the firearm once again look new, be protected, and restored to its original form, fit, and function. Such rebluing is also an end goal of both transformative learning and therapeutic jurisprudence as each person travels their own pathway to success. Similarly, the military often engages in the process of rebluing members to rehone military bearing, skills, core values, and the "why" of serving. Such rebluing was also evident in the VTC journey as participants, who were formerly productive members of society, even if only during their military service, once again focused on becoming effective citizens.

Notably, the military rebluing follows the U.S. Department of Defense’s standard training protocol addressing both skills and knowledge. Interestingly, when asked how the process of acquiring skills and knowledge in the VTC compared to life in the military, Bruce jokingly said that "they don't yell at me." Charlie, a retired career senior NCO, noted there was no real change from how they were trained in the military. As did Adam, who admitted he learned through trial and error and thought the process was very similar to the military's. Edward thought the structure was very similar and a plus, allowing the veterans to trod familiar ground, although he admitted not missing "being smoked" physically.

**Skills Development.** Veterans were presented opportunities to rehone their abilities by building on skills learned in the military, such as financial management, smoking cessation, goal
setting, and communication skills. For John, he is focusing more on his health, smoking cessation, and the right dietary choices to live a healthier life. Part of Adam's goals for phasing up included saving $300. Since departing the military, he was serially unemployed, so he had to regain financial management skills as he obtained gainful employment and once again exercised his job engagement skills.

Increasing personal responsibility was a key for both veterans court and the military. Haley, a former security forces soldier, likened the phase process to getting promoted in the military, as the veteran is given more responsibility and freedom as they progressively phased up in the program, not having someone "constantly be on my back, telling me how to do things."

While the Urinalysis (UA) checks were still random and burdensome, court appearances were less frequent as the "promoted" veterans navigated competing demands, such as no notice UA's, counseling sessions, community service, and work, forcing time management skills rehoning.

Gena started multiple businesses during her journey and obtained her driver's license, car insurance, housing, and sobriety. Thus, managing increasing competing demands and using the skills she learned to step up and out. Perhaps Ken, when talking about skill rebluing, summed it up best:

So, I think, you know, we can take some skills we've learned in the military and apply them in veterans court and make it better. I think we all have that, you know, some of us it's, it was so buried deep down in there, but it's still there. You know, we all have that military bearing, and we all have that sense of pride, and we all have that, but some of us just, I mean, veterans court just brings that all back. You know, it takes all that bullshit away and, and, and brings all that good stuff back up. And sometimes it takes a minute, but it happened.
Knowledge Development. Personal knowledge, including self-awareness and societal awareness (i.e., emotional intelligence, Mersino, 2013), is addressed in the military but often dulled through substance abuse use, as the addict parochially focuses more on self than others. In the military, the balance is more focused on a team versus self. Both are taught and discussed, but again, the focus is more on a team, or as Nick put it, "how to get along with other Marines." As Nick phrased it, the veterans court shifts more of the focus to "get along with [Nick]." Edward summed up his rebuing as a journey to "learn how to be a decent person again."

John also noted while both the veterans court and the military wanted the members to think, "make you look at yourself, that make you kind of think back of what you could have done before you got into this position," making him "think a little more instead of acting" giving the veterans "time to, to get your head right."

Rehoning the veteran's "service before self" focus was critical and was conducted in counseling and mentor sessions. For instance, Bruce's anger management discussions allowed him to mitigate his rage, as "before veterans court I was angry. 'Um, didn't like myself, and uh that culminated in me drinking a lot." Likewise, Gena noted reobtaining pride for herself and others, stating:

I know one thing, the day that they took the oath when they went into the military, what they felt. I know every single one of us felt the same thing, the pride, and all that; they can have that path. It's, it's given back to 'em freely, through the veterans court. Yeah.

And I feel that pride now.

Outlier Data and Findings

By definition, data outliers are not clustered with the rest of the data set. However, sometimes such outliers can be the most interesting data to analyze (Gall et al., 2007). Two
outliers were found during this analytical journey, two veterans whose journey appeared to be orthogonal to the other eight veterans' journey and recidivism. Both will be discussed and rationalized in the following sections.

**Recidivism**

As discussed in Chapter Two, obtaining validated recidivism rates are difficult. For VTC-Alpha, as of June 2021, they had graduated 15 veterans, with none experiencing additional criminal charges. However, VTC-Alpha's newness and limited sample size prevent statistically significant analysis of its recidivism rates. Further, as discussed in Chapter Two, defining and measuring recidivism has proven challenging in literature (Duffy 2011; Hartley & Baldwin, 2019; Lennon, 2019; McCall et al., 2018; Tsai et al., 2017, 18). However, Adam provided perhaps the most succinct definition of recidivism as "returned customers in the criminal justice system." Still, the reducing recidivism discussion generated the most requests for clarification and robust conversation as veterans tried to articulate how to help other criminogenically involved veterans. Adam proffered he thought the camaraderie offered in the veterans court was important, in fact, "the only thing that I've seen work … having connection with other people that are in the same boat." Gena noted a key to reducing recidivism was having people you can talk to, whether a sponsor similar to Narcotics Anonymous (NA) or Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) sponsor program, a counselor, the veteran court social worker, or mentor. This in-depth support network she thought was critical to break the criminogenic cycle. Ken amplified this support structure more from a praise of accomplishment perspective. He noted the contrast between the VTC and the streets, stating in the VTC, "you're rewarded for doing stuff, good, … you don't get that on the streets, you know, … you are rewarded for doing right in veterans court."
Similarly, it was interesting the emphasis the participants placed on the connectivity provided by the mentor program. There is, however, disagreement in certain studies concerning recidivism in veteran therapeutic courts (Hartley & Baldwin, 2019; Smith, 2012). However, as addressed in Chapter One, Slattery et al. (2013) found that 87% of successful veteran court graduates attributed all or some of their success to developing a new social support system, such as their mentor. Four VTC-Alpha veterans expanded that view by looking to become a mentor. When addressing reducing recidivism, John was actually looking to participate in becoming a mentor stating, "I think I've learned quite a bit … I can help somebody out." But mentoring was not just a person to talk to about life. Mike, a self-described maintenance methamphetamine user and addict for over 40 years, strongly emphasized being held accountable by his mentor and the court system, which helped him proactively "think things through," and, resultantly, helped him avoid criminogenic behaviors such as having to steal to support his habit. Bruce was more succinctly reflective but similarly focused when discussing breaking the recidivism cycle, pointing to his mentor and stating, "he was a Vietnam jarhead. And, you know, we might have been a different wars, but it's all the same, right? We deal through the same stuff. So, 'um, that's helped a lot." Nick also noted he thought the mentor system was the best part of veterans court in reducing recidivism. Edward pointed out that the military connection built important bridges with his mentor as well as other court members. Charlie confirmed this theme stating a strong support system is critical, recognizing that not everyone has a strong family or friend support system. Gena echoed the importance of trusting your support structure, including mentors, noting "their advice isn't there to hurt you, but to help you and that they'll walk with you. They won't have you do it alone … cause that's how much they believe in it." Interestingly, given this
potential tie to reducing recidivism, as mentioned in Chapter Two, not all veteran therapeutic courts offer mentor programs.

**Insulated Inertia**

Most of the veterans expressed or experienced trouble getting into the battle rhythm of veterans court, showcasing the challenge of overcoming the inertia of trying to start a recovery program. Ken, perhaps the most striking example, after being admitted into the program fled, rather than continue the program, resulting in a warrant being issued and led to his incarceration. However, after his release, he robustly embraced the VTC program. Edward, Gena, Haley, and Mike all experienced significant challenges during the early part of their journey, including Mike, who, having celebrated 100 days sober for the first time in decades, significantly relapsed. However, two of the ten participants appeared to have no trouble navigating the court journey. Charlie and Nick, both Marines, had two of the shortest VTC tenures in the data cohort. Unlike many other cohort veterans, these two had not experienced significant relapses or challenges in their veteran court journey. However, their journey is not complete; there is still time for these two participants to experience a setback. In fact, Nick even mentioned that he at one time had five years sober, but then he drank, and three days later, he was back in jail. However, neither Nick nor Charlie appeared to be destined for that course again, based upon their written and verbal interactions as well as data provided by court officials and their mentors. Notably, VTC-Alpha's presiding judge expressed some concern that perhaps things were going too well for them. Where Adam, according to his mentor, was experiencing some "self-sabotage" leading to relapse, the judge specifically mentioned that Charlie was "boring" during a phase-up engagement, further stating, "you've never caused us any trouble. And you have done the work."

Charlie, who had honorably served 26 years in the military, was a senior non-commissioned
officer, was always prepared for engagement, and extremely focused. He mentioned that the
veterans court had produced few changes to his routine, which had included seeing a counselor
for years, with veterans' court just another task to complete. Similarly, Nick, the most "junior"
member of the data cohort, had been a part of VTC-Alpha for less than four months. However,
Nick had also been in counseling for years to address his alcohol and other service-related health
issues, including having experienced multiple traumatic brain injuries (TBIs). Nick further
mentioned that he specifically chose his mentor, a fellow Marine, because the mentor had served
as a cop, and Nick did not like cops. Nick critically reasoned that if he could learn to change his
thinking about cops, perhaps that would lead him to change his thinking about drinking. The
other veterans in the data cohort rarely presented such a mature thought process, i.e., critical
reflection. However, as discussed in Chapter Two, such critical reflection is crucial in
transformative learning as members integrate their new tools into their lives (stage 11).

In and of themselves, these two veterans were outliers in that their inertia was evident,
having been in counseling before being referred to veterans court. These two veterans (Charlie
and Nick) indeed had two of the shortest engagement times in veterans treatment court.
However, they had a compelling history of working with counselors before veterans court.
Further, these two, along with John and Bruce, were only dealing with alcohol abuse instead of
any other substance abuse. But in addition to the inertia they had built up through counseling and
support structure development, these two veterans also appeared more insulated from the court.
Charlie and Nick were extremely busy and were not as able to be actively involved in the
community service or peer interaction. Yet, they already had a success focus. For instance,
Charlie focused on "I tried to stay, stay in contact with, like I said, with all my Marines, either
through social media, call them every so often." For Nick, he was more self-reflexive, stating, "I
think the most important part for veterans court for me, and I would hope others is to, to make it work for you, take it, be selfish, this is for you." Nick admitted that if he could help others, that is a plus, but the principal goal is to focus on himself. Further expressing, "I was hesitant to join veterans court. I did not trust the courts at all. Uh, still don't. I trust 'um?" While he later admitted to trusting his mentor and certain court officials, his list of other court-related officials he trusted was very short. He was again showcasing an insulating perspective.

**Research Questions Responses**

According to Yin (2018), designing effective Research Questions is "probably the most important step to be taken for a research study" (p. 11) as the Research Questions frame the study. In the sections that follow, the Central Research Question and each sub-question will be adroitly addressed using data gathered during this study. Interwoven into the question responses will be the associated tie to the various major themes that were previously discussed.

**Central Research Question**

The transformative learning experience of criminally charged military veterans who participate in VTC-Alpha was substantive. Each of the 10 participants displayed noticeable progression according to Mezirow's transformative learning matrix (see Appendix I). While not expected to, every cohort member did not display all 11 stages in each data source (i.e., each essay, observation, or interview). However, when all data sources were combined (Appendix I, Table 7), each participant did exhibit all transformative learning stages, adding to the robustness and triangulation of findings. Specifically, Gena noted, "I mean it's changed everything in me, the way I think, the way I live, 'um, the way I feel. And it's great."

But perhaps, Mike's journey best addressed the veterans' transformative learning journey of integrating new ways of thinking, acting, relational engagement, and rebluing. For example,
knowing Mike was plagued with 43 years of drug use, Mike's mentor noted during a court session:

[Mike] shared with me recently that he got into a situation where you [directed towards Mike] may have fallen on old habits and old thought processes. But he's [directed to the judge] learned from the program and working with folks that he's stronger when he's got a support network around them. And he knows that he can call people and get through certain situations. So, I'm really proud of [Mike]. And he's doing great.

**Sub-Question One**

During their journey, veteran's self-perceptions generally spanned from feeling worthless to renewed confidence to assess personal limits realistically. Their self-perception journey often included accepting a vision-casted, evaluating self-worth, recognizing individual blind spots, and identifying fake masks, such as discussed in the Johari window framework (Berland, 2017; Koca & Erigücü, 2020). One blind spot that Haley had to address was how she viewed drug addicts before she became one, noting, "before I started using drugs, I thought, you know, only crappy people used drugs. People that are on drugs, they're creating their problems." However, after she started using drugs, her self-perception changed as she wanted to stop her drug habit but realized "I couldn't do it by myself." Her help came from the treatment court process, including her mentor, as Haley declared veterans court "was probably the best thing to happen to me," adding she is not sure where she would be without it.

Bruce noted that "veterans court has really helped me 'um to become a better person, accept who I am. And that life isn't so bad." Further, Bruce noted, "I guess my self-confidence is higher. And I don't know how to say it, but I'm just I'm looking at myself different in, in a good way."
John voiced one of the most important self-perception comments reflecting vision-casting in that while he has not reached the end of his journey, he recognizes that "it's okay to need help … it's okay to not be okay". Nick admitted that he is more trusting and that his "wall is not as thick," and the veterans court is helping him get back to him "thinking like he did when he was in the military." Two veterans, Edward and Mike, mentioned but for veterans court and the rebluing tools provided, they could not have even sat down and stayed focused for the interview. Also, Edward noted that previously he had felt "I'm not good enough. I had very low self-esteem. And, you know, now it's much easier for me to see self-worth." Further, Edward noted his self-perception included understanding his limits, mentioning he's "just not one of those people who can have one drink… It's not in the cards for me, you know, I mean, so, you know, I'm transitioning that line, I feel great."

Mike stated, "it took a long time … to achieve where I'm at now, to feel good about myself to feel good about … living life as normal people do. It had a lot of drawbacks at first, and now it's okay." Further, Ken noted that when sickness forced a rescheduling of his interview, previously, he would not have even bothered to notify the researcher to reschedule but did this time due to his VTC journey. When discussing the VTC program and helping others, Edward commented, "I got the winning lotto ticket, man, I can literally give 'em back my life." Finally, Adam, who had struggled with relapsing into substance abuse during his veteran court journey, noted he was now "his best self." Generally, the bottom line is that the justice-involved veteran's self-perception journey is often a steep but positive learning slope, especially for those who started with an extremely low self-perception.
Sub-Question Two

Sub-question two asked how do military veterans describe their belief system relative to their veterans therapeutic court journey. Several veterans, including Nick and John, didn't think their belief system had changed. Adam ruminated that his disjointed beliefs, if shared might cause someone to question his sanity. But Edward noted his new personal vision when discussing that his belief system has changed remarkably, "my personal belief is, is you know, life is going to be good." When talking about how her beliefs changed concerning her drug use, Haley focused on "I didn't think that anybody would want to help me." Further clarifying, "I thought everyone thought like I did." However, her beliefs changed when she got into the veterans court; even though she "made her own bed," veterans court personnel "are willing and do want to help regardless of the problems that you make for yourself." Conversely, Charlie noted that he didn't think his personal beliefs had changed during his veterans court journey, adding to his inertia status, as discussed previously.

Several veterans took part of the interview to refer to their religious beliefs. In an example of rebluing, Jeff commented, "I actually look forward to waking up in the morning… I was able to find the Lord again. And that's just for me; I'm not saying for everybody is, you know." John also noted he did not think his beliefs had changed but were previously formed through cultural and Biblical tenants, also noting the perils of religiosity during the interview. Yet, both John and Gena pondered about God's involvement in helping them avoid suicide, and Mike commented that "God looked out for me" when discussing how he became part of the therapeutic court. Ken stated, "I didn't think I'd dig myself out of it. Um, but there were two or three things that, you know, that just happened to fall in place. You know, God's hand came
down in this." Fundamentally, while their belief systems were different, these veterans believed in and experienced the power of relationships, either supernatural or biological.

**Sub-Question Three**

Sub-question three addressed how military veterans describe their lifestyle habits relative to their veterans therapeutic court journey. As discussed in Chapter Two, transformative lifestyle changes can lead to more effective life changes and reduced recidivism (Baldwin, 2016, Easterly, 2017; Johnsen & Robertson, 2016). And while lifestyle choices involve all three themes, veterans therapeutic court rebluing certainly impacted veterans' lifestyle choices. Edward noted his actions included "investing in myself because I need to be the best me to take care of the things that I care about the most." John provided the starkest assessment when he exclaimed he expected to be dead in five years because of his various health problems. He recognized, such a dark diagnosis could be debilitating, stating, "that's another reason why the court is helping me because that could really get me down hard." But the insights and rebluing tools provided by the veterans court served as a catalytic impulse. John is now taking active steps such as reducing smoking and restructuring his diet to prolong his life as long as he can. Haley's lifestyle completely changed. She started veterans court with the focus of playing the game, just doing what the court wants, "to keep them happy until I can get out of here," and then "I was just gonna go back to, you know, a similar lifestyle." But as Haley progressed, she admitted it "took me a long time to realize they are doing this for my own sake." And now she is enjoying living a clean, sober life, with blossoming relationships and a vision for a bright future, including going to college. Ken, who experienced severe trauma during his military experience, admitted to being "flaky as hell," "running and gunning" drugs before veterans court. But as he built relationships inside the veterans court and was exposed to the different tools and techniques, his lifestyle
became more structured. Ken said, "I think that's the biggest thing is I actually have a schedule, and I try to meet everything that I'm supposed to do. Like, you know, it's tight sometimes, but I get it done." For Edward, his lifestyle change story was similar to Mike and Gena's, one of moving from a drug-addicted spiral to a great life, noting, "I was homeless, I had no car, you know, and you know, [I got] housing now, I got a vehicle, you know, just, just as employee of the month I'm always number one or number two on my job. Yeah, my life completely turned around."

**Summary**

Adroitly transcribing, analyzing, and coding the data was often more art than science. However, using Mezirow's transformative learning lattice and the protocols and personal memoing outlined in Chapter Three allowed a qualitative analysis and understanding of the travails of a select group of justice-involved veterans. In many ways, the therapeutic court experience served as a catalyst for veterans to break their criminogenic cycle. Further, this study captured the veterans' voices in vivo and offered unique insights for potentially reducing recidivism for other veterans. Still, the three emergent themes: relationship engagement, vision-casting, and rebluing, were inductively insightful, serving as a critical foundational step to evaluate a veteran's transformative learning.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this holistic, multiple-case design case study is to describe the transformative learning experience of criminally charged military veterans who participate in a Washington State veterans therapeutic court. Much like any learning endeavor, the veterans therapeutic court metamorphosis was not complete for any member who participated in this study as no one in the cohort graduated as of June 2021. In addition, one veteran, Adam, experienced a significant relapse after completing the data-gathering period. Such is the nature of the long, hard slog towards sober, criminogenic-free living. However, given the hopelessness expressed by participants such as Edward, Gena, and John in their lives before joining veterans court, the success of such a slog is often measured in inches or minutes, in incremental yet often herculean steps for the individual. Nevertheless, even if slight and sinusoidal, positive gains result in each participant experiencing success in their transformative learning journey. Given this journey, key areas will be discussed in the next section and expectantly spark further discussion to help veterans break their criminogenic cycle.

Discussion

The data were collected from 4 until 26 May 2021, and a breakout of data gathered per participant is shown in Table 5. A minimum of at least one essay, one interview, and one observation was obtained for each participant. A more exhaustive listing of data collection specifics and thematic saturation mapping and discussion of the data collected against Mezirow's Transformative Learning stages are located in Appendix I. As discussed previously, all three data sources were coded and analyzed for cogent themes and sub-themes applicable to the central research question and related sub-questions.
To further unpack the data gathered, ten interviews were conducted, one with each participant. As outlined in Chapter Three, each of these interviews were recorded and conducted using the template found in Appendix G. The average duration of the interviews was 35.5 minutes, ranging from 24 minutes to over 58 minutes, with an average of 80% of the time the participant talking and 20% the interviewer. All the interviews were conducted face-to-face except for Nick's, which was conducted telephonically. Finally, the ten recorded interviews were transcribed, analyzed, and compared to real-time field notes and retrospective researcher memos following the protocol discussed in Chapter Three and Appendices G and H.

Twenty-one passive court observations were conducted of the participants as noted in Chapter Three and Appendix F, with at least one observation conducted for each of the ten participants. The number of observations ranged from one to four, depending on the veteran's phase and sanctioning history. In addition, an audio recording of each court session was obtained, transcribed, and reviewed for correlation to the handwritten observations. One unexpected benefit afforded from the court-produced recordings was the further triangulation of data using statements provided by the court officials and mentors. For instance, for Adam, the judge discussed how the veteran had and will continue to progress in the program, with agreement from Adam's mentor and Adam. This confirmation added additional gravitas to the identification of emerging themes tied to the central research and sub-questions. While a possible case could be made that the veteran was deceptively parroting due to the power differential between the judge and veteran, this effect was mitigated by confirming the veteran had a consistent track record (based upon his essay and interview responses) of honest engagement, when agreeing or disagreeing with the court officials or his mentor. Such court and mentor
engagement allowed fourth- and fifth-party triangulation, or confirmation of the data, adding unexpected robustness, richness, and trustworthiness to the voice of the veterans.

Next, phase upgrade request essays were provided for each participant. A total of 18 essays were analyzed, ranging from one to three essays per participant depending where the participant was currently in the VTC program, as an essay was required anytime a member requested phasing up into a higher phase, e.g., phase two, three, or four. The essays were obtained from the court after the researcher provided a copy of the participant's signed consent form to the court. Then the provided essays were analyzed following the protocol outlined in Appendices E and H.

Finally, as found in Appendix I, Table 7, multiple data occurrences mapped against the transformative learning stages were logged during each of these data-gathering events. These various occurrences afforded additional opportunities to ensure thematic saturation transpired as themes were inductively coded following the guidance found in Yin's (2016), Saldaña's (2016), Braun and Clark's (2006), and Appendix H.

**Table 5**

*Veteran Treatment Court Data Collection*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Veteran Participant</th>
<th>Consent Form</th>
<th>Number of Observations</th>
<th>Number of Essays</th>
<th>Interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bruce</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlie</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As stated in Chapter Two, while Mezirow’s Transformative Learning study is one of the most researched and acclaimed adult learning theories to date, no scholarly article was found that examined the application of transformative learning to a veterans therapeutic court journey. Such application was not without challenges, as discussed in this chapter; still, the body of academic research was advanced with this study. Nevertheless, there is certainly much more work that can and should be done. As an essential first step, the following five sections highlight the author’s condensing of the implications unearthed in this study and include: (a) Interpretation of Findings; (b) Implications for Practice and Policy; (c) Theoretical and Empirical Implications; (d) Limitations and Delimitations; and (e) Recommendations for Future Research. These sections often serve as starting conditions for this journey.

**Interpretation of Findings**

As discussed in Chapter Three, the researcher has an acknowledged bias towards veterans’ issues based upon his professional, personal, familial, and veterans therapeutic court mentoring experiences. Embracing these biases, the data, and memoing, three inductively
produced themes emerged as discussed in Chapter Four, and each will be discussed in further
detail. The following sections begin with a brief summary of thematic findings as offered in
Chapter Four, followed by a series of interpretations deemed significant by the researcher.

**Summary of Thematic Findings.** Distilling hundreds of pages of transcripts,
observations, and essays, and hours of interviews and court recordings into three cogent themes
was challenging. Fortunately, as discussed in Chapter Three and Appendix H, the inductive
process provided an ideal lattice to capture significant ideas, specifically the three themes of
relationship engagement, vision-casting, and rebluing. Interestingly, each of the identified
themes, discussed in more detail in the following sections, are a seminal characteristic of healthy
organisms and organizations.

**Relationship Engagement.** The first emergent theme was the importance of authentic
relationships that were made or renewed during the veteran’s veterans therapeutic court journey.
As a reminder, this study incorporated the 11th step into transformative learning (Kitchenham’s,
2008; Mezirow, 1991), that of forging healthier relationships. These transformed relationships
encompassed family and non-family members and included relationships that needed to be
cleaved. Like the word sanction, cleave is a contranym, simultaneously possessing exactly
opposite meanings, and both meanings for “cleave” were found in this analysis. Some family
relationships, such as with Haley’s mom and Bruce’s sister, were toxic and needed to be
dissolved. However, like Edward’s with his estranged daughter, other relationships needed to be
created so they can cleave to each other. Further, while Easterly (2015) noted that the presiding
judge’s military background was the most significant feature of the communal acceptance of a
VTC’s success, VTC-Alpha’s presiding judge is not a veteran. VTC-Alpha’s judge does not
possess a military background but is 100% focused on appreciating and helping veterans. As a
result, he was one of the most cited impactful non-family relationships, and as John mentioned, “he is there in your corner to help you.”

**Vision-Casting.** Vision-casting is a critical component of productive organizations (Mersino, 2013; Kouzes & Posner, 2017). The author of Proverbs reminds readers that where there is no vision, the people perish (Proverbs 29:18). Vision-casting is similar to magnetism’s first basic step. For magnetism to be effective, first, there must be an orientation towards True North. For the VTC-Alpha veterans, their True North alignment was towards successful lives, thriving relationships, productive work, and effective citizenship. The veterans therapeutic court vision-casting helped align the member. Given the starting place of many VTC-Alpha veterans, vision-casting is a key factor in assisting the veteran in believing success is possible.

As discussed in Chapter Four, vision-casting in the court occurred both individually and corporately. Sometimes the veterans’ vision cast their own future, picturing where they would be in five years. Sometimes the visions were simple, like Charlie, who expected his life to be pretty much the same. He was already aligned and moving towards productive citizenship, needing minor realignment or pull to accomplish his goal. Others, such as Adam and Ken, envisioned having a better-paying job. Still, others required more complex realignment during their transformative learning journey, such as John, who expected to be dead but was doing things to extend his life. Edward noted that the court would not give up on him even when Edward gave ample reason to do so. Also, Gena stated that others saw a spark in her and would not quit on her. Their tenacity finally led her to joyfully envision a family BBQ, as noted in Chapter Four. Whether the vision-casting came from internal or external sources, the result was alignment and pulling towards the goal of breaking the criminogenic cycle, transformative learning, and productive citizenship.
**Rebluing.** In physics, for work to be accomplished, a distance must be traveled (Williams et al., 1972). In magnetism, work results from a distance traveled from an effective pull (or push) forward. For the veterans in this study, to break their criminogenic cycle, this pull (or push) often came from rebluing. As discussed in Chapter Four, for rebluing to occur, there must be original bluing. In the veterans court journey, significant bluing occurred during the veteran’s military service and productive citizenship linked back to U. S. revolutionary times and the citizen-solider concept. However, substance abuse and criminal activity oxidized and dulled the veteran’s citizenship principles, necessitating rebluing. For Gena, this rebluing included remembering and restoring her sense of patriotism. For Ken, it was a reconnection with his military bearing. For Adam and Ken to continue to have good-paying jobs five years from now, they had to continue to hone the skills they have learned. Regardless, the skills and knowledge the veterans developed in the military were oxidized and worn due to criminal activity and substance abuse. The VTC fostered the rebluing during the veteran’s transformative learning journey. Activities common to the military service, such as serving others, pushing through difficult trials, and completing tasks at hand through systematic steps, all helped remind the veterans to continue to move towards their final goal. However, the distances and speeds the veterans have traveled varied, just like different strengths of magnets produce different effects. Many factors, including inertia, had to be overcome. While the veterans’ goal originally may have been just to complete veterans court and get back to their myopic life, the rebluing process helped the veterans look beyond the 25-meter target and focus on the surroundings and the final goal of not only breaking their criminogenic cycle but even helping others.
Implications for Policy and Practice

Academic research does not always facilitate helping shape policy and practice, but this study does. While there was no ubiquitous solution to take justice-involved veterans and transform them into productive citizens, the items expressed by members in this program should not be overlooked to improve policy and practice engagements. Overall, given the resource balance of conducting veteran therapeutic courts instead of incarcerating veterans, failure to continually reassess and strive for increased efficiencies is a disservice to the veterans and their supportive community.

Implications for Policy. As mentioned in Chapter Two, VTC-Alpha’s experiment as a veterans court is still in its infancy. However, given the unfortunate number of veterans who are being incarcerated, it is expected that VTC-Alpha’s caseload will continue to grow. Given the program’s success, the court has already hired a second caseworker to help manage the growing caseload. As discussed in Chapter Two, this experiment is funded by a local Public Safety levy that must be renewed periodically. Securing long-term funding would foster strategic, longer-range planning. Further, a dedicated funding stream, perhaps even at the state or federal level, would help mitigate any strain associated with truncating local financing and reapportioning it to other priority needs.

Implications for Practice. The struggles many of these veterans have overcome, breaking decades of substance abuse, physical trauma, and suicidal ideation was remarkable. Steps included finding stable housing, employment, and obtaining a driver’s license. Still, their journey is not theirs alone. As mentioned in Chapter Three, there are 12 different veterans treatment courts just in Washington. Unfortunately, not all of them have mentor programs, and there is little standardization among those that do have a mentor program.
Nevertheless, it was clear from the data collected for this study that mentors play an instrumental role in a veteran’s transformative learning journey. While care must be taken when attempting to assign causation in qualitative research, it is clear that the relationships developed with mentors certainly helped the veterans navigate their course. For example, the recognition that Edward’s mentor would “take a bullet” for him or the recognition by Nick of his mentor being a fellow Marine helped bolster their fortitude to not relapse. However, effective application of mentorship programs, akin to wrongly attempting to extrapolate outside a data set (Gall et al., 2007), is beyond the scope of this research. Still, especially for other therapeutic jurisprudence courts, given the cohort veterans’ input, mentor programs should be persuasively studied as a possible prophylaxis to help reduce judicial involvement by veterans.

Surprisingly, 80% of this study’s participants indicated an interest in becoming mentors. If they did not value the program, it is doubtful that these veterans would have wanted to invest in becoming mentors. As a start, VTC-Alpha’s speed dating process of encouraging the mentor and veteran to meet for five minutes to discuss expectations is in line with Kalbfleisch’s (2002) mentor enactment theory. Regardless of the matching process, ensuring a continued symbiotic relationship between the mentors and veterans helps reinforce the three major themes of relationships, vision-casting, and rebluing.

Additionally, it was somewhat surprising to hear the number of cohort members who had not known about the veterans court. Further, during a court session, another veteran recounted a story that a local corrections officer, when inquiring about the dramatic change demonstrated by the veteran, had not heard of veterans therapeutic court. The researcher encountered a similar occurrence as people in his circle of influence were not aware of the program. Notably, the researcher himself was unaware of the program before starting his dissertation journey.
approximately 18 months ago. Given the potential transformative learning and, more broadly, the life-changing opportunities provided by the veterans therapeutic court, a more stringent marketing campaign should be considered. Marketing recommendations should include local media broadcasting of veteran’s “success stories.” Further, mentors and court officials could be interviewed, and success statistics provided. Finally, significant events should include a press presence, understanding that some veterans may not wish to dwell too much on their past; the focus should be on the now and future casting.

**Theoretical and Empirical Implications**

This study confirmed that the veteran participants were indeed on a transformative learning journey as defined by Mezirow’s theory of Transformative Learning. Since this was the first of its kind, this study indeed advanced the body of knowledge. Further, the selection of the qualitative case study design aligned well throughout data analysis and findings generation. From a theoretical perspective, while each veteran traveled their journey, the three inductively developed themes (i.e., relationships, vision-casting, and rebluing) added gravitas to selecting the therapeutic jurisprudence and transformative learning framework. However, if the study were to be repeated, consideration would be given to only using Mezirow’s ten stages. More of the recent literature focused on the ten stages model versus the eleven stages. While it was important for this study to confirm the strength of relationships given their prominence in the military and mentor programs, they may be equally well captured by using Mezirow’s ten stage model and modifying some of the data gathering techniques. Further, the three data sources allowed the triangulation of the data. Additional data sources such as interviews with court officials, mentors, or other support staff could provide further comprehensiveness to the veteran’s voices.
From an empirical perspective, data collection could have been extended beyond the four weeks, or more participants could have been recruited. However, if extended or expanded, there was an increased risk of the participants graduating, being put in prison due to a relapse, or being terminated from the program. For instance, one court member, who initially considered being a part of the study but eventually chose not to participate, was removed from the program for failure to comply with the program’s policies and procedures during the data gathering and analysis journey. Still, the data analyzed from the ten participants equated to over 40% of the VTC-Alpha veterans and provided rich variety while still ensuring thematic saturation.

Another consideration was that the coding and analysis were left to a single researcher. Arguably, some other researchers might have coded the data differently. While it is certainly possible, from an empirical perspective, the final analysis proved trustworthy when shared externally with other experts and internally when reviewing personal memoing and other data sources to assuage bias impacts.

Finally, theoretical and empirical considerations were evident since one of the outlier data sets focused on recidivism. According to the veterans, mentors were the primary tenant proffered to help break the criminogenic cycle. However, Douds (2019) found a notable different outcome, noting a failure associated with mentoring that contributed to the loss of a veteran’s life. Further, academic literature is varied concerning the essential traits and applications leading to effective mentoring in various fields, especially in the nascent veterans therapeutic court (e.g., Yang et al., 2016). Still, court mentorship did appear to help break a veteran’s criminogenic cycle, and more broadly, help reduce suicidal ideation, as discussed in Chapter Two.
Limitations and Delimitations

Delimitations are intentional decisions made to identify and purposely scale what would and would not be included in this study (Galvan & Galvin, 2017; Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). First, each VTC is different; VTC-Alpha was located in a superior and district court, in a very veteran-supportive community. Both of these factors, type of court and location, serve as a delimitation. Also, the strength of VTC-Alpha’s mentor program was repeatedly mentioned by veterans, such as Haley recognizing her mentor as someone significant to her success. However, as previously cited, not all VTC programs offer a mentor program; selecting a VTC program with mentorship is also a delimitation.

Further, interview data was only gathered from justice-involved VTC-Alpha veterans, not mentors or court staff. Interviewing the court staff or mentors could have enabled a more robust response. However, this delimitation was mitigated partially through accessing court recordings, allowing the confirmation of the veteran’s court responses. The recordings also added a level of triangulation with court officials (such as the judge and social worker) and mentors. Such additional responses allowed more detailed insight into the veteran’s world that may not have been possible without hearing the officials and mentor discuss the veteran’s journey. Since all courts may not offer such ease of access to court recordings, this is a delimitation.

Further, the efficacy of the veterans’ essays data source was restricted by the veterans’ linguistic ability, personal perception, emotional intelligence, and engagement. These factors could cause filtering, such as Dunning-Kruger effects, imposter syndrome, or other biases at the time of the writing. Further, word choice and expression impact semantic analysis, as even slight verbal or written nuances can produce wide variances in the analytical outcome. Thus, choosing this data source with its apparent weaknesses was also a delimitation. Additionally, the veteran
selection process used in this study was a delimitation, as is any criterion-based sampling method. Further, having the social worker identify potential candidates and only accepting volunteers currently enrolled in the program instead of including graduates or passively observing all veterans limited the scope of the study.

There were several limitations or potential weaknesses that were outside the researcher’s control. For instance, the uniqueness of the study’s setting may prevent universal transferability and relevance to other locations, thereby producing questionable intra- and inter-organizational applicability of the inductively-derived results. Such applicability is a recognized qualitative study limitation.

Contrary to what Kerin et al. (2020) experienced, data for every transformative learning stage was gathered for each participant. However, confirmation bias could exist, as the researcher specifically designed the interview questions to address all 11 transformative learning stages. Also, the researcher analyzed the answers for responses mapping to each stage. Plus, since Mezirow specifically noted that transformative learning might not be linear and neither were the veterans responses, it is possible, some stages and phrases could be coded differently. Additionally, once respondents understood the purpose of the study (as outlined in the consent form and introductory, relationship-building engagement), respondents could espouse how they believe transformative learning should work in their lives, as opposed to what their actions suggest happened in their lives, a caution Mezirow identified (Mezirow, 1991, p. 221) and attributed to Candy (1989) as “espoused theories” versus “theories-in-use.” However, while possible, such occurrences were not found to restrict or obfuscate the findings.

COVID-19 restrictions did not impact data gathering, but work schedules did require Nick’s interview to be conducted telephonically versus face-to-face, limiting observation of non-
verbal feedback. Some data was lost by accepting this limitation, but court observations helped mitigate this data void. Finally, the effectiveness of the data sources, especially the interview questions, was affected by the veteran’s ability to recall their transformative learning experiences throughout their VTC journey. In some cases, the veterans had been in the program for two years and were asked to cite specific examples occurring months previously. During that time, some of their experiences may have been difficult to remember accurately. As a result, some of the subtle but essential nuances associated with the different stages of transformative learning may have been omitted.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

As previously discussed, there were several conscious decisions made to bound this study. While these were the right judgments for this study, this and other researchers are encouraged to push back on these boundaries and pursue ways to eclipse these delimitations and limitations. For example, as discussed in Chapter two, while Mezirow’s adult transformative learning theory is one of the premier adult educational theories, it is not the only one (Casebeer & Mann, 2017). Thus, a different study could look at VTCs expressly through the military culture lens or Kegan’s (1994) psychodevelopmental lens. Such theoretical expansion would encourage theoretical comparisons heretofore not available.

Next, only current VTC participants were included in this study. Expanding the research to include program graduates as well as those terminated from the program prematurely would allow some causation questions to be explored, even if not completely addressed. Additionally, including graduates would allow extra time for Mezirow’s more advanced phases, such as integrating new perspectives into the veteran’s life, to germinate and mature. Furthermore, interviewing court officials, mentors, and VTC service providers would allow additional
triangulation of transformative learning findings to help understand a veteran’s self-perception and lifestyle, as well as relationship development. Finally, as previously mentioned, each VTC has many oversight constrictions, such as type of crimes admitted, type of court, and type of discharge accepted. Studying other VTCs with different programmatic limitations, including those without a mentor program, would help understand the nuances of the data more succinctly, understand the veterans’ voice more fully, and more importantly, help future veterans succeed in their transformative learning journey of breaking their criminogenic cycles.

This research project was reminiscent of the spiral nature of program management (PMBOK Guide, 2017). When considering the next steps of a detailed research plan, it would be possible to narrow a focus of a study to delve more deeply into one specific transformative learning stage. For instance, during their transformative learning journey, many veterans experienced an emotional rollercoaster (i.e., stage 2). However, in this study, the emotional journey was not mined beyond a superficial exploration of the various veterans’ emotions. A more robust investigation of the veterans’ emotional journey could be conducted (Mersino, 2013). In addition, instead of selecting a case study design, a different qualitative study framework could be used (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For example, a phenomenological study focused on confirming or expanding on one particular theme, such as rebluing, would help advance the academic body of knowledge. Also, an ethnographic study of the veterans court culture or an individual narrative study would be interesting, such as exploring Mike’s or Gena’s life, both of whom endured over 40 years of substance abuse struggles. Their veterans court journey is but one chapter of their lives. Such a study would help Gena fulfill one of her visions, to help others by sharing her experiences.
From a quantitative study consideration, there are several options if the study could be adequately experimentally controlled. First, it would be interesting to systematically map veteran phase times in a veterans therapeutic court against having a mentor. Or evaluating the efficacy of duration of different phases in the VTC, or impact of relapses, based on how dyadic mentor-mentee matches were made, such as speed dating versus based solely on a branch of service or gender. Also, a critical study of recidivism in graduates could be accomplished with the experimental comparison occurring between those who had a mentor and those who did not. Such a study could confirm what many in the cohort felt, that the mentor program would yield a significant statistical effect. As discussed in Chapter Three, trying to control each confounding variable (such as the veteran’s or mentor’s motivation) might be programmatically impossible. Still, it would undoubtedly provide quantifiable metrics for evaluating the mentor program and its effects in breaking a veteran’s criminogenic cycle.

**Conclusion**

This study produced one cobblestone in an essential path towards additional research in veteran issues in general and veteran therapeutic court applications. Further, this study concisely proved that transformative learning is indeed occurring in one veteran therapeutic court. Additionally, the journey experienced by the veterans is both unique and similar as they changed their self-perception, beliefs, and lifestyles. Such change allows veterans to recraft their critical thinking skills and, more importantly, integrate these new skills and knowledge and resultantly help themselves and others who may also be struggling. This *bonding of brothers*, or building relationships, to include relationships with court officials and mentors, appeared to reflect critical success criteria for veterans therapeutic courts. However, vision-casting and rebluing were also notable themes that emerged. When taken as a whole, this case study showed potential for the
veterans to break their criminogenic cycles and once again become productive members of society, just like they were when they served the United States in uniform.
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20 February 2021

Dear [Redacted],

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for my Ph.D. degree. The title of my research project is “Transformational Learning in A Washington State Veterans Therapeutic Court – A Case Study”, and the purpose of my research is to describe the Transformative Learning journey of a select group of volunteer justice-involved veterans assigned to one of Washington State’s veteran treatment courts – specifically your court. Adult Transformative Learning is framed by how the justice-involved veterans describe or demonstrate transition through Mezirow’s 11 stages of Transformative Learning, including critical reflection.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research in the [Redacted] veterans treatment court. First, I request permission to access and analyze the identified veteran’s phase up and/or sanction letters. Second, I request approval to passively observe and access official recordings of identified volunteer veterans during their court sessions. And finally, I request approval to interview selected volunteer veteran court participants.

Volunteer participants will be asked to contact me to schedule an interview. These interviews will be recorded. The interview is expected to last approximately one hour, and participants will be required to sign an informed consent form prior to the interview. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are able to discontinue participation at any time with no fear of repercussions. The court sessions, interviews, and documents will be analyzed for evidence of Transformative Learning, with each used to triangulate major Transformative Learning themes. Any sensitive or Personal Private Information-related data will be password protected, and any published reports will be appropriately sanitized, and pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity of the individuals and the court.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please return to me a signed statement on official letterhead indicating your approval – a sample letter is attached.

Sincerely,

[Redacted]

T. Lee Williams, Col (ret), USAF
Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University
APPENDIX B: IRB APPROVAL

T Lee Williams, Col (ret), USAF
Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

Dear Lee Williams:

After careful review of your research proposal entitled “Transformational Learning In A Washington State Veterans Therapeutic Court – A Case Study”, you are granted permission to interview and record the interview of select volunteer veteran court participants in a place of mutual agreement or online. Further, we grant you access to passively observe and access official recordings of selected veterans during their veterans court appearance. Finally, we grant access to the selected volunteer veterans phase change and sanction letters/essays for review and analysis.

Please note the following checked guidelines:

☐ The requested data WILL BE STRIPPED of identifying information before they are provided to the researcher.
☑ The requested data WILL NOT BE STRIPPED of identifying information before they are provided to the researcher.

☐ Please supply the veterans treatment court with a copy of the results upon study completion and publication of your study.

Sincerely,
Research Participants Needed

Transformational Learning In A Washington State Veterans Therapeutic Court

• Are you an active participant in the Veterans Treatment Court (VTC)?

• Do you want to help future veteran court members through your VTC experiences?

If you answered yes to either of these questions, you may be eligible to participate in a Transformational Learning research study.

[Write a brief description explaining the purpose and procedures of your study. You may mention potential benefits/compensation but do not over-emphasize monetary gains/gifts etc.] Example:

The purpose of the study is to describe the Transformative Learning journey of a select group of justice-involved veterans assigned to one of Washington State’s eleven veteran treatment courts. Adult Transformative Learning is framed by how the justice-involved veterans describe or demonstrate transition through Mezirow’s 11 stages of Transformative Learning, including critical reflection. Participants will participate in a one hour interview, and will be allowed to review the transcript of the interview for accuracy.

The study is being conducted through Zoom. Lee Williams, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study. Please contact Lee Williams at (509) 554-6394 or TWilliams326@liberty.edu for more information.

Liberty University IRB – 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515
APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT
INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A VETERANS THERAPEUTIC COURT TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING STUDY

Consent

Title of the Project: Transformational Learning In A Washington State Veterans Therapeutic Court
Principal Investigator: T. Lee Williams, Doctoral Candidate, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study
You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be a current participant of the Benton County Veterans Therapeutic Court. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

What is the study about and why is it being done?
There is a large body of literature that addresses the effectiveness of organizational and military learning programs, but very little on veteran’s therapeutic court learning, superficially addressing their transformative learning journey. The purpose of the study is gather information that will help identify essential transformative learning experiences of justice-involved veterans assigned to one of Washington State’s veteran therapeutic courts, helping to identify critical components to help lower recidivism and problematic transition into society.

What will happen if you take part in this study?
My study will be descriptive and not evaluative, so there are no right or wrong answers. I want to capture your realistic experiences as you migrate through the VTC program. If you agree to be in this study, here is the process:
1. Participate in a one-hour audio recorded face to face interview, or video teleconferencing, depending on State guidelines, with me to discuss your Veterans Therapeutic Court journey. The recording will be transcribed, and the interviewee will be allowed to review the transcript for accuracy of intent. The interview will be conducted at a mutually agreed upon time, with attempts made to minimize any impacts to your schedule.
2. The interview transcript will be analyzed by the researcher for emergent themes and once these themes are finalized, will be presented to you for an opportunity to review and comment.
3. I will passively observe your court sessions or review the publicly available recordings of your VTC appearances (15 minutes).
4. I will review any phase change or other court requested essays you write.

How could you or others benefit from this study?
Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. However, by participating in this study you would be contributing to primary research in the experience of transformative learning in veterans’ therapeutic courts. As the VTC experience is better understood, more effective measures can be taken, and lessons learned can be considered to help match veterans with resources to better assist in their veteran’s therapeutic court journey.
More benefits to society include helping assist the veterans to become more productive members of society, and finally, as the transformative learning journey is better understood, and its efficiency is enhanced, society’s willingness to support the program through local tax levies could also increase.

**What risks might you experience from being in this study?**

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. The risks involved in this study include discussion of successes and failures that you have experienced during your military and veterans court journey. However, if, during the interview, any question raises unusually uncomfortable memories, the question can be skipped, or the interview terminated by either the interviewee or the researcher.

**How will personal information be protected?**

All data collected for this study is the property of the researcher (i.e., me). Any records produced by this study will be kept private and strictly controlled. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify an individual participant. Specifically:

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location and in a manner where others will not easily overhear the conversation. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Interviewees will be afforded the opportunity to review the transcriptions for accuracy of thought.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and raw and processed data will be analyzed. All electronic records will be deleted at the completion of this study and any related follow-on work but will be securely stored for a minimum of three years.
- Audio recordings will be transferred to and stored on a password locked computer for the duration of this project. Once transferred the original copies of the recording will be deleted or kept under standard double lock and key security, such as with a password protected computer, locked office door, and/or locked file cabinet.
- Hard copies printouts of transcriptions, researcher field notes, and coding analysis will also be double lock protected.
- Research data and files, both electronic and paper, will be kept for a minimum of three years after completion of this study, and then all related data will be destroyed. During the collection, analysis and storage phase of this project, only the researcher will have access to the study files.
- All precautions will be exercised to maintain the privacy of the participants in this program.

**Is study participation voluntary?**

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Benton County Veteran Treatment Court. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.
**What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?**
If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact me in person or at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw from this study, data collected from you will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

**Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?**
The researcher conducting this study is Lee Williams. You may ask any questions you have now or later. You may also contact the researcher’s faculty sponsor.

**Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?**
If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you are encouraged to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

**Your Consent**
By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will also keep a copy as part of the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

[ ] The researcher has my permission to audio and/or video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

Printed Subject Name ___________________________ Signature & Date ___________________________
APPENDIX E: PERSONAL ESSAY ANALYSIS PROTOCOL

Personal Essay Protocol (adapted from Kerins et al., 2019; Kitchenham, 2008; and Mezirow, 1978a, 1978b, 1991). Note the analysis will be conducted through the review of the veteran’s personal essays. If examples from Mezirow’s stages are found, the phrase will be captured, and the location documented in this matrix. Examples will be coded into themes, compared across multiple essays from the same veteran, if they exist, and used to triangulate against other veteran comments reflecting transformative learning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date:</th>
<th>Essay Type:</th>
<th>Veteran Pseudonym:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage</td>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Veterans Therapeutic Court Example</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A disorienting dilemma</td>
<td>Incarceration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Self-examination with feelings of shame or guilt</td>
<td>Reflecting remorsefully on dishonoring their service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>A critical assessment of assumptions</td>
<td>Realizing that one mistake doesn’t necessarily completely define a veteran’s experience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Recognition that others have traveled the same transformative path</td>
<td>Listening to and discussions with other VTC members, including lessons learned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Exploration of new roles, relationships, and actions</td>
<td>Consideration of what it means to be a veteran and changing interactions with social circles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Develop a new course of action plan</td>
<td>Goals for new ways of interaction with society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Acquisition of knowledge and skills needed for implementing plans</td>
<td>Honing new anger management skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Provisionally trying out new roles</td>
<td>Executing new anger management skills in</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Altering present relationships and forging new relationships</td>
<td>Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Changing a peer group from those who have a tendency towards substance abuse or criminogenic activity</td>
<td>Accepting a leadership or mentoring role in a substance abuse group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Adapted from Kerins et al., 2019; Kitchenham, 2008; and Mezirow (1978a, 1978b; 1991)

---

**REFLECTIVE THOUGHTS:**

**Key Questions** (D. Vacchi, personal communication, 20 September 2020)

1. How do I feel the analysis went?

2. Do I agree with the participants? Why or Why not?

3. Did I insert bias into the analysis, such as inadvertently filling in blanks or omitting comments?

4. What would I do differently next time?

5. Was my end result “the truth,” according to the participant?

**Other Thoughts/Reflections:**
APPENDIX F: OBSERVATION PROTOCOL

Observation Protocol template (adapted from Yin, 2016). Note to the observer, especially noteworthy are emotional tone, proximal distancing, mentor engagements, court positive or negative sentiments, and descriptive learning activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date:</th>
<th>Time:</th>
<th>Location:</th>
<th>Veteran Pseudonym</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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**Descriptive Observations**

**Reflective Observations**

**Transformative Learning Stages:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Disorienting Dilemma</td>
<td>Self-examination with feelings of guilt, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A critical assessment of assumptions</td>
<td>Recognition others have traveled the same transformative path</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploration of new roles, relationships, and actions</td>
<td>Development of a new course of action plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acquisition of knowledge and skills needed for implementing plans</td>
<td>Provisionally trying out new roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Altering present relationships and forging new relationships</td>
<td>Building competence/self-confidence in new roles and relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reintegration new perspective into life</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Schematic of court layout – specific notation on locations of veteran and mentor

- **Judge**
- **Bench**
- **X – Veteran**
- **O – Mentor**

Positive Sentiments:

Negative Sentiments:
REFLECTIVE THOUGHTS:

Key Questions (D. Vacchi, personal communication, 20 September 2020)

1. How do I feel the observation went?

2. Do I agree with the participants? Why or Why not?

3. Did I insert bias into the observation (verbally and non-verbally)?

4. What would I do differently next time?

5. Was my end result “the truth” according to the participant?

Other Thoughts/Reflections:
APPENDIX G: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol (adapted from Yin, 2016). Note that the interview will be conducted physically (preferred), telephonically, or using synchronous videoconferencing tools such as ZOOM™. The following questions will serve as a base but will be informed and enhanced by data collected through observations and essay analysis. Reminders include:

a. Listen more than talk – the voice of the Veteran is the essence.
b. Be careful of rabbit trails (focus is transformative learning)
c. The interview will be recorded, and I will be taking notes.
d. Confidentiality will be attempted.
e. Be sure the recorders are turned on.
f. They will have a chance to review the transcript.
g. Be sure to give the veteran a chance to introduce themselves and confirm how they would prefer to be addressed.

Veteran ID: __________________ Setting Environment: ______________________
Date: __________________________ Time: __________________________

1. Please tell me about your age, ethnicity, military service history, branch of service, military job or specialty, length of service, assignment history, phase, and length in the VTC.

2. Briefly walk me through your journey from when you left military service to today.

I would now like to start our discussion on your journey in the veterans therapeutic court. This will be mapped against three broad areas, addressing your self-perception, beliefs, and lifestyle
habits, all relative to the veterans treatment court. Feel free to ask for clarifications if needed, but most importantly, I am interested in hearing from you about your experiences.

3. Part of an adult’s learning journey often involves particularly impactful experiences where your core thinking changes (often referred to as disorienting dilemmas), such as the first morning of boot camp. When you reflect on your time in the veterans therapeutic court, please describe an experience that caused you to rethink how you would have acted before veterans court.

4. Emotions can play a significant role in our learning experience. How would you describe your emotional journey during your time in veterans therapeutic court?

5. Part of self-reflection includes reevaluating previously held personal or societal assumptions. As you consider your journey, how would you describe changes in your assumptions from when you started the VTC until now?

6. Is there anything else you would like to add concerning how your self-perceptions have changed during your veterans therapeutic journey?

Now I would like to shift to a discussion of beliefs, which can be introspective (such as beliefs about yourself that have changed) and beliefs about others (how opinions towards other groups have changed).
7. Transformational learning includes a time when you are inspired to continue your journey by others around you or who went before you, perhaps signifying a shared misery and success. How would you describe the impact of a “shared journey” during the process of veterans therapeutic court?

8. When you consider your VTC journey, there are often changes in roles, relationships, and actions. How would you describe changes to your relationships during your journey?

9. When you consider your VTC journey, how have your roles changed?

10. When you consider your VTC journey, how have your actions changed?

11. As you think towards the future, what role, relationship, or action, are you most looking forward to changing?

12. One of the potentially challenging parts of this veteran court journey is understanding the past, current, and future you. If you could say one thing to you five years ago, what would you say?

13. Is there anything else you would like to add concerning how your personal beliefs have changed during your veterans therapeutic journey?
Let’s now shift the questioning to the final section, habits that may have changed throughout your veterans court journey.

14. Often, this journey involves creating a new plan of action; how would you describe your current plan of action compared to plans you had before entering the VTC?

15. To execute a new course of action, new knowledge and skills are often required, just like when you learned your job in the military. How would you describe the process of acquiring new knowledge and skills in the veterans therapeutic court as compared to what you experienced in the military?

16. One of the goals of the VTC is to reduce recidivism. As you think about your veterans therapeutic court experiences, describe specific tools or techniques that you have been exposed to that you think will help reduce the likelihood of recidivism of veterans.

17. In the military, supervisors often encouraged members to temporarily experience new roles and responsibilities, and the same is true in the VTC journey. How would you describe your experience of trying new roles during your journey?

18. As you try out new roles and relationships, how would you describe your attitude towards these new experiences during your veterans therapeutic court journey?
19. How would you describe your relationships now versus relationships before you joined the veterans therapeutic court?

20. As you progress through the veterans therapeutic court, there are opportunities to integrate (or reenforce) new skills and perspectives into your life. Reflecting on this, how would you describe your integration journey?

21. When you think about your experience in the veterans therapeutic court, consider five years from now, how would you envision your situation, including social interactions and vocation?

22. Is there anything else you would like to add concerning how your habits have changed during your veterans therapeutic journey?

23. We have covered many topics during our brief time together, and I appreciate the engagement you have shown. One final question, is there anything else you think would be important for me to know about your experiences during your veterans therapeutic court journey?

REFLECTIVE THOUGHTS:

Key Questions (D. Vacchi, personal communication, 20 September 2020)
1. How do I feel the interview went?

2. Do I agree with the participants? Why or Why not?

3. Did I insert bias into the questions, or how I asked the questions (verbally and non-verbally)?

4. What would I do differently next time?

5. Was my end result “the truth,” according to the participant?

Other Thoughts/Reflections:
# APPENDIX H: THEMATIC ANALYSIS AND CODING PROTOCOL

Table 6

*15-point Criteria Checklist For Successful Thematic Analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Process</th>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Transcription</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Data accuracy and immersion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coding</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Individual assessment of all data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Coding process is complete, comprehensive, and cogent.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Adroit combination of extracts into themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Themes were assessed against each other and for data grounding.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Thematic internal validity check – consistent, unique, and convincing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analysis</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Data analyzed not summarized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Verification: Data aligns with analysis – no injected bias</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9</td>
<td>The analysis produces a sapient story – for the data and results.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10</td>
<td>An effective balance between the captured extracts/themes and the analytical prose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>The analysis is “Goldilocks-ed,” balanced, not hurried, but not overanalyzed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written Report</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Foundational methodological assumptions and approaches identified and communicated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>13</td>
<td>Consistency between the described plan, how it was executed, and reported</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Epistemological congruency between analysis and reporting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>15</td>
<td>The researcher is active, not passive, as themes emerge, but sagacious</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Adapted from Braun and Clark, 2006
Table 7

1st Cycle Coding: Using 11 Stages “In Vivo” If Possible (Miles et al., 2020)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Veterans Therapeutic Court Example</th>
<th>“Pre” Code Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A disorienting dilemma</td>
<td>Incarceration; Learning about VTC</td>
<td>Disorienting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Self-examination with feelings of shame or guilt</td>
<td>Reflecting remorsefully on dishonoring their service</td>
<td>Feelings, guilt, self-awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>A critical assessment of assumptions</td>
<td>Realizing that one mistake doesn’t necessarily completely define a veteran’s experience</td>
<td>Assumptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Recognition that others have traveled the same transformative path</td>
<td>Listening to and discussions with other VTC members, including lessons learned</td>
<td>Shared misery, shared experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Exploration of new roles, relationships, and actions</td>
<td>Consideration of what it means to be a veteran and changing interactions with social circles</td>
<td>Trying stuff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Develop a new course of action plan</td>
<td>Goals for new ways of interaction with society</td>
<td>Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Acquisition of knowledge and skills needed for implementing plans</td>
<td>Honing new anger management skills</td>
<td>Skill development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Provisionally trying out new roles</td>
<td>Executing new anger management skills in different stressful settings</td>
<td>Leap of faith</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Altering present relationships and forging new relationships</td>
<td>Changing a peer group from those who have a tendency towards substance abuse or criminogenic activity</td>
<td>New friends, families, altering relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships</td>
<td>Accepting of a leadership or mentoring role in a substance abuse group</td>
<td>Skill honing, getting easier, I can do it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Reintegration of new perspective into life</td>
<td>Using new coping skills during daily life engagements such as driving</td>
<td>Integration</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 8

2nd Cycle Coding: Taking Codes to Patterns (adapted from Miles & Huberman, 2020, Miles, 2020, p. 82)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mezirow Phase</th>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>VTC Example</th>
<th>“Pre” Code Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phases 1-3</td>
<td>Self-perception</td>
<td>They have to believe it is disorienting</td>
<td>“I perceive” – a hard internal look for understanding</td>
<td>I think, I feel, I assumed, I can/can’t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phases 4-5</td>
<td>Beliefs</td>
<td>Can be internal and external</td>
<td>“I believe”, “I think I can do it”</td>
<td>Religion, God, values, service, camaraderie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phases 6-11</td>
<td>Habits</td>
<td>Skills, Knowledge, Honed, rebued</td>
<td>“I did”, “I acted”</td>
<td>Action, do/did it. Second nature, lifestyle</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A+: A positive attitude. B-: A negative behavior.

Jot: Be sure to jot on a transcript

Memo: Be sure to memo (Saldana, 2016; Miles et al., 2020): Summary, problems with the study. Pp. 90-91 Memos are about ideas – just do it.

Final Thematic Coding: Highest Level Binning

Table 9

Major Thematic Mapping

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relations Engagement (Start/Stop/Continue)</th>
<th>Vision-casting</th>
<th>Rebluing</th>
<th>Knowledge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Others</td>
<td>Internal</td>
<td>External</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Son/Daughter</td>
<td>Court Officials (Social Worker, Judge, Prosecuting/Defense Attorney)</td>
<td>Self</td>
<td>Court Officials (Social Worker, Judge, Prosecuting/Defense Attorney)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mom/Dad</td>
<td>Mentor</td>
<td>Can’t to Can</td>
<td>Mentor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Husband/Wife</td>
<td>Friends/Co-workers</td>
<td>Dreams</td>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended</td>
<td>Animals</td>
<td>Beliefs</td>
<td>Cheerleading</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
One of the principal assumptions made in preparing this study was that transformative learning was indeed occurring during the veteran’s journey in veterans treatment court. However, since this had never been researched, a concurrent check was made to ensure transformative learning did indeed occur. To confirm this assumption, additional detailed coding was accomplished on the essays, observations, and interviews of the participants to ensure thematic saturation did indeed occur and that transformative learning was indeed happening.

**Transformative Learning Discussion**

During the detailed coding from the three data sources (i.e., interviews, observations, and essays), significant themes were identified as systemically tied to Mezirow’s stages of transformative learning. The number of data collections per transformative learning stage ranged from 12 connected to stage four to 37 occurrences linked to stage ten. Interestingly, the higher transformative learning levels received more occurrences. Table 7 captures the aforementioned data breakdown. In the table, the number associated with the O (i.e., observation) corresponds to one of four court observation dates. The number associated with the E (i.e., essay) corresponds to the phase the veteran requested to phase into. For example, E2 would correspond to the veteran’s essay asking to be phased up from phase one into phase two.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>TL1</th>
<th>TL2</th>
<th>TL3</th>
<th>TL4</th>
<th>TL5</th>
<th>TL6</th>
<th>TL7</th>
<th>TL8</th>
<th>TL9</th>
<th>TL10</th>
<th>TL11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Table 10**

*Data Occurrences During Interviews, Essays, and Observations*
Using the summation data from Table 7, a bar graph was populated, and a linear trend line was calculated (Rose, 2014). The trend line shows the tendency towards higher-level transformative learning stages (Figure 2). As discussed in Chapter Four, this trend is not surprising given the maturation program stage the participants occupied in the court program and the vision-casting provided by the mentors and court officials.
Transformative Learning Stages As a Function of Data Occurrences

The following prose confirms the transformative learning stages that inductively emerged from the data.

**Transformative Learning Stage Mapping**

**Stage 1: Disorienting Dilemma**

**Veterans Court First Encounter:** For many individuals, simple incarceration would be a disorienting dilemma. However, many of the participants had extensive engagement with the legal system. For instance, Gena had the judge as her representative attorney many years ago when she faced an earlier criminal charge. Further, since VTC-Alpha had only been in existence for about two years, celebrating their second anniversary on 15 June 2021, perhaps this disorienting dilemma theme is not unexpected. Still, many veterans stressed an ignorance of the veterans treatment court. Adam mentioned that the veterans court was different from his other
court experiences. Haley, a member of the inaugural VTC-Alpha class, said her first exposure to veterans court was when her lawyer mentioned it. Haley said, after hearing about the program, she asked her lawyer, “is there any chance that I could not be a part of this program?” Like many disorienting dilemmas, this was more of an instant tipping point. For others, such as Edward, also an inaugural member of VTC-Alpha, the process was more like a building to a crescendo, as he conducted his research as his lawyers and counselors discussed the possibility of veterans court with him. Veterans, such as Edward, weighed their various options and ran a personal cost-benefit analysis, and decided if this therapeutic jurisprudence option was a good fit. This goodness of fit often included reevaluating closely held assumptions found in stage three.

**Stage 2: Self-examination of Feelings**

**Emotional Rollercoaster:** Adam was the veteran who used the term “rollercoaster” when referring to his emotional journey. This term was also used by Watkins et al. (2018, p. 262), as discussed in Chapter Two. When reflecting on their emotional journey, most veterans did experience shame and guilt, as was voiced by Adam in his phase-up essay where he mentioned being “severely ashamed and riddled with guilt.” This emotional journey was also showcased through a sense of loss, such as Edward’s and Mike’s discussion of a loss of relationship with their kids. The emotional journey was palpable in the veterans’ voices. For instance, Bruce related that he was “angry,” which exacerbated his alcohol abuse. Some veterans, such as Gena, expressed raw emotion when considering the loss of tangible relationships with her children. But as the veterans progressed through their transformative learning journey, they gained hope. Gena mentioned a positive outlook, and Adam noted living his “best [Adam] ever.”
While not every veteran expressed emotions mapped to every wedge listed in Mersino’s (2017) emotional SASHET circle, it was clear that there were definite negative emotions (shame and guilt as discussed by Mersino) as well as positive emotions such as Edward’s expression of not feeling shame when asking for help and that living a sober life was “awesome.” He further noted, he was happy with life, something Edward admitted he could not say for a long time, and that the only thing he previously thought could bring him happiness was drugs.

Similarly, Gena expressed true happiness instead of fake happiness, which she previously used as a mask to cover up her pain. Realizing she laughed one day when leaving the social worker’s office was a marked turning point for Gena. While Adam’s positivity bar was a little lower, he still expressed his happiness with his current situation and no longer waking up dreading parts of his life, like going to work, “which he doesn’t do now.” Lastly, Haley, who moved to Phase Four, and previously struggled with depression, noted that as she started veterans court, she was focused on keeping the court happy, but now she is “happy now … genuinely happy.”

Stage 3: Critical Assessment of Assumptions

**A Court Neck-snap:** While this stage could be overlapped to some extent with the disorienting dilemma listed in Stage 1, the principal difference here was dealing with the fact that therapeutic jurisprudence, as opposed to regular jurisprudence, requires that the court officials indeed look for win-win solutions with the defendant. Adam noted that he specifically felt the court “wanted me to do better” and was not there just to push him out or “get him into further trouble.” Mike, who had been using drugs for over 40 years, noted that the veterans treatment court was “the best thing that ever happened to him,” with the court looking out for his “best interests.” Gena had been kicked out of drug treatment court several times and, at 61, had been
using since she was nine years old. When she was notified about the option of veterans court, she admitted a blossoming hope that the court could help her be successful. Such success, she lamented, could reflect the pride she experienced when she took her oath of military service with a hope that those feelings might be rekindled through veterans court. Haley perhaps summed it up best when discussing VTC-Alpha, “it was probably the best thing to happen to me.”

**Stage 4: Recognition Others Have Traveled The Same Transformative Path**

**Shared Misery:** Of all the data collected, the least occurrences were tied to stage 4, with only 12 recorded instances of veterans discussing this shared journey. While not necessarily surprising given the newness of the court, all ten veterans mentioned the shared journey; eight of the veterans did so during the interview portion. For instance, when discussing his mentor, a Vietnam-era veteran, Bruce said even though they served in different wars, “it was all the same, right?” In addition, for some veterans, while their support system may not have faced the same court experiences, they were there with them. For instance, Gena noted that her support structure was like “family,” recognizing she had it “in her” and just wanted to help her “find it and pull it back out.” Gena specifically noted one of her drug treatment counselors kicked her out of two previous drug treatment plans but is now celebrating Gena’s success. However, Haley, who recently moved up to Phase Four, captured this shared journey most succinctly:

> [many people] are in so long, and I seen a lot of people you know, relapse, go back to jail. Um, someone who’s been really in the program has been [fellow court member who recently graduated]…. I could tell that, you know, the team kind of, you know, was not, didn’t believe. I think that they believe in everyone when they first come in, but they were kind of, you know, like, ah, yeah, you’re getting into a lot of trouble. And that was me. I was getting into trouble all the time. And [fellow court member] pulled himself up,
he had, he had his relapses, he pulled himself up, and he’s doing so good now. He’s going to school, he has a job, and he has his family, and he’s just doing so well. And, and I’m so proud of him. And I was like, you know, … people can change. He’s one of the big ones, lot of people that have, you know, graduated. And you know, all of us didn’t start, you know, not everyone in the program has the charges, not everyone in the program has the same issue. [Fellow veteran] was one of those people I saw overcoming those struggles.

**Stage 5: Exploring New Roles, Relationships, and Actions**

**Blazing New Trails:** While Mezirow combined three components, roles, relationships, and actions, into this stage, from a qualitative study perspective, during the interview, each member was asked separately to allow further understanding of the journey. For several veterans, such as Haley and Edward, the new relationships include their mentors. As mentioned by Nick, his new actions included community service, as he started to be involved in community service because of his veterans court sanctions. Gena commented that her roles changed “from a loser to a productive member of society,” which is the ultimate end goal of veterans therapeutic court.

**Stage 6: New Course of Action Plans**

**Determine Personal Pace and Cadence:** Goal planning is a vital component of the essays, court interactions, and interviews. Hence, it was not surprising that the data occurrences supported the prominent role this stage represents. For Adam, he admitted he had no goals before veterans court, but now goals are one of the things most often considered, noting he didn’t have a job before veterans court and now has one he loves. For Haley, she said she had absolutely “no plan” before veterans court. Some veterans, such as Bruce, noted one of his broad goals was to just “keep moving forward” as he purposefully found “things to do with my time. Now that I’ve
changed, and uh, you know, crocheting, building models, ‘um, stuff like that instead of drinking.’ For Nick, the new course of action was also a life of sobriety. For Ken, the veteran court precipitated a complete 180-degree turnaround. He previously lived with a complete lack of goals while “running and gunning” drugs on the street. He focused on making money to continue his drug use and dependency devolution, and now he chooses to live a drug-free life. The most prevalent goals included building or rebuilding relationships with family, particularly children. Edward noted the lost opportunities with his child, as his geographically separated former spouse while encouraging Edward to be part of his daughter’s life, would not allow him to talk to their child if he was impaired, and “unfortunately I chose that every night.”

**Stage 7: Acquisition of New Knowledge and Skills**

**Practice Their Pace and Rhythm:** Therapeutic jurisprudence dictates a personalized planning regime for each veteran to develop new skills at their tempo as they learn or relearn how to manage their lives while sober. For some, it is subtle. For instance, Adam, who loves the outdoors, was asked when his next fishing trip was planned. Adam replied he was not sure; he had other responsibilities to take care of first, including building trust. This building of trust was also echoed in Adam’s interview when he noted, “I’m more trustworthy because I wasn’t as trustworthy, not even close before I started to change my life.” For Bruce, this acquisition of new skills included learning to vocalize his emotions, especially those associated with grief and loss. For Charlie, these new skills introduced by the veterans court helped him “see the way to those solutions.” Notably, when asked how the process of learning new skills and knowledge compared to their military experience, Bruce mentioned, jokingly, “I don’t get yelled at.” Still, overall, many like Charlie noted the process he experienced in veterans court was very similar to what he experienced in military life. Perhaps Gena summed it up best when she noted, the
veterans court staff helped her reach out and trust others. For Gena, her new skills included recognizing her compulsive behavior and developing tools to address it, as noted in the next section.

Stage 8: Provisionally Trying Out New Roles

**Fake it Until You Make It:** According to Mezirow, head knowledge must translate into action to continue the transformative learning journey. As the veterans gathered new skills, they were afforded the opportunity or took the initiative to practice those new skills. Gena, for example, again who had been an active addict for decades, took advantage of her new knowledge and skills to control her compulsive behaviors by “I think before I do. I try to talk to myself before I do ’um, and I try to make the best choice.” Further, Ken was able to serve in a leadership role in his place of residence, helping other addicts transition to a sober life. Nick noted that because of the program, he was using his experiences in the veterans court to get his life back on track, celebrating over 100 days sober, more than he had experienced in decades of drug use.

Stage 9: Altering Present Relationships and Forging New Ones:

**Connected Companions:** Relationships, 360-degree relationships both within and outside the court, were a central discussion point throughout the veterans’ journey and were discussed in more detail in the emergent themes section of Chapter Four. Interestingly cleaving relationships carried both meanings in this study. Charlie noted during his journey, there were several relationships he had to cleave or separate. Specifically, Charlie stated one of the challenges for people is:

they’re hanging out with somebody that’s probably still using, it doesn’t cause them to use, but it gets them in inadvertently into some other legal, legal trouble. And, you know,
it’s more than one way that it can affect you with some people that are just not in your best interest towards your life goals or keeping you away from staying in the court systems.

However, for other veterans, new relationships took their place. For instance, developing new relationships, such as with mentors, played a significant role in this journey. For example, Haley mentioned her mentor was one of the first people she called after receiving notification she had been approved for a home loan. Her loan approval was an incredibly emotional time for Haley after experiencing protracted bouts of homelessness. Edward said he believed his mentor would “take a bullet for me.”

Further, Nick summarized the personal importance of his mentor when he noted his mentor was a fellow Marine, which added a little more “pressure” on Nick to be successful, not wanting to let a fellow Marine down. It was also interesting that Nick chose the words “fellow Marine,” indicating the service pride and bonding continues. Other new relations involve court officials, with many veterans mentioning the judge as a substantial relationship. For instance, John noted that while he was outside the court building, the judge came up and talked to him, taking a personal interest in how John was doing. This engagement further shaped John’s appreciation for how different veterans therapeutic court was from other courts he experienced, building on previous transformative learning stages such as stage one. Similarly, other court officials such as the caseworker and even the prosecutor were noted as having a relational impact on the veterans.

Stage 10: Building Competence and Confidence

Just Try It: In Mezirow’s traditional ten stages of transformative learning, this stage immediately follows stage eight, provisionally trying out new roles and actions. Opportunities to
integrate (or reenforce) also build competence and confidence as surely as shooting a successful free-throw. Interestingly, this stage had the most data occurrences, perhaps relating to where most veterans found themselves – in phases two or three and trying and integrating new roles. As these roles and experiences are encountered, self-confidence typically follows. However, with the addition of a more focused relational stage – stage 9, there was some overlap between answers to questions, especially questions 18 and 20. Yet, the building of competency and confidence actually could be found in other questions as well. But to help narrow the focus, the veteran’s attitude was a key determination, as attitude often reflects confidence. Not only did veterans describe their current attitude, but they also contrasted their attitude before veterans court. For instance, while Nick was not convinced, he developed a broader or deeper skillset during veterans court; he noted his attitude was much better due to his forced engagements in veterans court, allowing him to gain his self-respect back.

**Stage 11: Reintegration of New Perspective Into Life**

**Putting It Into Practice:** The integration phase, while the capstone for the transformative learning journey, is also the focus of veterans therapeutic court. Unsurprisingly, this stage also logged one of the most numerous data occurrences. Veterans were eager to discuss their progress, even if the gain was not as positively sloped as they, and the court, would have preferred. For instance, Mike and John both indicated they expected to live longer due to the skills they developed in VTC. For John, who before Veterans Court contemplated suicide, this was a marked improvement. Additionally, three veterans, during their interview, mentioned suicidal tendencies during their journey. They credited the veterans court with skills and people to help them mitigate those issues. While not all veterans wrestled with suicidal tendencies, all had to make sure they did not experience a drug or alcohol relapse during veterans treatment
court. None of the veterans experienced significant sanctions during data gathering. However, one member did experience a substantial relapse within weeks following data gathering. Like other integrations, sometimes the most important way to learn mastery of a skill is after making a mistake. For this veteran, and others, the journey is continuing.

**Thematic Saturation**

Given the robustness of the occurrences and the commonality found in mapping the data against the various transformative learning stages discussed in previous sections, the researcher is confident thematic saturation occurred. However, given the personalized journey of transformative learning, additional data in occurrences, text, and voice could provide additional richness and insights into an individual veteran’s journey. Further, they could also combine to form more broadly applicable understandings.