A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF THE MOTIVATIONAL

EXPERIENCES OF UNITED STATES SERVICE MEMBERS ATTENDING COLLEGE

WHILE ON ACTIVE DUTY

by

Sean L. Mulvaney

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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Abstract

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was to explore the motivation of attending college through the experiences of active-duty Navy service members stationed at Naval Air Station East (NAS East). Specifically, the study sought to better understand how intrinsic and extrinsic motivators impact the behavior or actions that compel that small percentage of Navy service members to pursue a college education while balancing their military service requirements. With self-determination theory as the theoretical framework, the central research question asked, "What are the determining motivators that influence United States Navy service members to attend college while on active duty?" Data collection involved purposeful sampling from active-duty participants stationed at Naval Air Station East. The research employed three data collection methods: audio-recorded personal interviews, focus groups, and participants' written journals. Moustakas' phenomenological methodology guided the data analysis while In Vivo Coding and Descriptive coding styles identified the thematic elements of the study. The research revealed that participants possessed a blend of extrinsic regulators stemming from external influences such as environmental factors and inspirational support. The participants also embraced intrinsic regulators of motivation deriving from internal passions such as faith and a drive to achieve satisfaction in their personal career growth.

Keywords: qualitative, phenomenology, hermeneutic, motivation, intrinsic, extrinsic

Copyright Page

Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my wife, Darlene. Saying my wife is supportive is a massive understatement. Like other doctoral candidates, my journey has been long, but Darlene has always motivated me even on days when the goal seemed too far away to achieve. She also remained sympathetic and loyal during the long nights when I was unable to provide the attention she deserves. Thank you, sweetheart, for always believing in me. I love you more than you can comprehend.

I also dedicate this dissertation to my two daughters, Ashley and Taylor. Ashley, my princess, is the sweetest person I know. She can illuminate any room with her positive spirit and caring nature. Thank you for being my ray of sunshine on those cloudy days. Taylor, my little buddy, you truly are one of the most driven and focused people on the planet. Your passion and fearless approach to goal achievement are unbelievably inspiring. My girls tell me that I motivated them to complete their degrees at Liberty University, but they undoubtedly reciprocated that inspiration. Thank you, both; I love you more than I can say.

I would like to thank my mother for always believing that I would finish my academic journey. Though the Lord called you home in 2020, I know that you are always with me. Mom, your belief in me was unwavering. I am unable to repay your steadfast faith in me. I love and miss you, Mom.

Lastly, but most importantly, I would like to thank God for making my journey possible while providing me the strength to continue pushing. Without His blessings, none of this would be possible.

Acknowledgments

There is certainly an immense amount of heartfelt gratitude for the constant guidance provided by Dr. Savage and Dr. Vacchi. The unwavering mentoring and understanding I have received from them during this journey are inspirational and humbling. Their steady support, direction, and expertise proved immeasurable during this process. I was truly blessed to have you both during this journey. Saying "thank you" does not convey my true gratitude.

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List of Abbreviations

Department of Defense (DOD)

Federal Aviation Administration (FAA)

Naval Air Station (NAS)

Naval Air Training and Operating Procedures Standardization (NATOPS)

Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Military Community and Family Policy (ODASD)

Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Tuition Assistance (TA)

United States Government Accountability Office (USGAO)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

This chapter provides a brief background into motivation from a behavioral perspective focusing on the small percentage of active-duty Navy personnel attending college. The tuition assistance benefits are available to most Navy service members, but only a small percentage utilize them. The chapter discusses what the Navy provides for tuition assistance while providing insight into how education is incorporated into organizational motivation. The chapter continues by highlighting the study's focus on the self-determination theory and how the various assumptions intersect with personal investment of the research. The chapter proceeds by discussing the study's intentions to research motivation through active-duty personnel pursing college because they make up only a small portion of the military population that is eligible to enroll in school. The chapter continues by discussing the exploration of the study's significance on educational research and military personnel. The chapter concludes with a description of the study questions and definitions of terms that are important to understand for this study.

Background

The United States Navy offers many opportunities for enlisted service members who choose to pursue a college degree. Research has shown that depending on their financial standing, many enlisted service members place a high emphasis on college benefits as a primary reason for enlisting (Barr, 2016). Despite access to higher education opportunities, along with financial and organizational support, many service members choose to forgo college education while on active duty. The Department of Defense (2021) reported that 34,162 Navy personnel used military tuition assistance in 2020. This number is approximately 12% of the Navy's enlisted inventory (Department of Defense, 2020). Numerous reasons exist to explain why most

Navy service members do not utilize an available college benefit; however, focusing on the motivation of that small percentage who do enroll will highlight the degree completion puzzle from the standpoint of those who take advantage of the available opportunity. By exploring the motivational influences of this small population, researchers may determine specific behaviors and profound experiences shaping internal drive.

Behavior is significantly influenced by a range of characteristics and environmental factors. Personal aspects of behavior motivate individuals from more internal means, whereas environmental factors tend to derive from external perspectives (Deci & Fiaste, 1995). Both internal and external factors are the basis for motivation, where behavior is focused on a need or desire to accomplish specific conclusions (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Sansone & Harackiewicz, 2000). Motivation grows from both internal and external factors. Some motivators stem from pure volition, an image of personal interests or ideals; however, other motivations are external, stemming from coercion or pressures designed to create behavioral adjustments (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Though motivation derives from internal mechanisms, experiences are often the basis for future behavior. Parents and peers are among the most critical influences that generate much of what is considered personal motivation (Reeve, 2005). Researchers have determined that the level of college education achieved by parents plays a role in subsequent generations attending college (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). Socioeconomic and educational structures also play a role in whether service members view college as a priority (Barr, 2016). Sailors bring these influences with them as they enter military service.

The United States Navy utilizes a variety of motivational instruments designed to encourage personnel to attend college. These influences are also aimed at attempting to spur

Navy personnel into using benefits, such as the service's tuition assistance program, to those who are currently eligible and can reasonably attend college while on active duty (Department of the Navy, 2021). One prevailing theme of motivational influence is that intrinsic motives and personal values are primary contributors to personal motivation (Gong et al., 2017). Each service member who attends college has reasons for attending. The exploration of these motivators drives this study.

Historical Context

College was not always a focus or priority for the military, but the partnership between the military and post-secondary schooling has grown stronger since the Vietnam War era where service deferments for college attendance and divided mindsets on the war itself were pervasive throughout the nation (Higbee, 2011). With the growth of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, the relationship between service members and college has strengthened even more. The focus on providing college benefits was implemented as a recruiting incentive while also providing transition assistance for departing service members (Higbee, 2011).

Another essential aspect of the Navy's focus on education is how service members are assessed on their performance, specifically the personnel evaluation process. Here, service members are measured on several performance traits to determine the mastery of their present paygrade and readiness to accept the responsibilities of the next paygrade. The evaluation has changed over time to reflect the evolving mission of the Navy and the expectations of the modern service member. As this evaluation process has changed, there has been a clear emphasis on college enrollment and continuing education (Department of the Navy, 2019).

Despite the initiative to increase awareness and emphasis on education, the Department of Defense (2020) reported that only 7.7% of all enlisted Navy service members have a

bachelor's degree, and 1.3% earned a graduate degree or higher.

The Navy Tuition Assistance program provides $250.00 per credit hour for eligible service members to use toward up to 18 college credit hours per fiscal year. There are eligibility requirements that must be met before applying for this benefit. Navy service members must be a part of their present command for at least a year prior to the request, must be actively serving on active duty for a minimum of 2 years prior to the request, must have passed the most current physical fitness assessment, must have passed the most current advancement exam, must be attending a regionally accredited school, must produce a copy of the degree completion plan, must receive counseling from a Navy college counselor, and must receive command approval. Lastly, one of the most important requirements is to achieve a passing grade of a "C" or higher to avoid repayment. Although these standards currently exist, they fluctuate depending on available funding (Department of the Navy, 2022, March 24). Pundits may point to mission restrictions requiring certain prerequisites be met before tuition assistance approval is granted as a reason for lower numbers. Those within the Department of Defense note that beyond deployment cycles, tuition assistance usage may be connected to the general economy's performance. Despite participation levels, the Department of Defense asserts that the benefit is a recruiting incentive that pays dividends (Gross, 2018).

Social Context

The availability of incentives is not necessarily an indicator of an outcome. Often, it is the difference between conceptualized goal processes that act as performance actions and the perceptual emphasis on external incentives (Vansteenkiste et al., 2006). Having the correct balance of motivating styles generally produces results that are personally valued. Motivation derived from high control mechanisms or structure produces less adaptive results (Haerens et al.,

2018). Service members benefit from having a variety of support structures in place aimed at creating a culture of success. However, many Navy service members still avoid this backing, regardless of educational status. The lack of resource utilization may support the notion that individuals are motivated to attend college regardless of tuition assistance status. Molina and Morse (2017) alluded to this assertion in determining that 44% of military students never meet with an academic advisor either employed by the college or affiliated with the military. They also concluded that the same percentage of military students never have a meeting with faculty outside of the classroom. This data raises concerns about purpose while implying that motivation may be a matter of enthusiasm or internal fortitude.

The military is deeply engaged in attempting to provide service members with incentives that are representative of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. The U.S. Navy addresses the focus on motivation by shaping what is considered a more well-rounded member of the military through their evaluation procedures (Department of the Navy, 2019). The U.S. Navy implies that employing the evaluation process is a significant part of the development process to modify behavior. By creating obligations, leaders are fostering voluntary intentional expectations (Cibik, 2018). An important aspect in motivation is creating a sense of internal drive. Previous research has discovered that depersonalizing members of a group produces affiliation. Though it is an effective behavioral shaping tool by itself, it falls short of full integration because behavior does not gain permanence without autonomous-supportive environments (Pawinski & Chami, 2019). Exploring an autonomous-supportive environment propels the need to understand motivation as a phenomenon from the perspective of the service member. It also creates a desire to establish an understanding as to why some persevere where others fail to meet the expectation. In order to study service members in this regard, it is important to understand more than organizational

expectations and norms, because military lifestyle is unique in many regards.

Military organizations employ a regimented approach to work life, creating a culture within itself that is largely dependent on the environmental and social influences that service members experience (Brown et al., 2013). The military uses this approach to group dynamics and teamwork as a process focused on eliminating individualism and forming a bond with others in the unit. By emphasizing teamwork and uniformity, service members are better able to acclimate to the subculture. This conditioning aspect of military subculture fosters a sense of confidence (Dillard & Yu, 2016). Yet, within this subculture of self-assurance and trust, Navy service members face challenges in balancing their personal desires with the needs of the mission. Their internal conflict may contribute to struggles with external balances and provide brevity on why some Navy service members attend college and others do not.

Theoretical Context

Deci and Ryan discussed that the self-determination theory (SDT) distinguishes actions within classes of behaviors based on intent or motivation. They concentrated the theory on three basic psychological needs: relatedness, autonomy, and competence. Attempting to satisfy these needs contributes to motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2016). The SDT aperture was expanded, asserting that motivation is theoretically discrete but relational with behavior regulations (Howard et al., 2016). Deci and Ryan broadened the scope of SDT further by incorporating four subcategories of extrinsic motivation to include external, introjection, identification, and integration (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Though the focus on the external aspect of motivation is an important facet of this study, it may not entirely explain the internal drive of task completion in a counterintuitive culture. Still, this internal conflict is important to SDT because it provides understanding of how a small percentage of individuals embrace a macro-level influence that is less impactful at a

micro level—such would appear to be the case considering the amount of focus the Navy has placed, organizationally, on education assistance despite it not being broadly utilized (Department of Defense, 2021). Additionally, there is a gradual development approach anticipated within the constructs of SDT where the theory organically develops based on convergently supported behavioral research (Ryan & Deci, 2019). By expanding the concept of intrinsic reward predicated on goal accomplishment, SDT may further expand to better explain a subculture that illustrates an adverse response to less popular behavior. From a theoretical perspective, SDT provides guidance while still allowing this study to address the gap in the literature from an active-duty service member's perspective. SDT may also provide better insight on specific motivators impacting the potential duality with attending college while balancing the unique lifestyle of being active-duty military.

Situation to Self

I am an active-duty Navy senior enlisted leader. Having served in the Navy for over 24 years, I possess experiences that create biases and assumptions needing isolation, such as my innate understanding of Navy enlisted service members' work schedules and individual training progressions. My time spent in the Navy has provided personal insight. The schedules and training mandates that most of the study's participants are enduring are similar to work timetables I have experienced. I began my career as a junior enlisted service member until earning promotion to the level of senior enlisted. Through the years, I have lived through many professional challenges shared by many of the participants.

I have also utilized a variety of military education support programs to earn several college degrees while on active duty. I have earned a bachelor's degree in general studies, a master's degree in management and leadership, and an education specialist degree in curriculum

and instruction. I have utilized most of the education support services the military provides to earn these degrees while on active duty. Furthermore, my specialized military training has allotted me the opportunity to train and earn certifications in combat information and a variety of air traffic control positions. The Navy has also trained me to serve in the program management role of a variety of areas including equal opportunity, sexual assault response, drug and alcohol awareness, and casualty assistance. These experiences shape many of my organizational viewpoints.

Another important aspect is my age. I am much older than most Navy service members and must account for the acceptance of technology gaps that exist between generations. In many cases, I have children older than many of the younger service members under my leadership. This generational gap is a legitimate challenge in some areas of communication. I am more of a face-to-face communicator, whereas many of the younger service members are more comfortable using electronic means of communication. My largest concern with electronic communication is the lack of verbal and physical dialogue.

Naval leaders are trained to identify, address, and fix deficiencies among other service members. The teamwork aspect of military service is one that derives from trust and integrity. I am trained to assist any personnel under my leadership who need assistance. Support and problem-solving are not only expectations from military leaders, but they are also among the most rewarding aspects of the job. I take great pride and enjoyment in helping service members through challenging times while guiding them to achieve personal goals. The data is sensitive and anonymous, mandating the researcher to remain aware of those restrictions and his role during the study. I am not a naval leader for the purposes of this study and will not address the participants' issues in that capacity. I will remain acute to my role throughout the study. The

participants are active duty, but none of the participants work for me. Though the personnel are stationed at Naval Air Station East (NAS East), data will not be gathered in a way that creates personal discomfort for the service members or threatens their military service.

Problem Statement

The problem is that only a small percentage of United States service members attend college while on active-duty despite it being virtually cost-free and convenient. In fact, there is a deficiency in available research that explores why service members across all military organizations do or do not attend college while on active-duty. Though there are concentrated efforts highlighting motivation, the phenomenon still exists. The majority of active-duty Navy service members have access to the same education benefits and opportunities, but most do not pursue college. There is, however, a small percentage of service members who do attend college courses (Department of Defense, 2021). There is quantitative research depicting motivational concerns among active-duty personnel in maintaining physical fitness standards. This lack of motivation exists despite a clear understanding of organizational mandates preceding promotion opportunities (Maclin-Akinyemi et al., 2017). Among available data, there is data implementing concerns of motivational behavior with military personnel in educational settings (Tchitchinadze, 2020). There is also data that illustrates best practices to keep military students motivated after enrollment (Fernandez et al., 2019). However, there is a deficiency in qualitative explorations that better explain the motivations of the small percentage of active-duty Navy service members attending college. Obtaining a more thorough knowledge base of this phenomenon through a qualitative lens allows the researcher to collect data from the participants perspective by exploring how and why they feel, as opposed to garnering simple statistics on the logic of motivation. The percentage of Navy service members attending school compared to those that do

not seems to indicate that there may be a transformative difference in motivation between those who pursue a college degree and those who decide to forgo the opportunity to attend post-secondary education.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study is to explore the motivation of attending college through the experiences of active-duty Navy service members stationed at NAS East. At this stage in the research, *motivation* is defined as a movement to perform an act or desire to engage in a specific behavior (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Gunnell & Gaudreau, 2015). The research sought to discover the personal aspirations and motivational factors that compel some individuals to pursue college education despite the many intrinsic and extrinsic impacts in their lives while serving in the Navy. The SDT framed the research, as it provides introspection into the different motivators that ultimately influence and guide behavior (Deci & Ryan, 2000). SDT is relevant because it emphasizes a comprehensive focus on social, cognitive, and emotional influences and their effects on personal satisfaction (Evans, 2015).

Significance of the Study

Many studies focus on motivation and college attendance (Black & Deci, 2000; Buch et al., 2016; Cerasoli et al., 2014; Gagne & Deci, 2008; Respondek et al., 2017). However, there is a gap in the research exploring the motivation from the perspective of active-duty service members attending college. This study addresses that void while providing empirical, theoretical, and practical insight that benefit naval leaders, military policy reviewers, and Navy service members who either desire to attend college or are currently enrolled.

Empirical Significance

Current studies describe how important intrinsic and extrinsic motivators are in guiding behavior. Many studies analyze the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness as they pertain to SDT (Gagne & Deci, 2005; Church et al., 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2016; Arvanitis, 2017; Flannery, 2017; Lou et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2019). A gap in the research still exists regarding an exploration of motivation from the perspective of the active-duty Navy service members' drive to attend college. By gaining an understanding as to their motives and thoughts on college attendance, the research will better recognize the mindset and outlook on motivation from the service member's viewpoint. By gaining personal perspective, it allows the data to tell their story and provide insight into the thought processes or struggles experienced by the participants.

Theoretical Significance

This study utilizes the self-determination theory. Within the theory, there is evidence to assert that intrinsic motivation plays a role in college attendance if students enroll out of genuine interest and without preconceived expectations of organizational rewards. Moreover, the established research within this theory affirms that individuals who are extrinsically motivated are less likely to repeat the action, even if success is obtained (Vansteenkiste et al., 2006). This would enhance the notion that SDT supports attending college for personal reasons and not as a response to organizational advocation. This is important to note because of the many support functions allotted to active-duty service members designed to entice college attendance. Though there are many studies analyzing quantifiable data measuring the motivation through veterans schooling and military members' motivation, there is a lack of research that explores the personal aspects associated with service members' motivation to attend courses. This study is

distinguishable from others because it focuses only on active-duty participants in college. A qualitative phenomenological research study exploring their motivation through SDT may illuminate the individual motives and justifiers of the service members' experiences while also creating a better understanding of why they are compelled to attend college while on active duty.

Practical Significance

Military service is entrenched in many ways to incorporate pride and execution into motivation. Much of the pride is based on historical relevance and precedent. There are naval resources available that address organizational support for those seeking college enrollment. The resources provide insight into readiness and assistance that are important during preparation. They also aid in streamlining the understanding of expectations (Department of the Navy, 2021). They are guidelines that service members may understand but may not apply in all aspects of balancing college demands with their workday. However, the low numbers indicate the need to expand the research to explore those unique attributes that motivate service members to attend college. The goal is not to ascertain a cause for deficiency toward service members not attending college, but more to provide brevity on what differentiates the service members who do attend college from others. It is especially important to understand that college is an elective process in most aspects of military service. The focus is on performing the duties that service members are trained to execute (Department of the Navy, 2019). But, analyzing motivation through the lives of service members who place a high emphasis on college, especially when it is not mandatory, is important to further research on motivation. Also, by exploring motivation from the service member's point of view, it provides valuable data for naval leaders to better understand the intricate ways in which their personnel are motivated. Though the missions may be diverse, the concept of understanding how service members think is a universal concern. Lastly, gaining a

better understanding of how active-duty military service members are motivated may benefit

those not in the military arena by better understanding the relationships between employers and

employees, or educators and students.

<div align="center">**Research Questions**</div>

The research questions focus on the understanding of autonomy, competence, and

relatedness and how they shape the participants' motivation. The questions also explore extrinsic

and intrinsic motivational factors that impact the behavior of those service members attending

college.

Central Research Question

What are the determining motivators that influence United States Navy service members

to attend college while on active duty?

The central question derives from the prevailing focus on motivation. Gaining a better

understanding of why a select number of service members attend college may provide brevity on

the types and levels of motivation possessed by the personnel attending college. Moreover, there

is a need to ascertain perspective on the level of autonomy that service members may need to

attend college. Existing research affirms that the more autonomy-supportive an environment

becomes, the more likely intrinsic behavior will flourish (Vansteenkiste et al., 2006).

Sub-Question 1

What are the intrinsic behavioral identifiers that influence United States Navy service

members attending college?

When individuals are involved in an action or behavior as a result of a high level of joy or

engaging challenge, they are intrinsically motivated. Furthermore, individuals who possess a

strong sense of self are likely to be more certain in their decision-making and less likely to seek

assistance or reliance (Cheng, 2017). The perceptual qualities of this research are critical to the data. Gaining a better understanding of service members' motivation is important because it may add clarity to the personal confidence they have in deciding to attend college while balancing school's impact on the command's mission. The added pressure of personal achievement needs to be studied to determine how intrinsic motivation perseveres in a highly extrinsic environment.

Sub-Question 2

What are the extrinsic behavioral identifiers that influence Unites States Navy service members attending college?

Exploring external influence is vital to the study when considering the level of extrinsic motivators that service members are exposed to while on active-duty. Military culture represents a prevailing reliance on standards that are embedded and incentivized. Service members are trained in these areas. Service members embody this strong sense of emotional control and task accomplishment that is pervasive in military culture (Cole, 2014). Though these are highly valuable tools in many areas, SDT posits that promoting external praise or tangible rewards are concerning. They represent extrinsic motivators that are fleeting in their quest to instill internalized behavior (Bear et al., 2017). Military organizations are small societies with inherent beliefs, values, and history that represent foundations of military culture in which service members identify (Hill, 2015). Gaining introspection into the unique external influences and environmental factors that service members experience will provide a more well-rounded understanding of motivation. Also, by exploring the desires of service members and incorporating how personal drive coincides with cultural demands or influences, the study will be able to provide clarity on if personal motivators change or adjust during active-duty service.

Definitions

1. *Apprentice*: Enlisted personnel serving in the United States Navy in paygrades E1–E3. They are the most junior naval paygrades (Department of the Navy, Military Personnel, Plans and Policy Division (N13) [Navy Personnel Command], 2022).

2. *Autonomy*: One of the three basic psychological needs in SDT. It is the involvement of volition in decision-making and self-regulating behavior (Hu & Zhang, 2017).

3. *Chief Petty Officer*: Enlisted personnel serving in the United States Navy in paygrades E7–E9. They are the Navy's senior enlisted leaders, the skill-set technical authorities, and subject matter experts. They are also tasked with supervising, instructing, and training all E1–E6 personnel (Department of the Navy, Military Personnel, Plans and Policy Division (N13) [Navy Personnel Command], 2022).

4. *Competence*: A component of the three basic psychological needs in SDT. Having the skills and confidence to complete a task or action. High levels of competence are synonymous with strong sense of self and lead to more effective learning (Deci & Ryan, 2016).

5. *External regulation*: a type of extrinsic motivation that destabilizes intrinsic motivation where an individual's behavior is modulated by external occurrences (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

6. *Extrinsic motivation*: derived from external coercive rewards often associated with pressures such as pay, promotions, or fringe benefits (Gottlieb, 2017).

7. *Influences*: Service members experience extrinsic and intrinsic influences that affect their decision-making processes and help shape their perceptions of what is acceptable (Brown

et al., 2013; Andersz & Bargiel-Matusiewicz, 2018; Eickhoff et al., 2015; Sonati et al., 2016).

8. *Identified regulation*: Individuals identify and accept the fundamental value of the behavior. There is a higher sense of commitment but not completely intrinsic because it is still extrinsically motivated (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

9. *Integrated regulation*: The action is complete internalized. Individuals completely accept the values of the action and identify with the behavior resulting in a fully self-determined extrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

10. *Intrinsic motivation*: Learning or action was assumed for its innate concentration or satisfaction (Vansteenkiste & Lens, 2006).

11. *Introjected regulation*: The behavior is partially internalized but not fully integrated. The behavior is assimilated but unstable because it stems from a sense of guilt, shame, or ego (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

12. *Motivation*: The target of what compels individuals to action. SDT posits that not all motivations are the same, some with volition and some with coercion (Deci & Ryan, 2016).

13. *Petty Officer*: Enlisted personnel serving in the United States Navy in paygrades E4–E6. They are designated in a specific rating or skill set. They also are skill-set technicians tasked with managing apprentices (Department of the Navy, Military Personnel, Plans and Policy Division (N13) [Navy Personnel Command], 2022).

14. *Relatedness*: The last of the three basic psychological needs in SDT. It involves a social context where individuals feel the need to be respected, accepted, or a sense of belonging (Deci & Ryan, 2016).

15. *Self-determination theory*: Distinguishes actions within classes of behaviors based on
    intent or motivation. Actions that are volitionally endorsed by the individual are self-
    determined. Whereas actions dictated by interpersonal force are controlled and not self-
    determined. When the behavior is self-determined, it is an internal action. When the
    behavior is controlled, it is external (Deci & Ryan, 2016).

Summary

Chapter 1 discussed the background, historical context, social context, and theoretical context of the research. It also highlighted the various ontological, epistemological, rhetorical, and axiological assumptions highlighted for the study. The chapter continued by describing how most active-duty Navy service members have access to the same education benefits and opportunities, but most do not pursue college while on active-duty (Department of Defense, 2021). This study focuses on the small percentage that do attend college. The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore motivation through the experiences of active-duty Navy service members who attend college. The empirical, theoretical, and practical significance of the study are conferred. Lastly, the chapter concluded with a description of the research questions followed by a list of important definitions.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

This chapter introduces the theoretical background that frames the study while exploring the current literature. A better understanding of what motivates some service members to attend college when others do not is best explored by applying the self-determination theory (SDT). Emphasis on motivation through the self-determination theory is pertinent because the number of service members that have the ability, time, and support to pursue college greatly exceeds the number that does attend (Department of Defense, 2021). Conducting a study on motivational aspects of personal drive requires a deep exploration. The use of qualitative research is ideal in this respect, because it relies on understanding of meaning. It accepts that individuals act in significant ways with engaging and thoughtful insight. It also allows the researcher to explore on a more expansive level (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In examining the current research on SDT and motivation, it is important to explore research that connects the various components of SDT. This chapter reviews literature on competency, autonomy, and self-regulation, as they may be central aspects in trying to better understand the various motivators that compel active-duty service members to pursue college. Chapter 2 also illuminates literature that strives to better understand the theoretical framework of SDT, its various basic psychological needs, its components, the associated regulations, and descriptors of intrinsic and extrinsic motivators. It combines these facets of review while discussing the U.S. Navy's integration of these elements into personnel evaluation methods and service-member motivation. The chapter continues by further reviewing discussions on motivation's use in naval service before concluding with a summarization.

Theoretical Framework

SDT contends that motivation derives from different purposes reflecting distinct motivations that vary in quality (Gunnell & Gaudreau, 2015). SDT's primary focus is intrinsic motivational aspects within human construct and personal behavior. The theory tightens the aperture by gaining understanding on the practical impact of influences on motivation, regulations, and behavioral health (Ryan & Deci, 2000). SDT also postulates that there are foundational needs essential to human existence. Those basic psychological needs are competence, relatedness, and autonomy. When these needs are satisfied, positive motivational, self-regulated, learned, and integrated results are expected (Martin et al., 2018). Three categories of motivation exist within SDT: autonomous motivation, controlled motivation, and amotivation. *Autonomous motivation* describes the concept of acting with volition. *Controlled motivation* is associated with certain behaviors performed under internal or external burdens. Lastly, *amotivation* is a lack of either intrinsic or extrinsic motivations. Here, individuals do not perceive value in the behavior, while placing a low worth on the intended consequence (Gagne, 2014). Within the construct of SDT and behavior, it is widely considered optimal to reach an autonomous level of motivation because it has shown to be more effective in sustainment when associated with adaptive outcomes (Langan et al., 2016).

Exploring the Self-Determination Theory

Deci and Ryan (2002) explained that SDT concentrates on social conditions that impact human success. Unlike other theories of motivation, SDT does not establish a need for security and self-esteem. Instead, these are considered substitutes for needs deriving from insecurities that accumulate as basic needs are not met, thus creating a gap in desire that is fulfilled by substituting. SDT concentrates on the level of which needs are satisfied instead of focusing on

the degree or strength of the need. SDT theorists argue that by focusing on satisfaction, it provides vital information on how to structure environments that cultivate fulfillment in order to create greater outcomes (Gagne, 2014). The theory evaluates the ways in which biological, social, and cultural conditions augment or subvert human growth. Moreover, it is concerned with how these factors affect the basic psychological needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2000).

Learning new skills and mastering them require a certain level of competence. For effective cognitive development, it is imperative to consider the importance of competence. SDT expounds on this by affirming that internal and external environmental factors enhance or inhibit learning. Where individuals feel effective, they are more likely to be motivated to learn. Behavior is also specifically affected by self-initiated actions. In this construct, people must embrace a sense of empowerment or ownership to gain intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2002).

Relatedness in SDT refers to the interdependency of social interaction and motivation. People act in ways that aim to bring them closer to others (Martin et al., 2018). This is evident in all fabrics of interaction such as fashion, music, societal definitions of beauty, and the use of technology. It is often this sense of group acceptance or belonging that fosters cultural motivation. By gaining acceptance in a cultural setting, a sense of relatedness is gained. However, the most important aspect of this need is not admiration. There must develop a sense of understanding or caring in an unconditional manner for relatedness to establish a firm hold (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Autonomy relates to personal choice. It is also the most debated of the three because of its interpretive concepts of internal awareness and self-regulation. SDT focuses a great deal on

volition and actions derived from personally endorsed behaviors (Ryan & Deci, 2000). When

autonomous needs are met, humans perform at their peak levels and tend to persist in these

actions (Martin et al., 2018). Though it is often confused with independence, it is different

because of autonomy's reliance on a sense of self with value in performing the behavior instead

of just performing the act without asking for assistance (Deci & Ryan, 2002).

Regulations of the Self-Determination Theory

SDT contains six total regulatory categories, including four different types of extrinsic

regulations and one intrinsic regulation, all aligned by external or internal motivations

(MacIntyre et al., 2018). There is also amotivation, which is the sixth regulatory style, also

referred to as the *nonregulation motivation* (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Some regulations highlight

engaging in a task or job to obtain rewards, while others emphasize actions to evade some form

of penalty. All these reasons are prevalent in various settings. With external regulations,

researchers have discovered that there is an importance with creating incentives to promote

extrinsic motivators that people can identify with and accept as somehow aligned with personal

goals. Once the action is internalized, individuals are more likely to perform in a manner more

consistent with influential goals (Zhang et al., 2016). With internal regulation, autonomy is the

key component because there must be a sense of interest (Deci & Ryan, 2002), but to analyze

organizational subculture's influence on college attendance, it is important to better understand

how these regulations intertwine with impetus.

Motivation is not a homogenous concept that has unilateral applications. Instead, it is

aligned with effort and quality. This balance impacts the likelihood of experiencing an external

regulation. Relational data asserts that where there is high quality motivation in students, there is

a high level of intrinsic identifiers. Conversely, where there is poor quality motivation in students, there is a connection to a higher level of external regulation (Guay et al., 2008).

Motivation in the workplace may have different factors impacting regulations than those affecting students. Many believe that workers' behavior is guided more by extrinsic motivators than intrinsic because of monetary rewards associated with having to make a living for self-sufficiency. Management teams are more likely to reinforce extrinsic motivation with consistent rewards to combat the mundane and boring aspects of many jobs. However, employees' goals may not line up with those set forth by their employers. Here, many researchers focus on external regulations, which fall on the opposite end of autonomous forms of motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2016), but military service intertwines work and individual pursuits due to many of the overlapping personal and professional goals.

SDT supports that there is a level of dependency and designates that extrinsic motivation may be internalized. Behavior can be regulated through external means or controlled through introjection. These types of regulators are often connected with self-imposed pressure or internal conflict. Extrinsic motivation is also controllable through value analysis and autonomous identification of a behavior. Autonomous motivation tends to control the balance between certain social frameworks. This balance is often related to how people internalize values and migrate toward relevant groups that share similar intentions (Ryan & Deci, 2016). Autonomous motivation may explain why some Navy service members attend school, while others do not, and compels an analysis of the various regulations.

The first analyzed regulation stage, amotivation, is essentially nonregulation and occurs when there is a state of behavioral inertia or a lack of action. When individuals are amotivated, they either do not act or do so in a passive nature. They may perform the act without any intent

to achieve conclusion or completion. This behavior stems from a lack of capability or fortuity (Deci & Ryan, 2002). These purposeful actions may explain why certain service members fail to enroll in college. They may believe they are ill-prepared to succeed in college, or they may be void of interest in its personal value.

Shifting from lack of action to the least internalized is *external regulation*. This regulation is the most extrinsic stage where the individual is externally guided to the goal to gain reward or avoid retribution (MacIntyre et al., 2018). It is also the most analyzed extrinsic regulator. Its reliance on external rewards or consequences is its primary component. Here, the behavior is dependent upon an external contingency that will spur behavior based on active effect. Individuals are expected to respond to the regulation only when they receive the expected provocations. This is important to note because the use of reward and punishment produces perishable levels of motivation that wane when the contingency is removed (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Erosion of consistent action also leads to the concern over how extrinsic motivators would provide a sustainable level of interest for service members attending college for impersonal reasons.

Proceeding further on the spectrum moves attention to *introjected regulation*—essentially an extrinsically basic approach but with an internal influence (MacIntyre et al., 2018). Though it is external, there is a minor focus on self. Introjected regulation describes actions that have not been accepted by the person performing the act, yet they still engage in the behavior. This type of behavior often occurs due to a sense of guilt (Zhang et al., 2016). Compared to external regulations' reliance on strictly extrinsic motivations, introjection is intrapersonal. This is a control that is self-imposed where people develop internal judgements that produce conditional worth. By accepting only portions of the external value with self-imposed limitations, individuals

embrace higher levels of self-esteem and pride. However, the levels are considered unstable because of the potential for indignity (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

As behavior becomes more internal, the regulations involve engaging in acts because of some form of actual identification while accepting personal ownership. This is referred to as the *identified regulation*. It is often associated with people who believe the behavior is consistent with their personal values (Zhang et al., 2016). Identified regulation is also extrinsic, but with an intrinsic transition. Here, the individual views value in the performed behavior despite not enjoying or fully endorsing it (MacIntyre et al., 2018). Possessing more autonomy than introjection, individuals who identify with a behavior view it as more personal and important to themselves. Though the individual is more personally devoted, they are not totally vested in the action and lack total integration (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The most autonomous form of extrinsic motivation is *integrated regulation*, which occurs when the act is identified with and personally endorsed as a goal or value. The behavior has now become a part of self. Studies show that integrated behavior is the most effective means of extrinsic motivation and is the most likely extrinsic regulation to produce repeat behavior (Deci & Ryan, 2002). This may explain if Navy service members begin college as a response to external pressure but continue because they later embrace the personal value in attending.

Lastly, shifting away from extrinsic, the most desired from the standpoint of SDT, is *intrinsic regulation*. This regulation is grounded on self-sustained behavior based on the individual's own volition. There is genuine interest, enjoyment, or satisfaction in the behavior (MacIntyre et al., 2018). Gaining a greater understanding of self-reflection and self-identification, this is the highest level of internalized regulation and the most autonomous form

as well. When someone is intrinsically motivated in a goal, they demonstrate lower levels of prejudice on unspoken valuations (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The Autonomy-Controlled Continuum

Beyond regulations, there are considerations for the differences between those motivations that are self-governed and those that are not within the individual's control. With this focus, one of the most importance dissimilarities with SDT is the relationship between autonomous motivation and controlled motivation. Autonomy encompasses using personal experience to act with intent. When a person performs an activity because of personal interest, they are acting on their own volition. When considering autonomous motivation, it is important to include intrinsic motivation as the focal point. Conversely, a controlled action conducted with pressure or as a response to a forceful action is an example of extrinsic motivation. Also, by using extrinsic motivation, researchers have discovered that it produces controlled motivation. SDT suggests controlled motivations and autonomous motivations diverge at the process and the accompanying experience level. Neither motivator should be confused with amotivation, which is devoid of motivation and intent (Gagne & Deci, 2005). Within SDT, motivation is often differentiated by accounting for the autonomy-control continuum. This component of SDT characterizes motivation by exploring the balance between autonomy and controlled regulations. The autonomy-control continuum is a factor when behavior is autonomously moved to the degree that a person is willing to engage in a particular action (Ryan & Deci, 2016).

Theoretical Relevance

SDT is pertinent for this study because of its focus on motivation. Naval service members experience many internal and external environmental factors, such as local command dynamics, organizational factors that dictate military branch policies and define performance standards,

societal inputs reflected in social media or those within their social circles, generational gaps, the type and diversity of their training, and behavioral or social characteristics (Committee on the Context of Military Environments, 2014). These environmental influences are prevalent throughout military culture and are evident in how the Navy places a high emphasis on education as a key component of a better-performing sailor (Department of the Navy, 2019). Service members' motivation should be explored from a standpoint that accounts for this and other external influences. It is best to study their motivation from a qualitative standpoint that focuses on motivation to better understand what influences, personal or otherwise, are most prevalent in active-duty Navy service members attending college. SDT meets this need perfectly because it posits that the motivational foundation is an integrative progression impacted by both external and internal forces. It also asserts that the most important aspect of self is to assimilate, coordinate, and regulate all inputs (Ryan & Deci, 2019). SDT provides a better foundation for this study considering the low number of service members that attend college despite a much larger percentage having the same availability (Department of Defense, 2020). This would imply that other influences that may be more internal are the most prevailing impacts on motivation, further supporting the guidance of SDT. By gaining a better understanding of the participants' internal and external motivators through self-determination, the study should provide data on how much influence each has on college attendance.

Related Literature

The review of literature concentrated on SDT's impact to the study of motivation and how focus on intrinsic impetus is interwoven. Though there is little data specifically dedicated to studying Navy service members, there is research of varying focuses on military personnel. Much of the synthesized research in literature on motivations and influences for service members

is predominately quantitative focused studies. Since there is little research on active-duty service members' motivation to attend college, the research expanded from this relationship and explored service-member motivation in other areas. The research also accounted for studies on motivation outside of the military arena in order to gain a better perspective of human influences and subsequent actions resulting from motivators that were put in place to adjust behavior. The goal was to gain the necessary basis on how external and internal influences affect action while gaining perspective on whether attending college is more intrinsic or extrinsic motivation. By exploring where motivation to attend college derives, the researcher may be able to better attenuate the various influences motivating service members in their education pursuits.

Motivational Impact

Ryan and Deci (2000) maintained that motivation is an undertaking to carry out an act. Motivation is an essential element of human behavior and action. It is often considered to be a primary focus of organizational behavior across industries, worldwide (Cerasoli et al., 2014). When a person is compelled to act or excited to reach a goal, they are motivated. Conversely, when people are not inspired to act, they are unmotivated. The drive toward motivation is at the core of behavioral changes. SDT understands there are levels of motivation but is also concerned with whether it is intrinsic or extrinsic. To this end, research concentrating on SDT has previously explored the internal and external means by which motivation occurs. Moreover, it concentrates on the relationship between the level of personal satisfaction associated with a behavior and the various motivational means utilized to act (Flannery, 2017). This is a building block for the study's direction, but it only covers a small portion of SDT's impact on educational research or service-member motivation by only addressing satisfaction. To further the data, research instances were available where internal influence is predicated on positive

reinforcement. One study conducted among military university students found that nearly 62% of the cadets emphasized a relationship between positive reinforcement and better performance in class (Petrova, 2017). Though the numbers were significant, no measurable data in the research accounts for the type of reinforcement of how it was internalized. By not gaining perspective on the internalization process, it is difficult to gauge how individuals are compelled to perform. This would suggest that additional data is desired, bolstering the need to receive some level of support in cultivating academic performance to highlight what is important to service members attending college.

Data does exist showing how researchers discovered that the availability of tuition assistance is a significant component of college enrollment, while still not representing the most important purpose of attendance. This was noted in a study of active-duty students, veteran students, and military family member students, which determined the importance of financial assistance in pursuing college education. However, it is not the only central characteristic. Social support is also significant, but to an even lesser degree. The most important aspect of this data is that researchers were able to unfold how institutional support is a primary contributor among military students and their intent to continue in college (Mentzer et al., 2015). Though, among lower income students, research illustrates there is a greater focus on tuition cost in selecting a college as well as the inclusion of financial aid. This is also an important aspect as students select whether to attend a four-year college, vice a two-year school (Bruce & Carruthers, 2014). The research also suggests that there is a significant impact among veterans who use their earned military benefits (Post-9/11 GI Bill) to attend college (Barr, 2015; Hitt, 2015). However, the literature does not clearly define a similar relationship among active-duty service members due to changing levels of benefit entitlements (Zhang, 2018). The combination of the studies implies

that service members may value their college benefits, but it is unclear to what degree this may affect their motivation to attend school or even complete classes.

The importance of self-efficacy should be factored when considering service members' ability to complete college courses. *Academic self-efficacy* has been highlighted as a direct impact in the personal belief of one's academic abilities and may be a precursor to the level of motivation applied to completing an academic course (Buch et al., 2015). Military competence may also be affected by this same intrinsic motivator. There is research explaining that it is plausible to derive that intrinsically motivated service members will possess a higher value for attending college because they gain a greater sense of reward for course completion and academic success (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Buch et al., 2015). In analyzing previous data, research was available connecting a relationship between reward and academic success; there does seem to be a counterbalance for the relationship between academic self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and perceived competence. Several studies discovered this counterpoise. One review among U.S. Army cadets illustrated those certain participants not sharing an intrinsic motivation for military studies produced higher levels of academic performance. This may be due to a greater level of perceived competency among intrinsically motivated cadets due to their higher level of interest in the material, whereas cadets who were initially less interested in the material were more motivated by a higher degree of academic success stemming from a perceived concern over their lack of initial competency. This focus may be the reason for their higher levels of measurable success (Buch et al., 2015). However, further data highlighted a stronger connection among self-efficacy and peer emotional support but only among student veterans who have remained in college for several years (Mastrocola & Flynn, 2017). This encourages the belief that self-efficacy may not always be a major contributor to increased performance and furthering the need

to explore a wider range of motivators that include organizational cultural influences. This is an integral part when exploring Navy service members attending college through the SDT lens because of the many influences that are unique to those in the naval organization.

There is research available showing that organizational motivation is a strong presence within human behavior. A study on the motivations to lose weight among active-duty service members found that the 75% of the respondents affirmed their primary considerations to attaining a healthy lifestyle were improved fitness and living longer. However, 69% of the participants stated that passing the military's fitness test was their secondary motivator (Maclin-Akinyemi et al., 2017). Though this study shows the importance of intrinsic motivators, it has specific importance in weight loss where physiological influences are more prevalent. However, it points to a need to further explore the difference between cultural influences and personal drive. Improving personal fitness may constitute an internal motivator, but concern over the military's fitness evaluation may be an extrinsic motivator and not measured as equally important. However, organizational motivation is a widespread topic that has impactful implications going beyond physical fitness. Research is available discovering that there is a significant connection between perceptual fairness, organizational performance, and motivation (Hannam & Narayan, 2015; Pang & Lu, 2018). When a reward is perceived as more informational and less controlling, it contributes to higher levels of competence, while higher perceptions of control inhibit autonomy (Readdy et al., 2014). The existing data on the relationship between competence and perception may be an indication of confidence into why service members attend college. Discovering this research compels a need to review research focusing on personal academic fulfillment.

Individual Motivation

Analyzing student satisfaction requires a research focus into educational quality perceptions and impressions of support. Data is available illustrating how students are keen on their perceptions of cognitive learning outcomes. These areas are connected in their effect on participation. In students who share low perceptions of support and quality, there is a high level of disinterest. Conversely, there is attention directed that shows students who share a high level of excitement for their respective program, or the institution, embrace a strong affinity for cognitive outcomes (Duque, 2014). This is important to understand while pursuing literature on personal motivation. It is widely accepted that the relationship between dropout and academic achievement is significant. However, more research displays that the relationship is also affected by student control. Researchers have discovered a connection between continuous enrollment and student control. In previous studies, student participants who felt a sense of control over their academic outcomes and their academic emotions experienced lower dropout rates and higher academic success (Cheon-Woo et al., 2017; Respondek et al., 2017; Sass et al., 2018). This illuminates relational connections between internal motivation and college success. It also further supports that an increase in competency breeds improved internal motivation. The research furthers the position that a sense of community is an important aspect to consider because it emphasizes how cultural influences are important in supporting internal motivation through external means (Matthews et al., 2014). Research focusing on internal motivation propels further examination, uncovering data highlighting the cultural influence of empowerment in the education process.

Some research also concentrates on a decrease in motivation among younger students while they are in school. In one study, their self-view and perception of task-value diminished

for many of their learning years. This measurable decrease persisted as students aged, but eventually increased once entering high school (Gill et al., 2012). The debate is one concern that compels research contributors to discover means of fostering strong intrinsic motivation to develop academic self-regulation. It also complements other data, which found that service-member empowerment can be circumvented by mandated policy ("Fighting for Victory on the Learning Battlefield," 2017). This debate is one concern that compels research contributors to discover means of fostering strong intrinsic motivation to develop academic self-regulation. Students desire to consistently act with their intrinsic motivators even when the activity lacks interest. They accept the self-importance of the behavior, or they may find the means to integrate certain regulatory aspects of the act to internalize its standing (Martinek et al., 2016). The intrinsic aspects of school may be more prevalent in college as students are able to choose classes in a more self-empowering way. This literature is pertinent because it may highlight one allure for active-duty service members who embrace the sense of empowerment in attending college. It also steers data research toward self-regulation and personal investment in college.

Additional research supported analysis of self-regulation strategies because students exhibiting a balance between personal interests and school external demands (assessments and curriculum) tend to have higher levels of self-regulation (Martinek et al., 2016). Researchers have found that college students are more inclined to enjoy their college experience if they are engaged with instructors who foster pupil autonomy and self-competence. Moreover, the use of humor and relatedness have shown to increase student intrinsic motivation to learn the curriculum (Bolkan, 2014). This is relevant when in future research aimed at exploring intrinsic motivation's impact on college attendance and may indicate that service-member participation in college is reliant on the educational institution's support.

The importance of developing a learning environment that fosters student development while accounting for individual intrinsic motivators is undersold and often undervalued. This is noteworthy because additional data indicates that fulfilling a student's psychological needs is a precursor to mediating the balance between personal education habits and the motivation to learn. By developing a culture that enhances intrinsic needs, schools can improve the quality of learning (Goldman et al., 2017; Eckes et al., 2018). This may be relational if certain service members have higher motivation and graduation rates than personnel in other commands. But the research also underlines the importance of fostering autonomy supportive behaviors in areas where low inherent interest is prevalent. Previous studies have indicated a growing need to adjust learning tools to enhance autonomy in areas where interest wanes (Griffin, 2016). This may also be pertinent when discussing active-duty service members' interest in attending college. The data would seem to indicate that emphasizing total-person development over a singular focus on mission accomplishment could build a more intrinsically motivated person with a higher level of enjoyment at the workplace. This creates a necessary shift toward organizational research to determine how the Navy's institutional processes may foster total-person development in relational motivation as it pertains to SDT.

Exploring Psychological Needs

The current research affirms the effects of autonomy, competence, and relatedness with intrinsic motivation (Church et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2019). Moreover, the literature asserts that combining the consummation of the three basic psychological needs may be a considerable interpretation of student motivational levels in certain environments (Wood, 2016). However, contained in the realm of motivation is the importance of examining how the three needs interact

with each other in a way that motivates students or active-duty military personnel to attend school.

The query on the three basic psychological needs began with autonomy's effect on individual behavior and action. It is largely acknowledged among SDT supporters that there are three interactive conditions required if individuals are to accept that their autonomy is reinforced—an understanding or rationale for the behavior, an acknowledgement of negative tension or conflict, and the use of noncontrolling language that provides choices (Nunez & Leon, 2015). SDT also posits that fostering autonomy requires a genuine desire to encounter behavior from a sponsored perspective, one that emanates from within (Levasque et al., 2004). Researchers explored how different types of autonomy play a role in self-determination by identifying connections between SDT's regulations and independence while highlighting the importance of autonomy in engagement and self-learning (Ntoumanis & Standage, 2009; Van den Berghe et al., 2014; Ulstad et al., 2019). Exploration of studies that focused on measuring autonomy within the education realm produced findings reflecting positive associations between motivation and productivity in less controlling environments. More specifically, the data supported increased autonomy in learning environments that fostered a culture of self-worth and individuality while also deemphasizing the importance of assessments and coercion (Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Prigmore et al., 2016). Additionally, there is a relationship between self-regulation and learner autonomy that illustrates productive education when students take control of the comprehension process (Woon et al., 2018). But the search for data needed to continue in order to determine if previous studies were able to ascertain a relationship between learning and positive motivation.

There are studies that do identify that individual motivation is also greatly affected by competence. Mastering a skill and feeling competent are the second area of psychological needs. Literature exploring competence implies that to be most effective, it must share a balance with a comparable level of challenge or intrinsic motivation will subside (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Competence does not increase intrinsic motivation by itself; it requires an autonomy-supportive framework or else the behavior will be perceived as controlled, thus reducing the likelihood of high levels of intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 2000). When people are in a control-oriented environment, the acts feel more like pressure, which decreases satisfaction. This is true even where the external demands are perceptual. In either scenario, the feeling of autonomy is diminished (Mekler et al., 2017). Within the SDT context, competence without autonomy is bound to fail (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Van der Burgt et al., 2019). Both competence and autonomy have a significant impact on intrinsic motivation through self-determination. The relationship between the two is often affected by the social background of the learning environment. The more communicable the atmosphere, the more likely intrinsic motivation will thrive in this environment (Kiemer et al., 2018).

The third basic need is relatedness, which is denoted as a desire for belonging to a particular group. Researchers emphasize that within SDT, relatedness is a contributing predictor to learning attainment within certain settings that emphasize personal interaction (Raes et al., 2020). In some instances, relatedness is the strongest indicator of the differences in a learning outcome (Akbari et al., 2015). During the review, the importance of developing and maintaining relatedness in learning environments was significant. When students are more connected to the curriculum by identifying with teachers and other students, they are more likely to internalize the value of the material (Deci & Ryan, 2000). But relatedness has relevance in a variety of means.

If some sources of relevance are more impactful than others, intervention strategies may need developing to determine a new tactic (Guay et al., 2017). Inside the military construct, researchers determined that relatedness is a vital component to unit cohesion. Maintaining that unity often develops as a result of stressful situations or mission readiness. Each member of the unit is mandated to consider the well-being of other members of the team (Pawinski & Chami, 2019). Despite the data, the research may not be indicative of military service members attending college or even succeeding once enrolling.

Despite education's importance as a vital component to the perceived personal achievement of service members and veterans, there does seem to be a disparity in college success. The literature highlights that despite a similar college completion rate, the amount of time to earn a degree is longer for service members and veterans than their civilian counterparts (Riegel, 2013). There are also concerns over the differences in adjusting to college life between service members and civilian students. Data suggests that service members have a more difficult adjustment period and may require additional assistance from their respective schools to mitigate many of these inhibitors (Barry, 2012). There are many potential influences that may affect college attendance, but some of the most important aspects are social connections. Research shows that military service members fail to connect with civilian students because of a lack of understanding in the differences between the groups. Also, data illustrated how service members are accustomed to certain types of structure that may contrast with others (Borsari et al., 2017). The differences in military culture and college are often overwhelming for many service members. The military implements standardized training, repetition, and teamwork to build competence and teach service members to perform tasks, but further studies determined that college tends to be more autonomous, with professors having unique assessment perspectives

that may differ from the military standardized performance evaluation processes (Durdella & Kim, 2012). Additional literature also revealed that it may be a byproduct of the military work environment. Research discusses that a lack of motivation is often a result of burnout, a condition that is closely connected to commands that are perceived as less supportive (Chambel et al., 2015). To better explore service members' expectations in college, data that illustrates motivational techniques designed to create the desired military culture should be examined.

Naval Evaluations and Tuition Assistance

Previous literature discovery explored the importance of a strong environment in the creation and maintenance of a culture, which experiences high levels of motivation for service members and civilian individuals. Within SDT, research illustrates that a better structured environment leads to a more effective performance (Gagne & Deci, 2005; Tracey et al., 2016; Mammadov et al., 2018). An attention on environment drives the literature review into exploring how a military organization creates this type of setting. The Navy's usage of both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations is reinforced depending on the task or mission outcome. In reviewing the Navy's evaluation process, researchers gain an understanding of how the Navy uses its performance evaluation program to track and communicate performance. Navy service members receive evaluations on a consistent basis throughout their military service. The policy is designed so Navy service members may receive a minimum of one evaluation annually with the duration between evaluations not to exceed 15 months (Department of the Navy, 2019). Within the policy, there are clear milestones such as how service members also receive a midterm counseling to apprise them of their current status. Both positive and negative performances are discussed during the evaluation discussions, while goals are established prior to the annual evaluation (Department of the Navy, 2019).

The evaluation instruction is a central component of each service member's naval career. The literature acknowledges that performance traits are assessed in the evaluation accounting for areas such as military bearing, contributions to organizational climate, professionalism, physical fitness readiness, community involvement, contributions to retention, career involvement, and pursuit of educational opportunities. The evaluation also produces advancement recommendations and a trait average, which are utilized as measurables in an algorithmic contributor for promotions (Department of the Navy, 2019). The more productive service members are on their evaluations, the more favorable point values they will have as they take their advancement exams. This presumably means, for promotion purposes, they will not need as many correct answers on the exam as Navy service members with lower evaluations. The evaluation does provide its own level of analysis because it seems to gain different levels of motivation. The evaluated areas are both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated. By measuring professionalism and character, naval service members may tap different types of motivators than more tangible evaluative components such as education or community involvement. While this instruction is a vital component for all naval service members to understand, it spurs the discussion on which type of motivation is more conducive to higher levels of performance. It is important to note that certain research affirmed that though extrinsic and intrinsic are different, they are not necessarily antagonistic. Literature was available that showed a coexistence with intrinsic motivators and influence depending on the motivator and the incentive (Cerasoli et al., 2014; Monnot, 2018). This compelled their review to analyze available incentives for naval personnel.

To better understand the existing documentation, it is important to first grasp the naval instruction's educational aspect. This portion of the naval instruction is important literature

because it provides behavioral and motivational input as to why certain Navy service members pursue college, while others do not. It is further enhanced when reviewing data that highlights how the Department of Defense has continued to fund the Tuition Assistance Program. Navy service members need to meet performance thresholds, need to meet a minimum time at their command, need to receive college counseling, need to have a degree completion plan on file, and need to have the necessary active-duty time remaining to complete a college course. Eligible Navy service members receive a maximum of $250.00 per credit hour up to 18 credits per fiscal year (Department of the Navy, 2022, March 24). The data illuminates how the organization packages the incentive for its users. It also impacts further discovery on how individuals are motivated by environmental inputs, competence, and internal drive.

Conducting a review in this area produces data on the relationship between motivation and SDT among music students. Here, the literature affirmed that regulation internalization improves rationalization for the activity. Moreover, confidence was emphasized as a positive relationship between perception of competence and intrinsic desire. The research stated a belief that there is a cycle where encouraging advice from perceived confidence creates skill improvement through positive emotional responses, which increase the yearning to learn (MacIntyre et al., 2018). Though this study focuses on students learning music, it does highlight a connection between internal motivators, perception of competence, and confidence that is pertinent to military service and college attendance.

Conducting additional research in studying SDT through the effects of self-regulation and autonomous instructor support uncovered data surmising that student competence was impacted by the environment. This literature found that students entering the course with higher levels of perceived confidence while receiving higher autonomous support from their environment were

more successful in the course and enjoyed lower levels of anxiety (MacIntyre et al., 2018). This study surmised that autonomy support was a strong predictor of commitment to course completion with lower course dropout levels. By increasing the autonomy and feeding perceived competence, the students enjoyed the course more and improved performance (Black & Deci, 2000; Cole et al., 2016; Poulsen & Poulsen, 2018). It is difficult to decipher whether internal or external motivators are more important. This debate only provides more incentive to conduct research on potential motivators. There is much more to consider when accounting for a variety of motivational theories that only partially explain why or how individuals propel themselves to act. Moreover, existing evidence suggests there is a need to expand research that explores what motivates active-duty service members to pursue a college education. As such, additional literature reviews into potential influences of behavior were necessary.

Intrinsic and Extrinsic Influences

With SDT, there is a profound focus on the importance of intrinsic motivation versus extrinsic influences with much research gaining advances into how autonomy, competence, and relatedness are critical components of motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000; Niemiec & Ryan, 2009; Kosko, 2015; Kozina & Mlekuz, 2016; Coccia, 2018). Much of the existing research on service-member motivation focuses on other areas where SDT is applicable (Ivey et al., 2015; Levy et al., 2015). However, one specific study originating from the RAND Arroyo Center defined pertinent information. The research emphasized how most service members covet the benefits package available to them and their families as prime incentives to enlist. Moreover, education was considered one of the more important incentives (Helmus et al., 2018). By providing insight into what motivators may be more prevailing to incoming service members, the research creates a natural progression point to explore how service members utilize those benefits. Moreover, by

identifying research highlighting certain motivators that draw individuals to military service, including benefits such as college tuition, it is certainly plausible to explore what motivates those service members who place a higher priority on college. It is more than plausible to deduce that the motivation to join is to complete a college degree without absorbing an excessive level of personal college debt.

Much of the available research emphasizes the need to foster intrinsic motivation, with much of the motivational strategies among education studies concentrating on extrinsic motivators (Tyner & Petrilli, 2018; Pullman & Andres, 2019). Existing data illustrates that focusing on grades, evaluations, and awards have not been as effective as autonomous support of values (Mantou-Lou et al., 2018). SDT researchers reason motivators are categorically specific in outlining broad accepted standards of expectations and evaluations (Ryan & Deci, 2016). Extrinsic motivators do not create a greater level of intrinsic value or relevance to most students (Kuhbandner et al., 2016). The response to resistance is often more extrinsic pressures placed on the students through punitive consequences associated with grades and performance evaluations (Tranquillo & Stecker, 2016). Moreover, existing research surmises that this cycle imposes the less effective means of motivation control instead of harnessing intrinsic motivators that create perceived value in autonomous learning (Ryan & Deci, 2016).

There is also data that illustrated how activities that are not interesting, or intrinsically motivating, require extrinsic or controlled motivation to produce action (Parker et al., 2017). When people are externally motivated to the point where their acts are performed simply to obtain an incentivized consequence or to avoid a negative value result, extrinsic motivators are guiding them (Gagne & Deci, 2005). This does not demand that research on extrinsic motivation is to be avoided; its use has been effective. Concern over proper balancing is prevalent and

should be considered during future studies. Data on military culture suggests a high emphasis

placed on cohesion and self-identification with the military's subculture (Rohall et al., 2017).

Researchers concluded that obstructions to military cohesion were often associated with the

military's interpretation of readiness, poor physical fitness, or an inability to qualify in one's job

(Pawinski & Chami, 2019). However, data on SDT asserts that external motivators, which are

institutionally processed and internalized, may become more autonomous (Wang et al., 2019).

Once these external motivators are internally embraced and accepted as part of the inner self,

their motivational influence derives from an intrinsic direction (Pawinski & Chami, 2019). Some

findings alluded to the importance of adaptability and attachment. In situations where individuals

perceive a lack of cohesion or experience negative peer relationships, goal accomplishment

suffers. Moreover, dysfunctional tactics develop, as well as a resistance to further change in

these environments (Shin & Lee, 2017). This sense of association is an important aspect to

military service due to its high emphasis on team cohesion but also may be an indicator as to

why the number of Navy service members attending college is consistently low. The existing

percentage of low participation may feed itself because it is not a prevailing norm among most

naval personnel, but examining influences on motivation requires more intricate exploration into

the differences between intrinsic and extrinsic.

Exploring Intrinsic Motivation

SDT emphasizes intrinsic motivation as a key component to goal accomplishment

(Delaney & Royal, 2017; Klaeijsen et al., 2018). Guay et al. (2008) emphasized this in a study

where lower levels of intrinsic motivation were detected in students who drop out, reaffirming

that autonomy is a prime indicator of dropout intentions, above past achievements. Research on

this influence exposed that intrinsic motivation occurs when an action is derived from internal

satisfaction garnered from the activity with a positive or negative outcome contingent upon completion of an action (Boekeloo et al., 2015). Motivational factors vary with extrinsic motivation, which derives from a desire to receive an activity unrelated to completing the task itself. Further studies developed a need to better understand the influence on service members who are active duty.

Additional research explored the parallels between the intrinsic motivators of an all-volunteer service and the extrinsic motivators of the working environment, tribal stimuli, and cultural norms experienced by military personnel. The review alluded to the importance of controlling external factors that foster internal drive (De Brabander & Martens, 2014). If the activity is deemed uninteresting and inhibits the immediate impact of intrinsic motivation, the individual will need extrinsic motivation to continue (Gagne & Deci, 2005). Studying influences, both external and internal, was important because it provided insight into how some view college as a necessary goal. Though the inclusion of extrinsic motivators is vital, internal contributions have proven to be equally as important in other studies (Olafsen et al., 2015; Hope et al., 2019).

Research on self-determination theory in the health domain supported this in concluding that individuals who were reinforced with positive autonomy were more likely to live healthy lifestyles (Ntoujmanis et al., 2012; Tak, Curlin, & Yoon, 2017). This would lend support to find data on how service members who receive the proper amount and type of motivation are more likely to succeed. Some experts are convinced that when individuals receive encouraging reinforcement, their intrinsic motivation is increased higher than those instances where negative feedback was conveyed to illustrate areas of improvement (Deci & Ryan, 2000). This type of literature is important because existing data shows that the United States Navy uses both forms of motivation in their feedback with service members (Department of the Navy, 2019).

Conversely, the review produced studies that understated how intrinsic influences often result from value and expectancy. Research that was uncovered demonstrated that individuals expect certain results for future actions and that cognitive predictors shape action (Weiner, 2000; Putwain et al., 2015). If aptitude or fear of failure are believed to be reasons for disappointment in school, it seems service members would be less likely to pursue college in the future. This is an internal conflict that everyone must battle. Other research discovered that there are basic internal conditions, both psychological and biological, that form one's level of expectancy for an action or condition (Reeve, 2016; Domenech-Betoret et al., 2017). Completing college courses to earn a degree may be a value-driven reaction to internal influences and cause for further research on value versus motivation.

Additional data discovered on intrinsic motivation among active-duty service members that determined the impact on physical readiness. Research revealed a substantial relationship between effective fitness and intrinsic motivation. Where extrinsic motivators or obligatory physical training sessions were used, the effectiveness of physical fitness training was less impactful (Buch et al., 2016). Further review uncovered that the opposite was found with intrinsically motivated participants. Individuals intrinsically motivated had higher physical fitness assessment scores and trained at a much higher periodicity. This disparity was still evident even if extrinsically motivated participants exercised the same amount as intrinsically motivated individuals. The study surmised that this may be a result of extrinsically motivated service members arriving at their appointed place of business not driven to exert themselves as much as their intrinsically motivated counterparts (Wilson & Markey, 2012). This may be another indicator as to the difference between service members attending college when others do not. When comparing physical fitness with college attendance, intrinsic motivation to remain fit

may derive from the same behavioral drive as pursing a college degree. The review was not exhausted until it accounted for external influences.

Exploring Extrinsic Motivation

Covington (2000) surmised in his study that motivation is often derived from achievement gains, and fear of failure was more likely to create an atmosphere where school was too much of an ordeal to pursue. Additional research supported that service members are more disciplined at general goal setting but may lack in maintaining college enrollment (Callahan & Jarrat, 2014). This is a relevant consideration that is also an area of consternation among certain researchers because it may be an indicator of inspirational actions, such as pursuing a college degree (Aarts & Elliot, 2012). Another study affirmed that actions are often the result of an intent to receive some other form of gratification beyond degree completion. In a study of Air Force airmen attending a community college, researchers discovered that students often sought financial rewards through grants as a primary reason to attend college. They treated it as an investment in time to garner financial gain (Savage & Smith, 2008). This would seem to direct belief that students refer to schooling as some form of part-time employment. But if this was the primary reason, it would then be plausible to assert that the number of military members with some level of secondary employment and the graduation rates among enlisted personnel would be higher due to a perceived financial reward. A multipronged approach to motivating military personnel requires a fine balance to maintain its effectiveness on future success. The use of external motivators may undermine internal drive even as it meets personal needs. When individuals concentrate on outside entities for motivation, personal empowerment, and process, their personal value and satisfaction diminishes (Coccia, 2018). This propelled the literature review to consider studies on environmental factors.

There is a volume of research concentrating on job stressors or work environmental factors and how they impact personal motivation and performance. Most studies were consistent in their evaluation of the negative impact that workplace stressors have on personal motivation and achievement (Xiaobo et al., 2015; Redmond et al., 2015; Soriano et al., 2018; Thakur et al., 2020). Research exists that questioned how work environments attempt to create cultures that are productive for all workers. However, this is an enormous challenge considering each person brings their personal impressions, expectations, and desires to the workplace (Raziq & Maulabakhsh, 2015). Each person may react differently to environmental stimuli and work demands while also producing job stressors that are often unique to the individual (Mitchell et al., 2019). However, there is research that focused on job resources as they refer to organizational factors, which make available a variety of support opportunities for individuals (Gagne, 2014). They also vary depending on the workplace. The same study determined that the goal of resources is to provide an environment that allows each worker to feel more comfortable in their pursuit of higher levels of job performance (Gagne, 2014). The data inspires further research review that focused on identifying research that addresses the impact of monetary lures on personal motivation.

Additional research discovered that one of the most common enticements for workplace motivation is the use of financial incentive. It was deduced that promoting the value of long-term financial gain as a motivational instrument is often associated with a consistent level of higher performance (Thibault-Landry et al., 2017). The data also determined many extrinsic motivators have the opposite of their intended effect (Chung & Narayandas, 2017). This is true in quantity-type performance taskers. The research review denoted that where production is measured in quantifiable production, there is a gap between extrinsic incentives and intrinsic focus (Cerasoli

et al., 2014). Moreover, researchers were adamant that quantity-type measures usually require more involved external controls, shifting the oversite burden from quality to quantity. Though the study asserted many situations where this is the most advantageous means to achieve a desired outcome, they were quick to note that this is not the most beneficial method to build employee empowerment (Cerasoli et al., 2014). By shifting the focus from organizational standards or organizational achievement to personal consumption or an increased sense of self gain, quantity-type measures that succeed may only do so for a short period of time. But the balance of motivation and self-accomplishment may be even further away from each other than initial studies realize. The shifting focus is foreshadowed when reviewing research that analyzed the relationship between high earners and low earners. An examination of extrinsic influences found data showing that high earners are just as dissatisfied as low earners (Itri et al., 2019). This is important because it may defuse some of the financial incentive aspects of the research. Another aspect of external rewards is the sustainability concern associated with its continual usage to dictate behavior. Using external incentivized approaches for long periods of time have shown to reduce intrinsic motivators (Kyongseok & Sun Joo, 2017).

To consider the concerns with specific types of motivation, one should consider the "cobra effect." In Delhi, India, the cobra population reached dangerously high levels and posed significant risks to the residents. In response, the government created a bounty program that paid citizens for their assistance in eradicating the cobras. Soon, many citizens realized that there was significant financial boom associated with culling the cobra population. To increase personal profit through the bounty program, many residents began raising cobras just to reap the rewards. The government discovered the cobra-breeding scam and discontinued the bounty. Unfortunately, once citizens accepted that they were no longer earning financial rewards, they

released their personal cobras into the wild. By raising and releasing many cobras, the residents made the cobra crisis worse than it was prior to the bounty program's inception (Varpio et al., 2017). The cobra effect is an example of how exerting an overabundant level of extrinsic motivation may create an opposite scenario than the initially intended goal. Though anecdotal, the concept of the cobra effect is pertinent and concerning for those providing motivational incentives.

Summary

Chapter 2 provided discussion on existing research focused on the self-determination theory and its theoretical importance in exploring motivation. The chapter also emphasized data on intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, which is at the core of the study. Previous research provided insight that the different successes and inhibitors to motivation are associated with the implementation of behavioral influences designed to produce a desired outcome (Ryan & Deci, 2019). The U.S. Navy's evaluation system and education benefits were also discussed to emphasize how the Navy constructs expectations (Department of the Navy, 2019). Despite the many levels of extrinsic motivation, attending school is only embraced by a certain population of service members. The annotated literature showed how important both variations of motivation are to behavior and action but also indicated the need to examine the individual in a qualitative manner to further understand motivation. There is a gap in the available SDT research that does not address the influential factors exploring motivation from the perspective of active-duty service members attending college. The gap in the research is not just determining why some active-duty service members enroll but also to examine why they stay in college despite the increased burden on their daily lives. This is especially important when factoring in that those

attending college amount to a small portion of the organization (Department of Defense, 2021).

Continued research can fill the void by gaining knowledge of this phenomenon.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study is to explore the motivation of attending college through the experiences of active-duty Navy service members stationed at Naval Air Station East (NAS East). A hermeneutic phenomenological framework is best to explore the central problem of the current study: the lived motivational experience of active-duty United States Navy service members attending college. The most pertinent theory that addresses this phenomenon is self-determination theory (SDT), due to its wide use in education research and its comprehensive focus on social, cognitive, and emotional influences (Evans, 2015). SDT is also applicable because it associates with human behavioral interaction in social environments while presenting a strong basis for the quality of motivation (Evans, 2015). The chapter discusses the lived experiences of a select number of service members by examining data gathered through personal interviews, journals, and focus groups. The goal is to find out more about their motivations to attend school. This chapter identifies the participants and the setting. The chapter also discusses the role of the researcher, the data collection, and analysis procedures. The chapter continues with a discussion on the importance of trustworthiness and ethical considerations while explaining bracketing measures designed to control biases before closing with a summary.

Research Design

A hermeneutic phenomenological framework is the best approach for the study because it allows the discovery of more in-depth research by exposing personal influences and internal drives of motivation not explained in a quantitative study. Due to its interpretive components, qualitative research effectively provides the opportunity to construe the data with a naturalistic approach (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Qualitative research requires extensive exploration with

participants to find the relational data. It is these connections, with the study's participants, that make the introspective research difficult to compose with quantitative measurements (Polkinghorne, 2005). Vagle (2014) discussed this in illustrating that phenomenological research focuses on considering and conjecturing how things are revealed in the world. Moreover, Vagle posited that studying a phenomenon through a phenomenological lens is examining how individuals are meaningfully connected. Thus, a phenomenological study is an appropriate choice to deliberate specific human experiences of a group of individuals.

Within phenomenological research, Moustakas (1994) mentioned how different study approaches exist that vary depending on exploration, with hermeneutic phenomenology described as a more empirical focus. *Hermeneutic phenomenology* is the study of how humans view things best explored from data assembled during first-person reports of lived experiences. Creswell and Poth (2018) analyzed hermeneutic phenomenology by initially recognizing the impact made by Van Manen (1990), who explored the meanings and the essence of knowledge. Van Manen described research as focused on lived experiences and the understanding of life content. Hermeneutic phenomenology research maintains a positive connection and balance with the entirety. In addition, it places emphasis on the researcher making an interpretation that embeds assumptions in the interpretive process (Laverty, 2003).

Moustakas analyzed hermeneutic phenomenology by placing emphasis on inquiries about the phenomenon that possesses social aspects and personal implications. Moustakas affirmed that research examinations should rise from a personal awareness of a specific problem. Hermeneutic phenomenology is research designed to explore the perceptions, influences, and attitudes among its participants (Moustakas, 1994). Selecting hermeneutic phenomenology provided an entirely different perspective on the data. It allowed the study to integrate the focus on interpretation.

Moreover, it provided exploration through participants' experiences and the themes that link them (Creswell et al., 2007). This study also employed hermeneutic phenomenology because it concentrates on the description of the phenomenon while also emphasizing knowledge and description (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Research Questions

The central question that informs the current study focuses on gaining a better understanding of the participants' perspectives about autonomy and intrinsic motivation. The sub-questions more specifically explore the different types of motivators that affect the participants' behaviors while also ascertaining the scope of influence the military environment has on college attendance.

Central Research Question

What are the determining motivators that move United States Navy service members to attend college while on active duty?

Sub-Question 1

What are the intrinsic behavioral identifiers that influence United States Navy service members attending college?

Sub-Question 2

What are the extrinsic behavioral identifiers that influence United States Navy service members attending college?

Setting and Participants

I selected a military installation because of its logistical accessibility and viable advantage to the study. This setting, a United States naval base, has personnel attached to the base command, but it also hosts a number of smaller commands, defined as *tenant commands*.

The participants were all members of tenant commands stationed on the base.

Setting

I conducted the study at a naval aviation installation in the eastern region of the United States, named for the study, Naval Air Station East (NAS East). NAS East contains several smaller governmental organizations, or *commands*, that reside on the base. These commands perform a variety of missions, including surveillance missions, pilot training, aircrewman training, and air defense patrol. The installation, one of the largest air bases in the nation, supports thousands of active-duty service members who perform these and other duties as part of their military service. While many service members are fully qualified to perform their duties, others are not, and they find themselves in various stages of naval training. All my participants were active-duty Navy service members stationed on the base. I selected participants assigned to different naval tenant commands located on the NAS East base. Though command personnel were attached to tenant naval commands residing on the same base, the commands were not attached. They have different military missions and provide a wider spectrum of military personnel and military assignments. The Naval Medical Team (NMT) is a large command, consisting of over 1,000 personnel who are under the leadership of the installation's naval hospital. NMT participants were all subordinates of the hospital's leadership, located on the base. They service a variety of civilian and active-duty military personnel as well as retired military service members. Medical Support Clinic (MSC) is a smaller command on NAS East installation with less than 200 personnel. They support the medical needs of active-duty personnel on the installation who primarily perform aviation-specific missions. They do not directly work with aircraft, but they do provide a variety of critical mission supporting duties. The third command was the Aviation Training Squadron (ATS). This is an aviation training command employing

over 100 personnel who specialize in operational readiness and mission training. All three have

their own chains of command, unique job obligations, and work schedules.

All data collection was collected remotely through Google Meet, teleconference, phone,

text, and email. Due to the COVID pandemic and the subsequent mitigation measures, it was

safer to reduce face-to-face interaction as much as possible. Aside from the obvious medical

concerns, the remote data collection provided some other advantages. Focusing on an impartial

location allowed for effective interviewing because it created a balanced power relationship

between interviewer and interviewee (Elwood & Martin, 2000). This type of setting also allowed

participants to feel more comfortable during the interview while also providing them with a more

convenient means to prepare for the sessions.

Participants

I selected participants using purposeful homogenous sampling. The primary criteria were

ensuring the selected service members were active duty, had attended college, and had a

minimum of 6 months remaining at their present command. The last component was important

because Navy service members may transfer to different commands before completion of the

study. By selecting service members who had ample time remaining, it allowed for the

completion of the study with the same participants prior to their detachment from their current

command.

I submitted an initial questionnaire (see Appendix G) via an online survey, and I

conducted participant solicitation through email correspondence (see Appendix B). The sampling

procedure identified service members attending college with the necessary time remaining.

Demographic information such as gender, race, age, and marital status was integrated into the

sampling process as well. Also, military rank information and military job information were

included to filter participants while increasing the study's aperture. All factors served a purpose, as I attempted to gain a group of participants that did not emphasize any specific criterion. Having the proper sample size for qualitative research is contingent on finding a balance between obtaining deeper insight of the phenomenon and data redundancy (Vasileiou et al., 2018). Using too many participants may produce data that lacks relevant information while also providing the researcher a false sense of confidence within the findings (Cleary et al., 2014). The study's sample size consisted of 11 selected Navy service members.

There were several military populations with active-duty service members available for sampling on NAS East. The selected commands provided a large pool of potential participants performing various duties within the NMT, MSC, and ATS military communities. NMT and MSC support a variety of missions specializing in fleet aviation support and medical support functions for active-duty personnel, civilians, and retired military personnel. The Naval Air Training and Operating Procedures Standardization (NATOPS) program predominately governs the aviation support personnel who NMT and MSC support. NATOPS is a mandated Navy aviation program that stresses professional knowledge through standardization while providing the foundation for aviation training development (Buis et al., 2014). The NATOPS portion was pertinent because it provided guidance on readiness and specific guidelines on aviation medical requirements. It also provided a further understanding of the level of training that aviation service members are exposed to while completing duties not associated with college study. The NATOPS portion was also an important focus of the personnel in ATS because of the specific training and medical readiness thresholds required before ATS personnel can perform their duties. Beyond the aviation component, both NMT and MSC support the needs of non-aviation personnel as well by providing medical assistance and training. Both commands have personnel

in various levels of readiness. Some were training in their respective fields, while others were fully qualified to perform their respective duties. By including service members in various levels of readiness, whether actively training or not, it allowed the study an opportunity to utilize participants with different job requirements. This variety was beneficial in exploring a variety of potential motivators.

Researcher Positionality

Some of the proudest accomplishments during my naval career are the many unique experiences inherent to military service. I found being a part of a Navy team, traveling around the world learning new cultures, and assisting host nations to be incredibly rewarding. The level of professionalism and comradery that our nation's military practices every day was another set of fulfilling aspects that I cherish. Nevertheless, I am just as proud of taking advantage of the allotted time and military benefits that made it possible for me to attend college. Like many others, I balanced my educational goals with the needs to complete mission requirements. My profound respect for those I serve alongside and our shared experiences are my motivators to conduct the research. If this study can provide introspection into goal achievement, then it was a success. It is also important to acknowledge personal philosophical assumptions while allowing the data to develop organically.

Interpretive Framework

My research paradigm was social constructivism because I searched for the complex data that participants produced, not relying on the narrow spectrum surrounding my experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). *Social constructivism* assumes that realism is communally constructed and that each person advances subjective meanings derived from personal experiences. From our individual understandings, various meanings arise (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). As a researcher,

I am aware that each participant has their own motivations and goals that significantly contribute to their actions. My study aimed to explore their individuality and to identify how those personal experiences intertwined.

Philosophical Assumptions

Articulating philosophical assumptions is a critical component of qualitative research due, in large part, to how researchers learn and experience in their respective communities (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For qualitative researchers, the ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions predominate. I will address each in turn.

Ontological Assumption

Ontological assumptions relay the personal facets and essential qualities of reality. Researchers affirm that qualitative examination embraces a world of multiple realities as absolute truth (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, my ontological assumptions are not so clear as to believe in multiple realities when multiple perspectives or interpretations of reality are more pertinent. I am a Christian and believe in absolute truth. Although my beliefs are consistent in this regard, the research is not about me or my worldview. The study is about the multiple perspectives and assumptions of the participants. I maintain that their experiences are their journey, and my assumptions were not to interfere with the study. Each perspective was respected and not prioritized, because all are important. By using multiple sources and differing participants, I gained a better understanding of the data and the differing perspectives toward motivation.

Epistemological Assumption

The *epistemological assumption* focuses on knowledge relational to the researcher's exposure to the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This is often best experienced through

extended time gaining a more profound respect for how participants perceive and act on motivation. Each participant brings their own perceptions of reality to the study (Moustakas, 1994). I had an obligation to the participants to expect a variety of realities. Conducting qualitative research is optimal to meet this responsibility because it allows researchers to get close to the participants. With qualitative research, subjective data is compiled. The goal is to reduce the physical and perceived distances often experienced in the field between the researcher and the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Though my research did not include observations, I was aware of the natural state in which the participants work. Due to my military experience and college pursuits, it was prudent to conduct research away from the field. I worked on the same base with many of the participants. Therefore, field study was not prudent because I am aware of their job responsibilities. Moreover, I had to remain acutely aware that junior enlisted personnel may be used for this research, and I had an obligation to allow the data to organically reach saturation without hindrances in an observatory fashion. To gain more equitable data, it was more beneficial to not conduct data in the field.

Axiological Assumption

Researchers need to examine participants through literal terms while also evaluating them through the context of the data. The most important aspect of qualitative research is not to attempt a journey of truth affirmation (Firestone, 1987). The data is captured organically to tell the participant's story. For me, this was an important aspect to remember. Because I was an active-duty service member attending college, it was vital to remove my personal bias from the data-gathering process. Though my experiences are important, the exploratory nature of the research must prevail. Moreover, I was not attempting to find absolute truth in motivation. I am telling the participant's story. The data will proceed and find its own ending, not one that was

created by the researcher or from quantitative testing. Qualitative research also compels me to disclose personal values and biases (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I have experience with service members who do not choose to further their educational status because they did not enter military service to attend college. I balanced college attendance and mission accomplishment for over 10 years through high- and low-operational tempo commands. Nevertheless, this needs to be a secondary focus.

Researcher's Role

I continually remained cognizant that the participants' experiences were the central component of the research. Though I utilized tuition assistance and other military college assistance for personal gain, I did not consider it more important than the safety of my participants. I understand my experiences are important, but they had to be bracketed for the integrity of the study. Therefore, I openly disclosed and displayed my biases and allowed them to remain separate from the study. During the study, I was a senior enlisted leader in the Navy. In addition, through my professional interactions, I completed missions with several of the participants. However, I had no authority over any of the participants, nor did I have any influence on their military service or careers. My social position is certainly a fixture into what makes me unique, but it has little importance on my exploration into service members and their motivation to attend college. The study was through the lens of the participants' experiences without interference from the researcher. My research was gathered and conducted within a social constructivism framework because it allowed the data to be presented within the complex views associated with the participants. It also allowed the data to provide social context and participant views of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

I implemented tools to address my biases and assumptions. Prior to commencing the study, I needed to employ eidetic reduction, which allowed me "to distinguish between introspection and subjectivism" (Sanders, 1982, p. 355). To ensure validity, I also implemented pilot testing prior to beginning the data collection. This is an important aspect of addressing bias and assumptions because it identifies data collection issues not previously noticed by the researcher. Once identified, I addressed these issues before the commencement of the main study (Gall et al., 2007). Another important aspect that assisted with compartmentalization was the use of researcher reflective journaling. This type of journal use allowed me to examine personal bias while reexamining individual subjectivities and the study's goals (Ortlipp, 2008).

Procedures

The study required multiple levels of permissions considering the Institutional Review Board (IRB) oversight was relational but still separate from the request protocol set forth by the Navy to solicit active-duty service members for participation. Moreover, the data collection portion was greatly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic, which required additional safety protocols to ensure adherence to naval infection mitigation measures. Lastly, experts in the field of conducting research reviewed all questions associated with participants and research.

Permissions

Before beginning data collection, I obtained IRB approval (see Appendix A) to ensure the safety of human subjects and adhere to conduct standards for social science research (Gall et al., 2007). I secured IRB approval from Liberty University. Also, the study required approval to use active-duty Navy service members from the United States Navy's Bureau of Medicine (BUMED). The extent of BUMED's approval requirements were narrowed because the university was responsible for the IRB process. After IRB approval, I retrieved informed consent

from the potential participants at their respective commands (see Appendix C) prior to data collection.

Recruitment Plan

Once permission was received, I emailed recruitment letters to personnel in the respective commands (see Appendix B). The letter contained questionnaire links designed to obtain the necessary screening data. I utilized purposeful homogenous sampling with the data contained in the questionnaires. Utilizing data from the questionnaires provides optimal information from a select group of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I implemented a purposeful homogenous sampling procedure because it emphasized a thorough understanding of explicit circumstances with specific importance to the study. It was also important because the selected participants shared significant similarities and characteristics, which provided experiential data more aligned with the intent of the study (Patton, 2015). Those selected were active duty, attending college, and had a minimum of 6 months remaining at their present command. I selected thirteen participants for the study, but only 11 completed the study.

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Data Collection Plan

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One of the most important aspects of data collection is the use of triangulation. The implementation of triangulation increases the credibility and validity of a study due to its combination of methods as it tests for consistency (Patton, 2015). For this study, I employed the method of triangulation because it efficiently integrated my three selected collection methods while focusing on the same phenomenon (Carter et al., 2014). I gathered data utilizing a hermeneutic phenomenological method. This process provided a study of lived experiences through the eyes of the participants (Moustakas, 1994). The data derived from interviews, focus groups, and journal entries illuminated behavioral rationalizations on behalf of the participants. I

gathered data derived from the experiences of the participants and transferred it to written text for meaningful analysis (Polkinghorne, 2005).

Individual Interviews (Data Collection Approach #1)

Semi-structured, audio-recorded personal interviews were my first method. The semi-structured interviews lasted approximately 30 minutes each and contained a limited number of questions (See Appendix I). Semi-structured interviews were effective because they defined the paths to explore, but they also provided the interviewer the opportunity to deviate where responses rendered more detail (Gill et al., 2008). The participants were informed of the freedom they have in answering all questions, and I reemphasized the voluntary and privacy components of the study. I created an interview guide consisting of the listed standard questions and scribed notes of responses that generated individually pertinent questions. Guides are recommended to generate deeper responses from participants while ensuring the main points are covered during the interview (Moustakas, 1994). I recorded observational notes after each interview to reflect and to be aware of any biases (see Appendix J). For this study, the use of the interview guide was selected because it allowed me to take full advantage of the limited available time to conduct an interview while ensuring each participant answered the same formatted questions and any follow-up inquiries (Patton, 2015). Because theoretical framework that steered the questions for my study focused on the self-determination theory, it was important to explore the lives of participants through the various influences that service members attending college use as motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Semi-Structured, Open-Ended Individual Interview Questions

1. Tell me about your Navy career to date. CRQ

2. Why did you join the Navy? CRQ

3. Please describe a typical workday. SQ2

4. What are your educational goals? SQ1

5. How many college classes are you taking? SQ1

6. Who inspired you to earn your college degree? SQ2

7. How do their college achievements influence your decision-making? SQ2

8. Why do you attend college? CRQ

9. How important is achieving the goal? SQ1

10. How do you envision your degree helping you in the future? CRQ

11. Describe how much your family influences your decision-making. SQ2

12. Describe how much influence your friends have on your decision-making. SQ2

13. How much do you believe faith influences your life? SQ1

14. We discussed quite a bit; is there anything else you would like to share about your motivation to attend college? CRQ

Individual Interviews Data Analysis Plan (Data Analysis Plan #1)

Question 1 was designed to put the participants at ease and provide an opportunity for the participant to relax. Questions 2–5 aimed to gain knowledge on the background of the participants from a factual standpoint while also garnering data on educational goals and naval association. They are designed to unearth knowledge through social interaction (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). Questions 6–9 were designed to create more focused attention on contextualizing. Here, I strived for a means to garner data that was experiential but reconstructive (Bevan, 2014). The questions were straightforward but subjective. Questions 10–13 strived to understand thematic events from the participant's perspective, which is critically important for phenomenological research (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). They concentrated on subjective

understanding of perceptual influences in the participants' lives, but they aimed to reach that level from opposite ends of the participants' influential spectrum. By gaining a better grasp of the inspirations impacting motivation, I was able to better conceptualize prevailing themes of motivation (Seidman, 2013). The study focused on motivation, which is the primary emphasis in trying to garner insight of how the participants view their worth and how it coincides with naval service. Lastly, Question 14 allowed the participant to address and add any pertinent information to the interview prior to completion.

Personal Journals (Data Collection Approach #2)

As my second data collection method, solicited diaries or personal journals were an invaluable tool because they prompted reflections of deep personal understandings. By allowing participants more time to ponder their emotions, the data was deeper and more personal (Filep et al., 2018). I provided all participants with simple journal guidelines on thematic content (see Appendix H). However, the journal entries were for their expression; therefore, individuality was encouraged. The theme of the journal was reflective and asked participants about their experiences while attending college. The goal was to obtain exploratory and personal data on how the participants balance school and military service. An alternative paper method for journaling was made available for those participants who were not comfortable with an electronic journal. The ability for them to utilize texting or emails for daily reflection was presented prior to beginning data collection. I provided email reminders and texts prompting daily entries. The time for data collection was 9 days, Sunday through the following Sunday, lasting approximately 10 minutes per day.

Personal Journal Prompt Questions

1. Thinking about your work and school experiences today:

      a.   What was your main challenge(s) today?

      b.   Why was it so challenging?

      c.   How did you address the challenge?

2. Did anyone assist you in overcoming these challenges?

3. What would you do differently next time?

4. Are there any other experiences that impacted your day that you would like to share?

Personal Journal Data Analysis Plan (Data Analysis Plan #2)

Question 1 solicited data on how the participants' naval duties and schooling impacted them during the day. Question 2 targeted whether the participants sought external assistance to overcome the day's challenges. Question 3 was more focused on soliciting information on what the participants would change now that they were in a reflective posture. Lastly, Question 4 provided an opportunity for any data the participant wanted to share that was not already discussed.

Focus Groups (Data Collection Approach #3)

Research-focused, group-level, audio-recorded discussions were implemented as my third data collection method because they provided data on collective viewpoints and the associations behind those shared beliefs (Gill et al., 2008). They are most effective when they are planned discussions that take place in a comfortable and inviting location. Also, they produce more pertinent data when group members are encouraged to exchange with other participants. Focus groups tend to be a pleasant experience for participants when the sharing of ideas flourishes (Gall et al., 2007). The focus groups took place after the interviews and journals were collected and initially reviewed. After gaining a better understanding of the participants' experiences through the first two data collection methods, I tailored the facilitated questions for the focus

groups (see Appendix F) and subsequent discussions to be more pertinent. I placed a higher emphasis on the reflection of personal experiences in the study and any information previously not disclosed that the individuals wanted to share with other participants. I also fostered dialogue that enhanced any shared perceptions or experiences that were identified during my analysis of the first two methods. Pseudonyms were provided for each participant, but some were more uncomfortable with this decision and decided to use their real names. The decision to use their real names were made during the focus group sessions by the participants. I conducted two 45-minute focus groups consisting of five to seven participants per group because that number was considered optimal (Gill et al., 2008). For convenience and to ease individual scheduling concerns, the groups were loosely organized by commands. However, due to scheduling conflicts, I conducted separate focus groups for two participants unable to attend their scheduled focus group. Their information was collected by first presenting the questions and responses of the other focus group participants before recording the participants' answers.

Focus Group Questions

1. What do you most enjoy about attending college? CRQ

2. What do you least enjoy least about attending college? CRQ

3. What are you most looking forward to about finishing your degree? SQ1

4. What comes after you finish the degree? SQ1

5. What do you consider to be positive about naval service? SQ2

6. What do you consider to be negatives about naval service? SQ2

7. How do you balance school and military service? SQ1

8. To what extent is your command providing the necessary support for you to attend college? SQ2

9. Describe how your family feels about you attending college while serving in the Navy? SQ2

10. How do your fellow sailors view you as a college student in the Navy? SQ2

Focus Group Data Analysis Plan (Data Analysis Plan #3)

The focus group sessions began with introductions from the participants. After introductions, I presented the participants the first two questions as a means to encourage dialogue and provide comfort. These were considered discussion starter questions. They were positive openers designed to develop constructive group dynamics (Morgan, 2019). Questions 3 and 4 were designed to enhance the environment's dynamic by gaining a perspective on intentions. They were also designed to generate dialogue where participants discussed their long-term goals. This created an understanding as to the purposes of college attendees in whether they intended on using their education in the military or in the civilian sector. The participants then provided answers to Questions 5 and 6. Questions 5 and 6 were more questions that opened conversations about participants' perceptions of naval service. The same format from Questions 1 and 2 took place. Question 7 discussed the challenges in work and life balance from the perspective of the participant. It is important to remember that not all garnered data is factual, much is subjective. Phenomenological research accepts this knowledge by recognizing the relationship between binds of time and the fleeting nature of human experiences (Seidman, 2013). Questions 8–10 were centrally focused on SDT. Environmental factors are critically important to motivation. Results of previous studies showed that individuals in controlling environments displayed lower levels of autonomy and were less motivated to achieve intrinsically designed goals (Deci & Ryan, 2016). Question 8 directed the participants to engage in facilitated dialogue focusing on their perceptions of organizational support and how they view

the various ways the military does or does not support college attendance. Question 9 addressed

support from the environment away from military influence. Question 10 created a discussion on

environmental factors that impact a sense of belonging. By understanding the participants'

concerns, I gained vital information into what their current motivators were toward college

attendance. The questions should stimulate the sharing of experiences and feelings. Research

illustrates that positive interactive environments stimulate participants that want to share

(Brinkman & Kvale, 2015).

Data Synthesis

Vagle (2014) mentioned that phenomenological research is more focused on conjecturing

how things are revealed in the world. Moreover, Vagle posited that studying a phenomenon

through a phenomenological lens is examining how individuals are meaningfully connected.

Selecting a hermeneutic phenomenological analysis allowed me to leverage personal experiences

as an interpreter of participant testimony to enhance collected data. Though I shared many

attributes with the participants, it was critical to remember that the study was not about me.

Moreover, through this process, the study focused on participants' experiences and the themes

that linked them (Creswell et al., 2007). The data analysis method involved several areas

including describing personal experiences with the phenomenon; developing significant

statement lists; grouping statements into themes, or meaning units; creating textural descriptions

of what the participants experienced; drafting structural descriptions of the experience happened;

and constructing a description that incorporates the textural and structural components in order to

identify the essence of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

After data collection was completed, I had to remain vigilant in ensuring that my biases

and assumptions did not obscure any evaluation associated with this hermeneutic

phenomenological study. I did this through effective bracketing. Creswell and Poth (2018) described hermeneutic phenomenology by initially recognizing the impact made by van Manen on this method. Van Manen desired to understand the discovery of meanings and the essence of knowledge better. His framework was intertwined with intentionality, which affirmed that the act and the object of consciousness are related. Van Manen also concentrated on the hermeneutic concept of interpretation, in which all things are intertwined in life. Moreover, he illustrated that researchers must approach phenomenology as dynamic while considering only those areas that interest the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I used phenomenological reduction to analyze the data in this study, for which there are six analysis activities (Moustakas, 1997). Researchers reflect on essential themes that are at the essence of the lived experience. Researchers explore, discuss, and textually conceptualize with a relation to the topic while maintaining a balance to the study itself (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The information gathered also needs to be combined into themes, after which structural and textural descriptions of the data need to be conveyed to ascertain the overall essence of the experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Husserl specified that researchers must reduce personal biases and preconceptions of any previous knowledge associated with the study. He called this process *bracketing*, a term derived from mathematics where brackets are used to separate operations from one another (Van Manen, 2014). Here, the study must attempt to be separate of prior experiences or personal familiarity with the research to prepare the study for the attainment of new knowledge. Moreover, by bracketing preconceptions, the researcher is free to explore new information (Moustakas, 1994).

The second step in the hermeneutic phenomenological process is to illustrate what is seen through rhythmic composition (Moustakas, 1994). Researchers need to observe the data and describe it repetitively but always with textural qualities. The process requires continuous

evaluation from multiple angles and fields of view to gain a thorough perception of the phenomenon. This method is possible through reflection, reduction, and experiential elements within the research that continually elucidate the phenomenon at its essential state. The result is a clearer understanding of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994).

The third step in the phenomenological reduction seeks to find meaning through the imagination variation. Here, researchers can discover the essential themes and descriptions obtained during the previous steps. The researcher understands that there is no singular causality producing meaning. Instead, the researcher gains an understanding of the endless possibilities that may emerge, then proceeds to gain the connection and meanings of the experiences (Moustakas, 1994). I needed to understand that there was no singular causality producing meaning. Instead, I used the opportunity to understand better the endless possibilities that emerged, then proceeded to gain the connection and meanings of the experiences (Moustakas, 1994). By conducting these phases, I viewed all data as participant experiences while still identifying patterns. I utilized Descriptive coding and In Vivo coding for the data analysis. The use of multiple coding styles provides opportunities for deeper perspective (Saldaña, 2021). My initial coding began with the creation of a spreadsheet of thematic categories for organization and archiving purposes. Quotes from the participants were noted in the first data review. After my initial coding produced a high number of codes, I analyzed the data several more times to reduce and more accurately reflect the essence of the data in subsequent reviews. Once my data analysis was complete, I incorporated lean coding to assist in reducing the number of themes and subthemes. Lean coding is recommended for novice researchers like me to assist with integrated theming that searches for substantive segments to describe information and develop themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

My phenomenological data analysis proceeded with a structural and textural exploration process where I studied how each participant experienced the phenomenon (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). The initial data examination commenced with the information obtained during the personal interviews. The data was transcribed to a separate electronic copy for archival use and backup availability. By personally transcribing the data, I was able to create a systematic approach that relied on a logical process. It is also encouraged to implement a coding process that begins with the first participant because subsequent compiled data may affect the previous person's data and those preceding. For the personal interviews, In Vivo coding was used because they allowed the data to be interpreted in verbatim with quotations derived from the participant's voice. Moreover, In Vivo coding is recommended for novice researchers as well. Phrases were used to identify the data into units organized by meaning (Saldaña, 2013). Descriptive coding was implemented to assist with the development of subtopics assembled from multiple types of data (Saldaña, 2021). Each participant had their own electronic copy file that contained all recorded information and notes pertaining to the individual. I then organized the interview data for examination and conducted memoing to build the data as an entity. Ideas and phrases are annotated on the margins of the transcripts to illustrate my thoughts as I reviewed the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This is also referred to as *precoding* (Saldaña, 2013). By capturing my thoughts in the initial review, I had a better opportunity to review the information when I returned to it. The analysis process also required phenomenological analysis, or horizontalizing, where all data was considered equal and categorized into meanings. Composition descriptions of the experiences were constructed and data overlapping evaluation was conducted to identify themes or patterns (Moustakas, 1994). By identifying themes and patterns in the data, I was able

to code based on similarities. No analysis software was used to allow for greater control of the data through paper and written notes (Saldaña, 2013).

After scrutinizing the personal interviews, I shifted my focus to examining the personal journal information from the same perspective established in the interviews. I compiled the data from the hard copy journals that I distributed and the electronic responses I received, both email and text. The evaluation of journalistic research also required data coding and classifying to develop themes during interpretation. I utilized In Vivo coding and Descriptive coding for this data form because of their leaner learning curve and emotive capturing styles for novice researchers. Here, data was themed with the use quoted words and descriptive nouns or phrases captured from the participants themselves (Saldaña, 2021). Analytical comparison of participants' entries was performed for thematic emergence (Gawley, 2018). To assist with the indexing aspect of the evaluations, I highlighted quotations and statements and annotated them on the participant's transcripts. The goal was to understand the reflective nature of the data better while accounting for the various influences that the participants experience.

Lastly, I reviewed and analyzed data gained from the focus groups. I reviewed the observational notes recorded during the focus groups to reacquaint myself with the experience and mindful aspects of the data. The focus group data received a thorough evaluation that incorporated my observational notes that were recorded at the conclusion of each group session prior to any further review of participant input. Also, the data analysis accounted for group dynamics and discussion context due to its interactive environment. This data review was necessary because situations vary in different discussions when participants engage in debate or personal justification (Gill et al., 2008). In Vivo coding and Descriptive coding methods were

used for the focus groups as well. The focus group information provided the final piece to the triangulation requirement for data validity (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

After I reviewed the three methods, I compiled the data into textural and structural descriptions. Moustakas (1994) described the need to merge the phenomenological research data into a unified statement that represented the essence of the participant's entire experience. I used statements, key words, and specific quotes to better define individual experiences. The description focused on what the participants experienced. For the textural and structural descriptions of data compilation, the participants' information concentrated on how the experience occurred. This is best explored by describing the setting and situation of the phenomenon (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Lastly, phenomenological representation of the data needed a merged description. I compiled the data into a description that incorporated both textural and structural aspects. This is referred to as the *essence* and accounts for the culminating aspect of the study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Trustworthiness

There are certain paradigms that are essential in ensuring standards of trustworthiness with qualitative research; they include data immersion to reach sufficiency, consistent subjectivity, data adequacy, and relatable issues of interpretation and presentation (Morrow, 2005). As a researcher, I had to account for these trustworthiness standards.

Credibility

Extensive contact with the participants with prolonged engagement is critical to gaining credibility. Continuous solicitation and testing of participants by searching for negative responses are effective in building credibility (Schwandt, Lincoln, & Guba, 2007). But one of the most important means to gain credibility is with triangulation. I fully incorporated the

triangulation requirement to enhance and strengthen the study by utilizing three distinct methods of data collection. The use of different methods, settings, and instruments provided integrity in the study. Also, I incorporated interviewee transcript review to verify the transcripts and to reinforce the participants' rights (Hagens et al., 2009). Peer debriefing and member checks were also a significant portion of my research as a means of creditability (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Transferability

Transferability pertains to how a study resonates with future research and its ability to transfer to other processes in their respective settings (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019). Building a narrative from rich and extensive data is critical in developing sound context that is readily available for others to apply my findings into future research (Schwandt et al., 2007). By incorporating quotes and details of the procedures used, I created a thorough description of the study that allows for readers to contextualize factors, participants, and experiences.

Dependability

To assist with this dependability, I conducted member checks, allowing the participants to verify raw data and an understanding of the data's meaning. This allowed for bracketing of my biases while safeguarding accurate participant reflections (Kornbluh, 2015).

Confirmability

The use of triangulation assisted with both aspects by providing a rich base for the study and increased data stability (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By utilizing three diverse methods of data collection to gain triangulation, dependability and confirmability was established.

Ethical Considerations

Prior to conducting any research, I obtained IRB approval from my university, and the Navy's oversight personnel (BUMED) and the university signed an education partnership

agreement. These aspects were important when considering the ethical facets of any study. The approval process encompassed policies designed to ensure personal respect, the welfare of participants, and fair treatment of participants. When considering the IRB, its utilization outlined principals that applied to the consent process, data collection and dissemination, and safety protocols (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Since the research utilized human subjects, informed consent by each participant was completed and available for review. I provided pseudonyms to protect the participants' identity. I also removed all identifier components from the data with attention focused on ensuring that participants understood the researcher's role. The participants were aware of this safeguard during the consent brief and again before the first interview. By describing my intentions and the context of data collection on two separate occasions, the information remained consistent and concise (Patton, 2015).

Data is safeguarded in a secure location, and I am the only individual able to access the storage area where data is maintained. All data was encrypted to remain secure and backed up to ensure availability (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The data will remain secured and encrypted in a safe location for three years. But the most important aspect of the study was participant safety. Their involvement was voluntary, and they had the ability to choose to exit the study at any time. I conveyed this importance prior to beginning any data collection.

Summary

This chapter discussed the hermeneutic phenomenological study I conducted, which explored motivation of attending college through the lived experiences of Navy active-duty service members. The chapter described why this type of qualitative approach was optimal before describing the questions that drove the study. The setting, participants, and procedures

were addressed, and the role of the researcher was explained. Moreover, the data collection methods were discussed as well as the various means in which the data was analyzed. Lastly, the chapter conferred the importance of participant safety while addressing the significance of data reliability and transferability.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study is to explore the motivation of attending college through the experiences of active-duty Navy service members stationed at Naval Air Station East (NAS East). This chapter presents the results of the data analysis for this study. This chapter also provides participant information, the developed themes, and subthemes. It also presents outlier findings while answering the central research question and the two sub-questions before concluding with a summary of findings.

Participants

Eleven United States Navy service members participated in this study by sharing experiences and influences that motivated them to attend college while on active duty. All participants were enlisted Navy service members with ranks ranging from E-8 to E-3. I obtained permission from the Navy's Bureau of Medicine to solicit military participants. Moreover, the Navy's Defense Health Agency obtained local permission through an education partnership agreement to conduct the research. I solicited participants from three tenant commands located on NAS East. I emailed recruitment information detailing the study's intent, a survey link, and participant parameters to personnel through enlisted leadership stationed at their respective commands. Selection criteria required the participants to be enrolled in college; they needed to be stationed at a command located on NAS East, and they needed to have 6 months remaining on station. I selected and contacted participants through the recall information provided on the survey. Once selected, I informed participants of their selection, retrieved their signed consent forms, and I coordinated their personal interviews. I conducted research primarily through phone conversations and Google Meet. However, several participants preferred in-person personal

interviews. I made accommodations while still maintaining COVID protocol mandates directed by military leadership. I intended to have focus groups with five to seven individuals in each group. However, due to military requirements, two individuals were unable to attend the scheduled focus groups but still wanted their data recorded. As such, I conducted phone conversations with the two individuals where I asked them focus group questions, then provided feedback from participants of their scheduled focus groups before soliciting their responses. I applied pseudonyms to maintain anonymity for all participants. Table 1 includes the basic demographic information of each participant.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Pseudonym	Age	Rank	Gender	Marital Status	Current Education Level
Craig	23	E-5	Man	Single	High School
Nolan	31	E-6	Man	Married	High School
Anna	36	E-8	Woman	Married	Bachelor's
Derrick	30	E-6	Man	Married	Associate's
Randall	27	E-4	Man	Single	Associate's
Charlotte	27	E-6	Woman	Married	Associate's
David	29	E-6	Man	Married	Bachelor's
Allison	24	E-3	Woman	Married	Bachelor's
Jennifer	28	E-5	Woman	Married	Bachelor's
James	37	E-6	Man	Married	High School
Emma	31	E-6	Woman	Married	Associate's

Craig

Craig is a single 23-year-old Caucasian man. He has a high school diploma and is pursuing his associate degree in general studies. He is an E-5 in the Navy and has served for 5 years on active duty. Craig intimated that he joined the Navy because his life had no direction stating, "[I]t seemed like a good idea at the time to set my life up." He graduated from high school and found that his employment opportunities were too limited. The lack of options and the enticement of something to assist in personal growth made military service appealing. He typically works shift work 5 days a week, 8 hours a day, rotating from a day shift to a night shift in a biweekly format. He works weekends as well, depending on the schedule. He is completing the last class for his degree and dedicates 7 to 8 hours a week to school. Craig is on pace to finish his degree prior to discharge at the end of his enlistment, with plans to earn a certificate as a physical therapy assistant.

Nolan

Nolan is a 31-year-old African American man, married, with no children. He has a high school diploma and is pursuing a bachelor's degree in electrical engineering. He is an E-6 in the Navy and has served for 9 years. He was recently selected for an officer commissioning and will transition out of the enlisted ranks and into a commissioned officer role in 2022. His typical work schedule is an 8-hour workday, 5 days a week on a fluctuating schedule. Since he is in a leadership position, his responsibilities require him to remain agile due to the variety of worksites under his charge. He is enrolled in two classes per semester, and he dedicates 4 to 6 hours a week to his studies, primarily on the weekends. Before enlisting, he attended college but dropped out due to what he believed was an inability to remain focused on the curriculum requirements. His intentions to complete one enlistment, earn his college benefits, and return to

school as a civilian were fluid. He soon found great personal fulfillment in his enlisted job and wanted to build a future around this military career path. "Once I got into the Navy, it refocused me where it was easy to get back in to school, but I actually found a trade that I could build on." While he waits to transfer, he is a personnel manager in the electrician field.

Anna

Anna is a 36-year-old Caucasian woman who is married, with two children. She has a bachelor's degree and is pursuing her master's degree in psychology. She is an E-8 in the Navy and has served for 15 years. Before enlisting, she had college experience, but it was becoming cost-prohibitive to continue at that pace. To meet her goals, Anna joined the Navy with explicit intentions of completing one enlistment and having the Navy aid in funding her college degrees. "I needed school to be paid for. So, it was do five years, let them pay for my college, and get out." However, she decided to stay in the Navy after her first enlistment because members of her family have specific life-altering medical needs that require constant care. The medical costs at discharge were too great, so she decided to reenlist, make it a career, and finish her college degree while on active duty. Anna is responsible for over 60 personnel. Her typical office workday is an 8-hour shift, Monday through Friday. However, the nature of her job demands a considerable number of hours throughout the week, even when she is away from the office. Her goal is to earn a doctorate in psychology or social work. She averages three classes per semester and dedicates 28 to 35 hours a week to her studies.

Derrick

Derrick is a 30-year-old Caucasian man who is married and has one son. He has a bachelor's degree and is pursuing his master's degree in communications. He is an E-6 in the Navy and has served for 8 years. There are several reasons why Derrick joined the Navy. His

respect for his grandfather, a former dentist in the Navy, was one main reason. He also described a desire to leave the small-town life of his upbringing to experience a broader aspect of life. "I felt like it was necessary for me to see other people's perspectives and see a different side of life of other people." Moreover, his childhood was one where he felt privileged, and he felt the Navy would provide a better perspective of adulthood. He initially attended college after high school, but when the scholarship was lost and student loans were no longer a viable option, he chose the military as the avenue to fund his college degree. Derrick is in a management position in a maintenance department. His work hours are normally during the day, 8 hours per shift, Monday through Friday. However, he does work other hours and days as needed to complete specific tasking. His job requires a great deal of mobility around the region because he is responsible for certain equipment at remote communication locations. He is enrolled in two classes, on average, per semester and devotes 20 to 30 hours per week to his studies. Due to his busy schedule, most of his school focus occurs during the week. This allows him more family time on the weekends.

Randall

Randall is a 27-year-old African American man. He is a single father raising a daughter. He has an associate degree and is pursuing his bachelor's degree in medical science. He is an E-4 in the Navy and has served for 7 years. He joined the Navy because he always had an affinity for the military. "I've always liked the structured system and I've always liked the military." Beyond his passion for military service, he also joined the Navy for its tuition benefits so he could complete his college degree. His typical workday consists of 9 hours balanced between three clinics. Randall normally works Monday through Friday. His goal is to earn his doctorate and become a surgeon. His first choice would be to remain in the Navy as a surgeon, but he is open to transitioning out and pursuing his dreams in the civilian sector. "I would like to be a Navy

surgeon. However, if the Navy can't support me being a surgeon, I will happily be a surgeon outside the Navy." His average semester enrollment is three classes per semester in which he dedicates approximately 35 to 40 hours per week to his studies.

Charlotte

Charlotte is a 27-year-old African American woman. She is married to her husband who also serves in the Navy, better known as a dual military family. They have no children. She has an associate degree and is pursuing her bachelor's degree. She is an E-6 in the Navy and has served for 10 years. In part, she joined the military because she grew up in the environment as a child of military parents. "My mom and my dad met in the military." Her father is retired Navy, while her mother was honorably discharged after initial enlistment. She felt that her life was not providing the necessary satisfaction, and the Navy was an integral part of her upbringing. For Charlotte, based on those emotions, the decision the join the Navy was an obvious one. Her typical work schedule is 8 hours a day, 5 days a week. She is in an administrative leadership role, which puts her primarily on a day-shift schedule, Monday through Friday. College was not an initial goal of hers upon entering the Navy. She admitted that enlisting in the Navy was a means to reach a level of personal success without attending college. Despite her initial intentions, she was compelled to go to school. She acknowledged that an ardent desire to earn a Navy commission also drives her quest to earn the degree. Charlotte admitted that she does not enjoy going to college and considers the necessary focus to be a challenge. "I'm not saying forever. I am just saying, I've been going to school for four years. I am tired of going to school." She enrolls in two classes a semester, dedicating 20 to 30 hours a week on her schooling.

David

David is a 29-year-old Caucasian man. He is married. He has a bachelor's degree and is pursuing his master's degree in leadership. He is an E-6 in the Navy and has served for 10 years. After high school, he immediately went to college on a sports scholarship. However, he quickly discovered that he was not ready for college. "And quickly found out, like I said, that they also wanted me to go to school. That wasn't my mentality." He left school searching for his life's path and found that military service would be his best opportunity to flourish. He joined the Navy to leave home, finish college, and gain steady employment with upward mobility. He is in personnel management and oversees aviation operations. He typically works 8 hours per day, Monday through Friday. He is enrolled in three classes and dedicates 6 to 7 hours per week to his studies.

Allison

Allison is a 24-year-old Caucasian woman. She is married to a Navy sailor, and they have no children. She has a bachelor's degree in psychology/neuroscience and is pursuing a master's certificate in global health. Allison is an E-3 in the Navy and has served for 2 years. She earned her bachelor's degree prior to entering military service. She enlisted because the wage scale in the civilian sector of her chosen profession was not enticing. She intimated that the poor benefits and long hours were also detractors. Moreover, she decided that continuing her pursuit of a graduate degree while on active duty was more financially beneficial because it is cost-free to the service member. The college benefits of military service were a major factor in her decision to join the Navy. "I am able to use the GI Bill, and the benefits really outweigh the cost for me at the time as I'm pursuing something in my field." She works in the field of mental health. Her work rotation is a 2-week rotation. Her shifts are primarily overnight and last 12 hours per shift.

Her goal is to earn a PhD in clinical psychology and neuroscience. She is enrolled in a master's certificate program through a naval medical program. Allison devotes 7 to 10 hours a week to school and does not feel overloaded. She is comfortable with the curriculum's pace. "As long as you can keep up with the readings, it's not bad. I think if you're someone who has a hard time, maybe sitting down a reading something, it can be very overwhelming." She views higher education as an essential building block to success in the Navy and in the civilian medical field.

Jennifer

Jennifer is a 28-year-old Caucasian woman. She is married and has one daughter. She has a bachelor's degree in elementary education but is pursuing a second bachelor's degree in computer science. She is an E-5 in the Navy and has served for 6 years. Jennifer joined the Navy because her life and employment lacked personal excitement. She decided that as she was finishing her first bachelor's degree, she did not have a passion for teaching. "I just wanted something different." She is currently not working in her military job due to personal medical issues. However, she works in an administrative support role assisting with the training and education of the command's aviation personnel. She works 8-hour days, 5 days a week, Monday through Friday. Jennifer did not join the Navy to go to college. Her initial thoughts were just the opposite. She felt school was not a priority considering she already had an undergraduate degree. She intends to discharge at the end of her enlistment to raise her daughter and continue her schooling. The pending discharge and her shifting focus to her family have compelled her to return to college for a second bachelor's degree. She is enrolled in three classes and dedicates 5 hours a week to college. This is her first semester in the new degree. She laments the decision to take three classes because she struggles to balance the hours to devote between school demands with work and family. "Not enough (hours). I don't have the time."

James

 James is a 37-year-old African American man. He is married, has four sons, and is pursuing a bachelor's degree. He is an E-5 in the Navy and has been serving in the military for 11 years. He finished 4 years of school attempting to earn a degree in criminology but fell short of graduating. There were clerical errors on miscalculated credits, which were not evident until after what he believed to be his last class was completed. His frustration and contempt pushed college down on his priorities. He joined the Navy to benefit his pregnant wife and their growing family. "To be honest, I didn't plan on staying this long. When I first joined the Navy, I was a corrections officer and my wife came home and said we're having twins. I kind of panicked (laughter) and said you know what, I've got to do something that I thought was safer. Something more secure." He initially intended on serving one enlistment, then discharge, but he enjoyed the Navy enough to reenlist and now is dedicated on retiring in the Navy. Initially, going to college while on active duty was an afterthought. Still, James remained disheartened for not finishing prior to his naval service. Years later, he decided to go back to school, in part, to feel a sense of completion and accomplishment. He did change his education goal to earning a degree in business administration because it is more in line with certain aspects of his naval job requirements, and it represents his chosen path once he retires. James's military requirements are primarily focused on naval supply. He is enrolled in one online class. His typical workday is an 8-hour shift, 5 days a week, Monday–Friday.

Emma

 Emma is 31-year-old Caucasian woman. She is married and has one son. She is graduating with her associate degree and is now seeking her bachelor's degree. She is a Navy E-6 and has been in the service for 6 years. Her ultimate educational goal is to complete her

master's degree in health science. Emma joined the military to be an inspiration to her family. Her father is a Vietnam War veteran who suffers from PTSD. Her father's military experiences, and subsequent challenges, are the main components of her desire to enlist. By joining the military, Emma has been able to form a stronger bond with her father. "I felt like I needed to join the service to see if I could relate to him or he could relate to somebody, which was a success. Now he will always talk about it if I ask him any questions or if he's having a troubled time, he's able to open up to me." Her typical work week consists of 8-hour days, 5 days a week, depending on the work schedule. She also enjoys military service because of the opportunities to promote. However, the daily schedule fluctuates between 8- to 12-hour work commitments depending on the specific watch or daily tasking. She is in management but works in a 24-hour watch rotation. She attends college full-time, enrolling up to five online classes per semester and dedicates over 32 hours a week to her schoolwork. She exhausts her Navy tuition assistance (TA) entitlement and pays for the classes not covered under the TA program.

Results

I collected data from personal interviews, reflective journals, and focus groups. A total of 11 participants completed the study. The interviews were semi-structured to allow for deviation where more data was explored (Gill et al., 2008). Some of the participants chose to conduct the interviews remotely, while others wanted to conduct them in person. All participants provided personal journal data. I received journal data through texts or emails. I conducted focus groups on Google Meet. I originally scheduled two focus groups. However, two participants were unable to attend a focus group. I conducted their focus groups separately, via phone conference. For their focus groups, I asked questions, then read replies provided by other participants from the originally scheduled focus groups before recording any responses. I transcribed all data using

Express Scribe. The participants were candid and open about the experiences. Though all were focused on their own specific goals, many areas showed intertwined experiences. I reviewed all several times to ensure proper coding. I used In Vivo and Descriptive coding styles during initial coding to find phrases that identified data interpretation and to assist with the emergence of themes (Saldaña, 2021). Initially, I recorded a greater number of codes and needed to reduce the codes to find themes. I began thematic development with the personal interviews by noting participants' responses to identify overlapping. Next, I reviewed the journal entries for thematic data. Lastly, I reviewed the focus group data for thematic elements. The review process decreased the number of codes; however, with subsequent reviews, the number of codes were further reduced. The analysis process continued with subsequent reviews of the data to find the themes that eventually emerged. Through the coded data, four themes became apparent: values, support, challenges, and aspirations. Table 2 displays the four prevailing themes, corresponding subthemes, and the prevailing codes.

Table 2

Themes and Subthemes

Themes	Subthemes
Values	commitment, pride, faith
Support	family, friends, coworkers, command, and organizational
Challenges	schedule, relationships, school, military
Aspirations	financial, personal growth, accomplishment, expanded opportunities

Values

Active-duty service members attending college possess strong internal mechanisms that are reinforced during their educational pursuit. They share certain prevailing character standards and values that strengthen self-motivation while also drive their desire to earn a college degree. When addressing his internal desires, Randall stated, "In my mind, I know that I have to get a degree to make something in life." Carter had a similar response when defining degree completion as "the biggest factor in my life." Other participants were poignant in their sense of self. David was explicit in his self-evaluation stating, "The more you invest in yourself, the better the outcome will be for yourself." The level of motivation that the participants possessed was indicative of how they expressed their drive to fulfill their educational goals.

Commitment

Service members in the Navy attending college maintain a strong sense of commitment to college achievement. Most understand that obligation and personal sacrifice are high, but they view their commitment as a worthwhile investment in themselves. They also view their college journeys with determination, believing their commitment is reaffirmed, with every completed class being another step toward completion. All participants stated a strong sense of passion for completing their degrees. Anna mentioned that staying committed was selfish but necessary. "Honestly, I wanted it for myself. I said if I was going to join the Navy, I wanted to leave the Navy with a master's degree. That was my goal. I think it's important." David echoed that sentiment when discussing commitment, calling school his "number one priority." Moreover, there was a strong sense of expectation among the participants. Earning a college degree was not considered an extended reach but rather an achievement that was an essential part of their lives. Anna described college as the "thirteenth grade." Derrick defined it as "a societal thing;

everyone has a degree when they go for a job. It's what have you done also. So initially, that

what it was. It was just expected."

Pride

They all took personal inventory of their journey, aware that their individual investment

in education was a venture not shared by most of their colleagues. The sense of accomplishment

service members attending college feel is a self-enriching behavioral reinforcer. The satisfaction

they feel is also a facet of pride. Sailors attending college are motivated to continue because their

self-confidence is rewarded when attending college. Derrick intimated that though his goal is a

master's degree, there is pride in the journey. "I told myself that, at least prove to myself that I

can finish my degree. So far, I have been successful. I was able to get my associate degree."

Sailors attending college emote pride in more ways than just attending college. They tend to use

their college focus to motivate others, and this level of mentorship is also a symbol of pride.

Emma described attending school as a platform. "I'm the one pushing education on everyone

else. No one's telling me to go to school." All participants described varying levels of pride in

attending college, with eight of the participants describing that the pride is derived from a sense

of accomplishing a goal they view as a greater challenge not achieved by most.

Faith

The participants agreed that faith is an integral component to their success and a critical

aspect of their internal regulators. How they defined faith was not unilaterally consistent. Six

participants perceived faith as a sense of trust in their own abilities and an important aspect when

acting on their own behalf. Craig asserted this when describing faith as a belief in self and those

in his support system. He had faith that he could achieve anything with a firm belief in his

abilities while placing an expectation that people in his support system would be available if he

needed any assistance. Three participants viewed faith exclusively through a religious worldview lens. James believes that faith is believing in God's plan. Emma also upholds that faith in God is a necessary ingredient in success. "If I'm not faithful to God, I would not get his blessings. Like the A's (school grades) and the opportunities to get my work done and the support of my family. All those are blessings." There were two participants who asserted their faith derives from a combination of God's plan and their inner strength.

Support

Active-duty service members attending college possess mechanisms that are reinforced and cultivated by their personal support circles. Having a stable degree of external encouragement is a vital component of environmental motivations necessary for active-duty service members to complete a college degree. The theme of support was the most prevailing among the participants. All participants emphatically pronounced how the encouragement and inspiration provided by their support systems are vital components to goal accomplishment. Active-duty service members attending college believe that their support structures are predominately positive influences even when members of their support structure apply pressure by emphasizing the importance of academic achievements. Active-duty service members rank members of their support structure by degrees of contribution, but their external motivations are related to those who are considered members of the support network. They need these inspirations in their life to help propel them forward in their pursuit of a degree. Though support and influence are motivators, they are different in how they persuade service members. Personal influences derive from an internal motivation to finish college and earn a degree. In many cases, personal influences are transparently evident to both the sailor and the influencer, but in other circumstances, the influence is much more innate and not necessarily visible to the influencer.

Family

All participants attending college view family as one of the most important mechanisms of support and inspiration. Family provides varying levels of support that extend beyond tangibility. David described his parents as the largest supporters along his college journey. "And that [my parents] showed me, no matter what, I can make it for myself, right? I can follow in this path that they have shown me." David also mentioned that his relationship with his dad became more defined and supportive when he decided to complete his college degree. "My dad is proud. My kid's in the Navy. But when I told him I'm back with school, and I'm finishing at the school you graduated from in the eighties, totally different conversation." Nolan admitted that his mother was the most prominent influence, partly because she had already earned her college degree in his same career field. "She definitely has a huge amount of knowledge in the IT field that is not really reciprocated with on-the-job training anymore. She strongly introduced that to my brother and me." Those who expressed a more overt family support structure explained that school is an implied prerequisite to career success. Derrick mentioned that he lived a privileged childhood where "my family was structured. Everything was just expected." Those service members who were married affirmed that their significant others supported them by accepting an increased role in meeting family needs such as childcare or household duties. Allison viewed family influence through fear of failure when she mentioned her concerns about not graduating from college. This concern stemmed from implied pressure knowing that both her parents were graduates.

Sailors also view loved ones as inspirations based on certain family members' struggles and achievements, generally involving educational success. Inspiration is more prevalent among those family members who completed a college degree. Moreover, in those instances where the

sailor understood their family member's educational journey and witnessed success, the inspiration to finish the degree was far more ubiquitous. David explained how his parents, having graduate degrees, were an example for him. "I can follow in this path that they have shown me. That worked for them. And I have that hope of living like they live. In seeing where they came from and where they are now, this is something I have to do."

The largest inspiration among active-duty service members who attend college and are parents is their children. Just the acknowledgment of being a parent and the responsibility that coincides with parenthood drives service members to attend college. Randall, a single parent, spoke with great passion about how becoming a surgeon was primarily based on providing for his daughter. "I want her to have the best life that she could have. In order to have certain things, to have resources, one of those resources is the monetary values." All participants with children were adamant that they remain motivated to provide a more stable and monetarily enriched childhood for their children. Active-duty service members attending college want to represent a symbol of hard work and success for their children. They view a college degree as a significant measure of success that their children can observe. Derrick alluded to this stating, "There are other routes to happiness and success. That's what I want to show him."

Friends

Active-duty service members attending college cherish support of their civilian friends. However, motivation deriving from civilian friends increases depending on their degree of success. Interpreting levels of success include college accomplishments and financial security. David stated that friends "challenge you to be better and they say hey, where are you at? How can I help you?" These relationships are solidified by mutual respect and a sense of unity along their personal journeys. For those service members who attended college prior to enlisting in the

Navy, their support network is heavily influenced by friendship bonds they developed with people they met during their previous college experiences. James was a fraternity member and explained how important this network is to personal success. "When I was in college, I pledged to a fraternity, and they always support and help. We all get to see each other grow. Some of them are still going back to school, too. That lets me know that I'm on the track also."

When factoring friends as an influence, service members attending college draw inspiration from their friends from expressive means and internal processing of decisions made by their friends. Active-duty service members attending college also draw inspiration from their friends through an internal sense of struggle and mutual care. Charlotte described how watching her friends deal with certain struggles while going through college inspired her to understand specific challenges, but she was also reminded that she is capable of more. She was thankful and intimated as much. "Watching them go through those hardships of trying to be a full-time student, trying to be a full-time worker, trying to be a full-time parent that was a big turnoff for me. But showing me that if they can be a full-time mom, student, and parent and still get the grades and education, I don't have any excuses not to get those things as well."

Coworkers

For naval service members, coworkers (also known as shipmates), are more than just professional associates. These relationships are fused during some of the most arduous experiences of their lives, such as military deployments, team-building exercises, or mission execution. Because of these unique bonding practices, coworkers hold a significantly higher position of support than all other members of their network except for family. Sailors attending college express their admiration for the support they receive from shipmates. All participants expressed gratitude and appreciation for those shipmates who are viewed as role models. This

support bond is important because active-duty service members attending college may not have

college support structure with civilian students. Nolan intimated that his shipmates support each

other to excel. "We all bounce ideas off of each other and we are all pretty much in the same

pathway leading towards getting our degrees." Craig commented on the importance of coworker

influence: He mentioned that he did not intend to attend college when he enlisted, but

conversations with coworkers and naval leadership, pursuing their own degrees, convinced him

that a degree was important. "I have guys that I work with. Especially a few people that went to

school and they have degrees. And they're the ones that say you need to kind of just get this.

Even if you never use it, just get it. It's free, it's there. So just take the opportunity, right now."

Being able to become a positive influence for others is among the most rewarding

inspirational motivators for active-duty service members attending college. They are convinced it

is a trait coveted by leaders. Sailors attending college acknowledge that coworkers not attending

college are watching them. Many of those not attending college ask for mentorship advice on

earning a degree while on active duty. Emma proudly intimated as much stating, "I have

continuously pushed on junior sailors, even outside of my own department, to get their degree, to

work towards something. Not only for their evaluations, but it also increases their chances for

advancement. It's just to better themselves and increase opportunity." Allison mentioned how

she helped senior personnel who had been at the command much longer than she had. "My

LPO's (immediate supervisor) went to school basically two weeks after I got there. I helped them

apply for school because they hadn't gone for their bachelors or anything yet." Active-duty

service members attending college embrace the interdependent motivational relationship they

share with other shipmates. They accept the additional pressure of continuing their educational

journey, knowing that they are drawing motivation from the shipmates that entice enthusiasm from them.

Command

For active-duty service members attending college, the local commands they are stationed at have an important impact on their support structure. The command's support is often a significant influence in why many active-duty service members decide to initially attend college or continue the journey as they battle adversity. The command is a unique aspect of the support network because it is the pivot point between organizational backing and shipmate support. Active-duty service members attending college view command support as more of an administrative process that motivates through external means. Service members attending college describe command support as less about the person and more about a cooperative relationship where school success is encouraged because their individual success is mutual achievement. Derrick stated, "[I]t makes them look good, I guess, that they're encouraging you to get a higher education." Allison described her command support as critical to her success because her leadership introduced her and guided her through the enrollment process. She considers herself fortunate in that regard.

Most participants mentioned varying degrees of positive support. However, one participant, Anna, was adamant that command support was not sufficient. Though the command approved the participant's requests to attend college, concern was conveyed to her that school was becoming too important. "I've had discussions with upper chain of command that will definitely [imply that] school seems to be a precedent." Anna mentioned the negativity experienced was consistent in her last three duty stations, implying a trend. The participant believes that this resistance was not evident until the participant was promoted into a more senior

leadership role. "I think, in the military, there is a stigma of helping the younger sailors and then the middle management side is like you already have a career and you're taking more time away from the Navy."

Organizational

Tuition assistance is an integral factor for service members attending college while on active duty. Most service members would not have enlisted in the Navy if not for the college benefits. They voiced their appreciation for serving during the pandemic because they felt fortunate to be still employed. However, six participants were adamant that they would not attend college on active duty without the military's college benefits. Moreover, the tuition assistance benefit was a driving force in why many service members attending college chose to enlist. Many service members attending college previously enrolled in classes and accumulated college debt. When combining these two factors, service members attending college are grateful for the college benefits and understand it is a benefit that many in the civilian sector do not possess. The support network is sustained because of the institutional backing available to service members. However, they believe changes need to be made to the TA process. Sixty-four percent of the participants felt the Navy's tuition assistance policy is either unnecessarily inefficient or frustratingly inconsistent. Their frustrations included the inconsistent administrative lead time that local commands require to work the requests through the approval process. Moreover, 73% of participants perceived that the Navy's TA support starts and ends with providing the funds to attend school. Nolan expanded on this, stating that the Navy provides the funds without guidance to assist service members who want to attend college but lack the knowledge to create viable goals. "The problem I've seen in my past experience, there's a lot of just get college, get college, but don't really know. You're pushing somebody, but you're not

giving them a path to follow." Emma voiced similar concerns about organizational support. "They say if you want classes, here's money to go for it. But they don't walk you through it. They don't hold your hand. If you want to go to school, you're going to have to do the research, apply to the school, get your classes all lined up to the extra legwork to submit it through TA."

Challenges

Active-duty service members also face many challenges and much adversity as they attend college while serving in the United States Navy. The difficulty in completing their college requirements depends on the complexity of imbalanced routines, family, military, and school demands that they address. However, they must overcome these trials knowing that the time available is not sufficient to complete all tasking. This constant level of adversity is taxing on their motivation. All participants described varying degrees of frustration, disappointment, and regret in their journals as they recorded their daily struggles with completing course requirements while balancing other parts of their day.

Schedule

While serving in the military, service members face a variety of mandates that require constant attention. The lack of available time throughout the day was evident during the study. Throughout the day, they must prioritize tasking and create time segments to organize goals. Balancing a daily schedule is very difficult for active-duty service members because their priorities constantly shift throughout the day. Most service members work a rotating shift that requires a constant alteration in their routine. Often, sacrifices are necessary to meet the day's tasking. This has created a sense of feeling overwhelmed and fostering frustration. In one of her journal entries, Anna mentioned the sheer level of frustration of trying to balance her college schedule while meeting the needs of naval service and a family. "I'm too tired to work out. I am

getting up at 0430 (AM) and going to bed at 0000 (midnight) to complete my schoolwork each night. It has left me exhausted." In his personal journal, David also expressed just how difficult his schedule is when trying to meet all priorities. He intimated an inability to meet all the day's tasks in one journal entry. "Challenge today was to find the time to get (school) work done. Nothing I could do to address the challenge other than to make a mental note of what needed to be done to catch up." The struggle with time balance was consistently highlighted in all facets of the collected data.

Relationships

Active-duty service members who need to balance their family relationships with their college studies endure a high level of stress in their schedule. Nevertheless, much of the frustration service members with families endure while going to college places a higher burden on their families. Six participants were parents, and all were consistent in illustrating mixed emotions because they had to devote time to their college instead of with their children or spouse. Jennifer intimated in her journal that there are days when she will not go home after work to meet her daily goals. "Stayed late at work to complete a math test. Additionally, I had to have my husband pick up our daughter and start dinner while I finished up." When they do not meet their daily goals, a sense of guilt and disappointment reflects a personal sense of failure. Anna stated she has great difficulty meeting her family demands. "I spend most of my time figuring out a way to make my family feel as little stress as possible with the new addition of school, but I am finding that my personal care is suffering, and I am gaining weight. I know there needs to be change, and I cannot maintain this workload for the longevity needed to complete my degree."

School

Service members in the United States Navy attending college can get inundated by their school workload depending on the complexity of the college requirement and any unforeseen changes to the daily schedule. The time burden can be overwhelming between the studying and scheduling times for testing or other academic evaluations. Charlotte referenced that time allotment for school is the worst part of her college pursuit. "I absolutely hate the amount of time spent doing a lot of homework. I'm tired of going to school. I think it's different when you're going to school and it's your sole job in life. But all of us are working full time jobs and juggling families or a social life. It's just really taxing." Jennifer echoed those emotions in her journal. "Completed a math lesson in two total hours, during work and later at night after my daughter went to sleep. The challenge this day was I missed out on time with my husband after the kids went to sleep."

Military Requirements

Active-duty service members face immense strain on their schedule just meeting military duty requirements, but time burdens are greatly multiplied when they factor school into their daily schedule. There is a constant need to adjust schedules and accept sacrifices on their time. Anna expressed this constant strain on her schedule as immense. "I constantly receive text messages/phone calls from work with issues and concerns. Work is very demanding and placed additional stress to my already stressful week." Active-duty service members understand that the additional burden of attending college is self-inflicted, but this understanding does not make the stress any less impactful. Randall admitted in his journal that flexibility is often met with unfulfilled goals, sometimes in schoolwork. "I had duty (military patrol or watch), so I missed a

(school) test. Long hours at work and preparing for an inspection. This is keeping me from getting into class on time."

Aspirations

Active-duty service members attending college intently focus on reaching the milestone along their college journeys. All participants mentioned tangible and internal goals that propel them to complete their studies. They consider their college degrees as a momentous accomplishment that brings rewards and unlocked possibilities that were not previously available to them. There are many concerns to identify when exploring why active-duty service members attending college are motivated to complete their degrees, including financial, self-progress, career prospects, and pride in completing a targeted goal. They accept the sacrifices and immense stress while confidently remaining focused on goal completion. They view school as an investment in their future and their family's well-being.

Financial

All participants were primarily focused on completing their schooling because of the possibility of expanded financial growth associated with college degrees. Among active-duty service members, there is a profound level of confidence that a college degree would positively change their lives monetarily. David is convinced that a college degree produces higher wages. "I'm going to be able to retire with a bigger retirement check." Moreover, Randall elaborated on being able to provide for his family by turning the focus toward his daughter. "I want her to have the best life. In order to have certain things, to have resources, one of those resources is the monetary value."

Personal Growth

There is a deep connection between college degrees and personal growth among active-duty service members who attend college. This is an area where eight participants described college as a deeply fulfilling goal. They believe that investing time to improve their personal educational standing will be integral to increasing their self-esteem while creating a better understanding of how others perceive them. David remarked as much in stating that the venture is primarily a personal venture. "The more you invest in yourself, the better the outcome." Active-duty service members also consider the personal growth associated with a college degree to be more introspective. They align the degree with greater knowledge and an expanded understanding of themselves. Anna described an earned college degree as "helping me figure out who I am and my talents that best support where I'm going and needed and where I feel I am called to be." Allison reinforced those emotions by firmly asserting that having a degree allows service members to provide aid to those in need and gain a better understanding of what compels action among people. As a clinical psychologist, a higher level of education would allow her to assist more people. "A little service to humanity in the sense that people need mental health care, and they need good people doing mental health care. I feel a little obligation that I can do that and provide that, and I enjoy it. And just kind of meeting my purpose."

Accomplishment

Active-duty service members who attend college also view earning a college degree as an enormous sense of accomplishment. Eight of the participants attended college prior to joining the Navy. For them, completing the degree is filling a hole or the perception of righting a wrong in their lives. Completing their degrees provides closure and completeness for many service members. Derrick was emphatic about the pending emotional release of completing his degree.

"Right now, the ultimate goal is to finish my Bachelor's. That is what I've learned about myself. I need to make shorter goals. I feel like it's something that I need to prove to myself that I am not just a doer." All participants were proud of their military experiences, but service members also view a combination of earning a college degree and serving in the military as two halves of success. They view their accomplishments as a counterbalance to their military careers. Nolan alluded to how the Navy instilled a sense of confidence in him that he could complete the degree. "The Navy refocused me. You start building confidence, and I feel like I can do this." Anna stated that a degree is the end requirement of her passion to become a counselor. "It really wasn't about the degrees; it was what do I need to accomplish to get to that goal? In order to be a counselor, you have to have a minimum of a Master's. That was always my goal."

Expanded Opportunities

There is a consistent belief among the participants that a college degree creates an expanded level of opportunities for active-duty service members who attend college. They are unilaterally convinced that their degrees will open doors in their personal and professional lives. Sailors attending college view a degree as a cultural change where they will have admittance to people and resources who covet education. Craig succinctly stated, "[I]t will make me a little more marketable. It gives you an advantage over a lot of people." This belief in expanded opportunities is consistent with service members pursuing a degree for their pending transitions back to civilian life and those service members who are remaining in the military. Sailors view college as a baseline that continues to shift. To remain competitive in front of other applicants, a degree is paramount in anticipating the future markets. "We don't know. In ten years, it could be a bachelor's degree. It could be a master's degree. So, kind of getting ahead of the tide on that is another objective for why I'm getting this degree." Nolan viewed his degree as the beginning of

his next chapter of learning. "The field that I want to go into, electric engineering project management, it's really deep with math electricians and math engineers. They kind of had to put in a lot of years of work after they got their degrees. It's going to be my ticket." Derrick described his degree as a stepping stone to more education. "I know that the journey is not done, even with this. You and I talked that I want to keep going on with this, with masters and all that." David was succinct in his view, stating that preparation for life after the military is a paramount concern. "This [military service] has to end one day. I'm really trying to slide in to the next phase of my life without hitting too many bumpy roads."

Outlier Data and Findings

Two important outliers need to be presented to accurately account for all participant information within the data. The first outlier centered on organizational support and the frustration with organizational mandates. The second outlier centered on the inability for one participant to complete college course requirements.

Organizational Support

I questioned the participants on the level of assistance they were receiving while going to college on active duty. When asked about organizational support to attend college, most participants were satisfied with the Navy tuition assistance policy. Most participants explained ample opportunity to apply and utilize the available tuition assistance. However, one participant, Randall, asserted that the tuition assistance policy was inadequate to meet the needs of first-term or first-enlistment service members. This was a concern about tuition assistance issues witnessed by other service members. The current policy requires eligible service members to have served at least 3 years of active-duty service, remain on active-duty service throughout the course, and be stationed at a permanent command for at least 1 year prior to requesting any Navy tuition

assistance (Department of the Navy, 2022, March 24). Randall mentioned that the minimum number of years the Navy requires service members to have on active-duty service prior to applying for tuition assistance is disingenuous. Once service members are eligible to apply for tuition assistance, the participant believes they are already planning to transition out of the Navy or transfer to a new command. "So, now sailors are upset that they come into the Navy to do college and they're told, yet, that they can't do college."

Though each command may make their own TA policy more stringent than the organizational mandates, they are unable to reduce any requirement below the existing Navy policy. Randall's concerns may be pertinent depending on the command and an individual's billet, rank, or job. Each of those components factor into how long a sailor is required to remain at a specific duty station. At a particular duty station, the length of time may vary from 1–5 years. Moreover, the length of an initial enlistment may vary between 3–6 years (*Requirements to Join*, n.d.). Depending on the command and the length of the individual's enlistment contract, it is plausible for first-term service members to have this experience.

Course Withdrawal

Most of the participants remained focused on the successful completion of their schoolwork, but this level of accomplishment and motivation was not universal among all participants. One participant, Jennifer, voluntarily chose not to complete schoolwork because of the increased pressure on an already compressed daily schedule. She enrolled in three classes during the study and quickly felt overwhelmed with the imbalance between schoolwork and tending to her infant daughter. She wanted to withdraw from the class but was instructed that it would be more financially prudent to fail than to withdraw. She stated, "I always do what I say I'm going to do and get everything done. The fact that I didn't get things done is hard for me to

accept, that's the best course of action. I reached out to the Veterans Affairs office at the school and asked them. I can't keep up. They said the best option is if you have to fail, then fail the class. Because if you withdraw now, you'll have to pay the university back. The GI [Bill] won't cover it. I had to just not turn something in." Jennifer explained that she did drop one of her three classes and stayed enrolled in the other two through the rest of the semester. Her class withdrawal was unique to this study.

Research Question Responses

The research focused on answering one central research question and two sub-questions. The questions attempted to determine motivational factors that propel active-duty service members to attend college. The goals of the data also targeted intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.

Central Research Question

What are the determining motivators that move United States Navy service members to attend college while on active duty? Active-duty service members attending college possess a strong sense of self. Service members attending college remain focused on personal goals that may or may not coincide with the Navy mission. Though they have military obligations, these service members are unwavering in pursuing a degree. They do not view college as an option but as more of a personal necessity in their pursuit of goal achievement and pursuit of knowledge. Moreover, the service members attending school are convinced that a college degree is the most important professional milestone for future success in their professional ambitions. Charlotte mentioned that the degree itself is the key. "I understand that if I want to have more options in the future, I have to go to school. So, I don't have any personal goals, like, oh I want to do this, or I want to do that. I just understand that I have to get this degree."

The participants also possess strong support networks from family and friends who encourage their pursuit. Their support networks offer value by providing enthusiasm and tangible examples of degree completion. Service members are motivated through environmental support as well, such as tuition assistance and the opportunities for promotions. For them, the Navy's tuition assistance program is a vital catalyst to school completion. Among the participants, five of 11 stated that a primary catalyst for enlisting was the education benefits, while seven of 11 of the participants also elaborated that they initially had intentions to complete their initial enlistment and then discharge. However, that number has dwindled down to two of the participants still intending to discharge prior to being eligible for deferred compensation at retirement.

Sub-Question 1

What are the intrinsic behavioral identifiers that influence United States Navy service members attending college? In the self-determination theory (SDT), motivation derives from the perceived value and satisfaction associated with an action (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Active-duty service members attending college are motivated by internal traits such as faith, commitment, and self-confidence. However, the participants view faith from different spectrums. When asked where their faith originates, three of 11 participants were adamant that they primarily draw internal motivation from their faith in God and that attending school is part of His plan. There were two participants who believe their faith is a split between an internal strength and God. Their faith in self is just as important as their faith in God. James was steadfast stating that faith is derived from both sources. "Just faith in myself, faith in God's plan. Faith that things happen because they're supposed to happen whether it's good or bad, it's all a lesson." Conversely, six of 11 participants stated that their faith is not derived from a theological standpoint. This

majority explained that their faith is centered on self-confidence and trust from within their support network. Craig explained his confidence as a strength. "I am really big into believing in myself and my future. I would say that I have faith that, no matter what I do, I'll be able to work it out, to some degree."

The participants' enjoyment of school is profound as well. Sailors attending college believe the school has personal value because it fulfills their pursuit of self-improvement. They enjoy the feeling of control in their lives, and completing college courses meets that desire. Lastly, active-duty service members attending college embrace the internal validation and self-recognition of accomplishment. They are proud of attending college, and achieving a personal goal is prevalent.

Sub-Question 2

What are the extrinsic behavioral identifiers that influence United States Navy service members attending college? External influences for active-duty service members attending college derive from their environment. The Navy's culture and financial incentives are important factors. The Navy's constant promotion of education and the organization's culture of support were identified as external stimuli and cited as positive aspects of attending college. Also, a support structure that continually reinforces pride and commitment were integral identifiers. Sailors are influenced by constant inputs promoting colleges, such as financial improvements or amplified opportunities to promote. David intimated that he views a college degree as a financial advantage both in the Navy and afterward. "I envision, overall, I'm going to be able to retire with a bigger retirement check. I'm going to make more money while I'm in. I can save more while I'm in. I can provide a nicer life for myself and my wife and my family. Also, with that, it gives me ample opportunity when I get out." Sailors attending college draw extrinsic motivation from

their friends as well. In some cases, this is from experiences derived from what friends have

either endured. Their friends' experiences increase the sense of competition in service members.

In other ways, friends provide examples of results less favorable to service members that

hindered their own pursuit of a degree. In either case, active-duty service members attending

college use these experiences to exceed the standing of those around them.

Summary

Chapter 4 provided participant data information with brief explanations of each of the 11

participants. The chapter transitioned into the data results and illustrated the four themes and

subsequent subthemes that developed during the analysis. The themes illustrated influences and

motivators that impact the actions of active-duty service members attending college. These

themes vary from personal strengths to inspirations and support systems. Moreover, I categorized

and displayed the subthemes to reflect their intrinsic and extrinsic motivational effects. Within

the subthemes, specific areas illustrated motivators such as family influences and personal goals.

The chapter discussed outliers within command and organizational data areas that were not

consistent with the rest of the participant data in those respective areas. Motivations and

influences impacting the participant's decision to attend college were also identified. Lastly, the

chapter covered the central research question and the two sub-questions.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenological study is to explore the motivation of attending college through the experiences of active-duty Navy service members stationed at Naval Air Station East (NAS East). This chapter offers my interpretations of the findings and concepts produced from the study. The chapter will also discuss the interpretations of findings, implications for policy and practice, theoretical and methodological implications, limitations and delimitations, and recommendations for future research.

Discussion

This section discusses the study's findings and accounts for the themes that emerged while examining the motivation of attending college through the lens of active-duty service members. My interpretation of the findings and implications for policy and practice are discussed, along with an account of the empirical and theoretical implications. Motivation is an intricate focus with many threads to explore. This section will interpret the study of motivation through a self-determination lens.

Interpretation of Findings

This portion presents a brief synopsis of the thematic findings presented in Chapter 4. The summary includes a discussion on the identified themes (values, support, challenges, and aspirations) and the significant interpretations I learned from the findings.

Summary of Thematic Findings

Interpreting the study's findings must account for how its themes and subthemes align within the self-determination theory (SDT). I needed to interpret the data to infer which motivators derived from extrinsic systems while also exploring intrinsic motivators. It was also

important to account for the relationship between the personal satisfaction associated with behavior and the motivational means utilized to act. This relationship is imperative when considering the different behavioral influences on motivation (Flannery, 2017). Among the developed themes, personal attributes were the most prevailing. However, I found a considerable gap between the participants' insecurities and needs fulfillment in the findings. This inner disparity compels action and drives their pursuit of a college degree; however, personal attributes are also influenced by inspirational support through aspirations. The participants' support networks and internal needs to provide for others feeds their ambitions. Lastly, challenges experienced by the participants highlighted the tools they implement to balance environmental factors. There is a connection between successfully balancing these external conflicts with effective cognitive development (Ryan & Deci, 2002). The data also revealed that the participants internalized the need to attend college from four of the six regulators. Those regulatory styles were introjected regulation, identified regulation, integrated regulation, or intrinsic regulation. The participants viewed a degree as a financial reward while also seeing the degree as a vital sense of personal importance.

The data also showed a keen sense of obligation that the degree is an expectation due to influences or understandings the participants experienced. This emotional impetus was evident when factoring in the importance of family influence. Among the participants, 10 of 11 were raised by parents who earned their respective degrees prior to the participants' initial college enrollment. My study supports previous research on parental influence (Bird, 2018; Byun et al., 2017; Davis-Keane, 2005; Egalite, 2016). Though the influence of parents with college degrees was significant, some participants struggled with remaining focused on their college studies. Two participants explained that earning a degree was essential, but the motivation to complete

one was waning. A declining push to complete their degrees may indicate either a lower intrinsic value or a need to adjust their goals in order to achieve maximum satisfaction at the integrated and intrinsic spectrum of SDT's stages of motivation. The other nine participants explained the joy, satisfaction, and sheer personal value of attending college was far greater than any other goal. These are clear examples of intrinsic motivation.

Staying Focused on Aspirations While Persevering Through Challenges. The participants described the many ways in which their motivations were influenced. My research noted that most participants were able to persevere by remaining focused on their personal aspirations despite their many daily personal impacts. The data support previous studies on perceived success's impact (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Srivastava et al., 2001; Gardarsdottir et al., 2009; Thibault et al., 2016). The participants were largely emotionally impacted by the many influences that affected their tenuous life balance. However, despite fragile schedules and prioritization challenges, the majority could meet their school requirements. All participants were consistent in conceding that they understood sacrifices in their personal lives but still chose to prioritize their school requirements to varying degrees. This type of motivation falls more in line with introjected or identified regulators. However, this study did find that the participants engaged in avoidance and coping strategies to help balance their schedules. This relationship between coping and motivation is also supported by previous research (Sanjuan & Avila, 2019). One participant, Craig, mentioned that he thrives on procrastination. He intimated that he purposely postpones schoolwork because of his constantly changing work schedule and an unwillingness to complete assignments on a more structured schedule. Craig's procrastination may be evidence of dissimilar findings suggesting that not all active-duty students who place a high value on college are able to persevere or remain consistently motivated. However, it also

may indicate how participants shape their motivation, because Craig explained how procrastinating "makes it more exciting to plan it out in a couple of hours the day that it's due instead of spreading it out and making my life easier."

The level of commitment and focus displayed by the participants were consistent with autonomy according to SDT. The participants' dedication to the purpose of college success and faith in the process illustrated that they viewed school success as a goal that reflected their personal values. Allison described college as a lifestyle and a way to use her knowledge to help others. "I'm getting the global health [degree] because I really believe it's a big proponent of everything, especially in the military aspects where we're kind of shifting to possible, more like biological warfare and how we get resources to people. Things like that are changing. And the same with mental health; how we talk to a lot of people or how we provide resources to people instead of just dealing with things when people are in crisis." This level of autonomy falls in line with the integrated and intrinsic regulators of motivation. At the same time, those who did not fall under the integrated regulation were categorized under the identified regulation and introjected regulation because they embraced college success as an inherently important goal (Deci & Ryan, 2002). Emma explained that she values school as a necessary target for reaching the goal of military promotion. "It's very hard to complete. So, it's very discouraging, sometimes to get my school done. But what gets me through it is the end result."

The Influence of External Motivators on Behavior. The data offered a consistent focus on attaching financial gain with professional success. This portion of the study is interwoven with the Navy's effectiveness in using extrinsic motivators to influence behavior. The study's findings are consistent with other research that denotes a connection between career goals and the value of college degree completion (Guiffrida et al., 2013; Taylor et al., 2014; Thibault et al.,

2016). However, the study provides potentially conflicting data when considering the impact of external motivators on the stimulus to attend college. Six of the 11 participants were adamant that they would not attend college if the Navy did not have tuition assistance. The need for financial incentives would seem to emphasize the externally regulated influence that tuition assistance provides or indicate that the Navy's desire to build a culture of personal success identification is compelling. It may also indicate the participants' motivation to attend college when considering the close percentages of those who enlisted for the college benefit (45%) and those who would not attend college if they did not have the tuition assistance (TA) benefit (55%). The findings allude that intrinsic motivation is still prevalent if the percentage of participants who enlisted for the college benefits would have sought tuition assistance elsewhere in their pursuit and forgone military service entirely.

Within the study, most participants intimated that the Navy's philosophical emphasis on personal development is a significant factor in the timing of their college enrollment and their school workload. Nolan mentioned how the Navy's push for self-improvement is why he went back to school. "The Navy made me a self-starter." Charlotte admitted that the Navy instilled a "strong work ethic" in her, instrumental in pursuing a college degree. This data supported SDT's focus on transitioning from external to intrinsic regulations. The participants embraced the organization's intentions and organically transitioned to identified or integrated motivation through the Navy's cultural expectations and emphasis on personal goals.

Cultivating Fulfillment Through the Personal Value of a College Education. The study's participants demonstrated their demands to bridge a gap between current perceptions of unsatisfied well-being with their expected or accepted levels of personal satisfaction. All participants viewed college as a necessary building block to quench self-demands because they

are not satisfied with their current status and are determined to reach a higher level of personal success. SDT acknowledges that filling the space between discontent and fulfillment is at the forefront of motivation. Moreover, SDT examines how biological, social, and cultural environments restrict or enhance human development while also understanding their elemental impact on the basic psychological needs of competence, relatedness, and autonomy (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Meeting these three basic needs enhances satisfaction and attentiveness to personal growth (Ryan et al., 2008). This study supports the existing research that connects student success with college education's efficacy in meeting those three basic needs (Benita et al., 2020; Church et al., 2012; Levasque et al., 2004; Woon et al., 2018). Jennifer described that the most enjoyable and motivating portion of attending school is "learning new things and concepts." Emma echoed that sentiment, stating that college provides value in "learning about new things in a topic that I am going for and eventually being able to do." Their motivation to learn and master new skills improves cognitive development while balancing the basic competence need. These are clear indicators or the intrinsic regulators of SDT (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

The intrinsic nature of the participants' motivation was also evident in their conveyance of joys of relatedness. The data reveals a discernable connection between attending college and the relatedness associated with school success. The participants explained that they enjoy the college learning environment because it is different than their work environment. The participants feel the school environment was a considerable contributor to their learning experience. They enjoy the concept of meeting new people who are also pursuing a college degree. Charlotte explained that college is about exchanging ideas in a supportive environment. "What I enjoy is meeting new people. We're not always going to agree on maybe the topic we're working on but getting other people's point of view on different subjects. Airing our ideas out,

that's always interesting." The conceptualization of interweaving social connections in a learning atmosphere with action increases motivation through relatedness (Martin et al., 2018).

Implications for Policy or Practice

This section discusses the integration of my study's data to illustrate implications for policies and practices that pertain to the motivation of service members attending college while on active duty. The data illustrates many positive attributes associated with motivating service members to attend college. However, despite the accomplishments, there are addressable areas that could increase the number of service members attending college while also accounting for the tangible success accompanying their pursuit of a college degree.

Implications for Policy

The data suggest inconsistencies in how different local commands embrace college enrollment among their service members. Most participants mentioned that their local commands helped discuss the importance of a college degree when considering positive attributes of personal development. However, the local support for active-duty service members attending college tends to wane due to a lack of assistance. The Navy removed most base-wide college counselors and shifted to a more remote concept that features phone assistance (Department of the Navy, 2021). The data indicate that service members prefer face-to-face guidance. Local commands could harness their passion for college enrollment by creating or designating individuals as dedicated mentors who have experience using the tuition assistance program. Though there are commands using college mentorship on a local level, it would seem to be a prudent investment for all active-duty service members attending college and should be considered by those commands who lack in this area.

Implications for Practice

The study revealed a significant level of frustration aimed at the Navy's organizational tuition assistance program. It is noted that the Navy's constantly changing tuition assistance eligibility rules are part of a greater workforce management effort that involves a shifting funding level. The study indicates a need to better standardize the tuition assistance eligibility for service members. Though my study focuses on active-duty service members attending college, it is evident from the data that many of those attending college experience similar frustration levels. However, for many other active-duty service members, the challenge is more daunting. Many may be confused to the point where they decide not to pursue college.

Sailors who enlist in the Navy based on college assistance information they receive from Navy recruiters may not be able to enjoy the benefits they believed were already available. Sailors who arrive at their new commands confident they will be able to do their jobs and pursue college degrees simultaneously are presented with a reality that differs from their expectations. The Navy may mitigate much of the users' dissatisfaction by reducing the number of changes to the existing policy. These necessary changes could have a much smoother integration period if the implementation period was applied during a more extended grace period than the current timeline. It would seem more prudent to implement changes to the tuition assistance policy more structurally and consistently. Perhaps the changes could be implemented after the Navy's annual budget is constructed. This would allow more time for the changes to be conveyed to the entire service prior to implementation. It would allow potential recruits to better understand the existing policy and potential changes that may occur annually. It would also provide stable guidance for the college semesters that fall under that particular year while providing a more cohesive planning process for service members attending college.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

  The self-determination theory framed the current study because it concentrates on personal satisfaction and value on the result of actions (Deci & Ryan, 2000). By incorporating SDT into exploring research from the participants' perspectives, the study provided a greater understanding of the motives, mindset, and actions of active-duty service members attending college. The study shed light on the personal desire of active-duty service members to pursue a college degree, regardless of the sacrifices. Moreover, the study illustrated the daily struggles between service members' motivation to attend college with the other areas of their lives. Given how most studies on motivation were more fixated on other participant groups (Gagne & Deci, 2005; Church et al., 2012; Ryan & Deci, 2016; Arvanitis, 2017; Flannery, 2017; Lou et al., 2018; Wang et al., 2019), an exploration of active-duty service members was necessary to provide important data in this focus area. The study illustrated a relationship between the participants' motivation to meet educational goals and their derived motivation to attend college. The study also provided insight into the difficulties of pursuing an educational goal while meeting the mandates associated with active-duty service in the U.S. Navy by exploring these challenges from the sailor's perspective.

  This study also supports the foundational basis of SDT when considering that most of the participants attend college because they place a very high intrinsic value on the outcome of their personal investment. Moreover, the study confirmed previous research on how vital environments are to behavior (Gagne, 2014). The confirmation on previous research was apparent in how the participants embraced the Navy culture of personal development by attending college. The relationship was more evident in those service members who initially enlisted in the Navy with no intention of attending college. The environmental influences of

Navy culture and their personal drive to succeed converged, resulting in their college

enrollments. An interesting and unexpected outcome of the research was the self-awareness of

several participants. The participants intimated that they learned about themselves during the

focus groups. Prior to the study, the participants explained that they felt lonely, as if they were

the only ones experiencing their respective challenges. As the participants listened to each other,

a sense of belonging developed.

This study also showed similarities between active-duty service members attending

college and other students not currently serving in the military. The value of a degree compiled

with the acceptance of time management and personal sacrifice was consistent with other studies

(Barr, 2015; Hitt, 2015). They also highlighted the impact of the Navy's ability to recruit a

particular type of sailor who embraces the organization's desire to expose an individual's

weaknesses and identify ways to improve. Sailors who do not attend college do so of their own

volition. They place a lower value on this personal investment than those who attend. The study

does not attempt to rank the importance of college but rather focuses on why the service

members going to school place such a high emphasis on a college degree. The research

enlightens how the balance of extrinsic and intrinsic motivators are intertwined. The research

also demonstrated how SDT's focus was slightly varied.

The data may deviate from the intrinsic components of SDT when factoring in that most

of the participants would not attend college without the Navy's TA funding. This portion is

fascinating because almost all the data assembled for the study illustrates just how poignant SDT

is when factoring in the different intrinsic motivators active-duty service members exhibit on

their path to completing their college degree. However, most were just as adamant about not

attending college if they were forced to pay for it. Their lack of desire to pay for college may

contradict the intrinsic mechanisms associated with SDT and seem to place a higher emphasis on extrinsic motivators that are less dependent on the internal value of a college education. But the divergence is only within autonomous aspects of SDT because this study does support previous research that utilized SDT in determining a favorable relationship between reward in course completion and academic success (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Buch et al., 2015). However, this divergence from SDT may not be as profound when considering that service members motivated to attend college may still enroll with an alternative means of tuition assistance or employment that provides similar benefits. Within this construct, participants enlisting primarily for tuition assistance would simply forgo military service and seek other employers that provide the college benefit.

Limitations and Delimitations

Many of the study's limitations resulted from gathering qualitative data while balancing the challenges of the COVID 19 mitigation measures designed to reduce face-to-face contact. The inhibitors resulting from the pandemic forced the study to reduce the number of participants from other commands. I collected data in a remote environment whenever possible. There were several issues with participants being unable to do their initial scheduled interviews and focus group sessions, which made rescheduling them a challenge. The pandemic also changed how active-duty students attended college and balanced their work schedules. Many of the students would have enrolled in brick-and-mortar or face-to-face classes in a more traditional college environment. Moreover, their work-life balance would be much different if their respective commands could deploy a more traditional work schedule. The varying dynamic challenges of balancing school and active-duty service may have produced different findings.

Recommendations for Future Research

Though this study was able to gain approval to solicit participants from specific commands, future research should include more bases and regions. Different military bases have personnel performing different duties; however, in many cases, the bases themselves have different missions. By expanding the variety and number of participants, the data may reflect more diverse findings that are more inclusive of all active-duty service members. I also recommend research determining if college professors are more empathetic to active-duty personnel. Many professors are experienced in the challenges associated with students attending college while on active duty. If active-duty students are treated differently, either for better or worse, this may shed light on how those changes affect the college experience for active-duty personnel. A third recommendation involves work schedules. Participants who attend brick-and-mortar classes should be included as well as participants who work a more standardized work schedule. Also, more research needs to be conducted on the number of military service members that enlist primarily for college benefits. It could include how the constantly changing access to those benefits impacts their motivation to continue with school and remain on active duty. A study emphasizing the inclusion of tuition assistance would undoubtedly explain the extrinsic connection between school aid, college attendance, and military enlistments. Though this area has many studies, the inclusion of active-duty service members would highlight whether individuals enlist strictly for the college benefits or are drawn to the school because they place a greater monetary value on tuition assistance.

Conclusion

The self-determination theory developed by Deci and Ryan (2000) was integral in the development of this study. Its central focus on how individuals perceive satisfaction aligned with

the balance between personal value and behavior resonated with my desire to explore motivation. The research was designed to study motivation through the journey of active-duty service members attending college because there is a lack of data focusing on active-duty participants. Implementing a triangulated data gathering approach that incorporated personal interviews, personal journals, and focus groups, I was able to understand, through the study, the shared experiences of the participants better. The participants shared their personal motivators, both intrinsic and extrinsic. They also explained the many challenges and frustrations associated with their educational journeys. The data produced four prevailing themes: values, support, challenges, and aspirations. The study revealed that the participants are motivated by financial growth, strong personal support structure, professional leadership, intrinsic family and friend influences, and environmental influences stemming from a Navy culture focused on personal development. The participants differentiated themselves from active-duty service members not attending college by willfully sacrificing family and personal time to complete their schooling. SDT was supported in most areas of the study, with the one exception of tuition assistance.

The study illuminated how many participants emphasized extrinsic motivators, explicitly mentioning that most would not attend college without tuition assistance. Though a considerable amount of data leans toward extrinsic motivators, the participants did significantly embrace intrinsic aspects of motivation to attend school as they described the enjoyment and satisfaction they emote while attending college. This leads the research to interpret a strong balance of extrinsic regulators, such as personal support influences and work culture that are intertwined with intrinsic motivators such as faith and personal success. The behavioral stimuli that effectively motivated the participants to attend college was identified. There is a clear indication

that personal growth and professional success are priorities for active-duty service members attending college.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

March 31, 2021

Sean Mulvaney
Jeffrey Savage

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY20-21-112 A Hermeneutic Phenomenological study of the experiences of United States Service Members Attending College While on Active Duty

Dear Sean Mulvaney, Jeffrey Savage:

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46:101(b):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form(s) and final versions of your study documents can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. Your stamped consent form(s) should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document(s) should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.
If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us' at
█@█

Sincerely,
████████

Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

APPENDIX B: RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Greetings:

As a student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to explore motivation through the perspectives of active-duty Navy service members attending college and I am emailing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be active-duty Navy, currently attending college, stationed at a command on Naval Air Station (East), and will remain stationed at NAS (East) for another six months or more. Each participant, if willing, will be asked to attend one personal audio recorded interview (lasting approximately 30 minutes), submit nine daily reflective journal entries (approximately 10 minutes per day for nine consecutive days), attend one focus group where 5-6 other participants will also be in attendance (45 minutes), and conduct a review of the participant's data that was collected to ensure accuracy (30 minutes). All interaction will be conducted remotely through Google Meet or conference call, depending on personal choice. A link on where to enter Google Meet and a conference call phone number will be provided prior to data collection. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

In order to participate, please click one of the following links to complete a screening survey:

https://www.surveymonkey.com/rXXXXXXX
https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/XXXXXXX

After I review all screening survey responses, I will select participants. If you are selected to participate, I will contact you to schedule the personal interview. A consent document will be emailed to all selected participants one week prior to the personal interview. The consent document contains additional information about my research. Please sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the interview. It can be scanned and emailed back, or a picture of the completed document can be texted to me.

Each participant that completes the study will receive a $25 Visa gift card after the study concludes.

Sincerely,
Sean Mulvaney
(###)-###-####
###@###.com

APPENDIX C: COMMAND APPROVAL TO SOLICIT PARTICIPANTS

26 September 2020

Naval Air Station East
Commanding Officer
United States Navy

Dear Commanding Officer:

Sir, as a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the dissertation requirements for an education doctoral degree. The title of my research project is "A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study of the Experiences of United States Navy Service Members Attending College While on Active Duty." The purpose of my research to explore the motivation of attending college through the experiences of active-duty Navy personnel. I am writing to request your permission to contact members of your command to invite them to participate in my research study.

Participants will be asked to go to SurveyMonkey.com and complete an initial questionnaire. I will conduct purposeful homogenous sampling to select 10-15 individuals to participate. Once they have accepted my invitation, I will contact them to schedule a 30-minute interview. Next, I will request that my participants take 10 minutes a day to reflect on the challenges of balancing college with serving in the Navy. This portion will last for nine days. I will then invite them to participate in a 45-minute focus group session with other participants. The maximum number of participants in any particular focus group will be six. I will also ask them to conduct a transcript review that will last 30 minutes, as well. All data collection will take place remotely, through Google Meet, and correspondence will take place electronically. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. All information will remain private, and their identities will be anonymous in the final manuscript. Their participation is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue involvement at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please provide a signed statement on official letterhead indicating your approval. A permission letter document is attached for your convenience. If you have any questions, my email is XXX@XXX.mil and my phone numbers are (cell) XXX-XXX-XXXX/(work) XXX-XXX-XXXX.

Very Respectfully,

Sean L. Mulvaney

APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT INFORMED CONSENT

CONSENT FORM
A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study of the Experiences of United States Navy Service
Members Attending College While on Active Duty

Sean Mulvaney
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study exploring the motivation of attending college through the experiences of active-duty Navy service members. You were selected as a possible participant because you are active-duty Navy, currently attending college, and stationed at a command on Naval Air Station (East) with no less than 6 months left on the installation prior to transfer or discharge. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Sean Mulvaney, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to explore the motivation of attending college through the perspective of active-duty service members attending college.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:
1. Log into Google Meet via a provided link in order to attend one semi-structured private interview that will be conducted for all participants. A group of standard questions will be asked but open dialogue is encouraged and desired. The interview will be audio recorded and should last 30 minutes.
2. Utilize a paper (provided) or electronic journal for daily entries reflecting on the day's challenges and successes as they pertain to attending college while on active duty. The daily journal entries will take place over nine consecutive days and should require no more than ten minutes per day.
3. Log into Google Meet via a provided link in order to attend one focus group session with approximately 5-6 other participants that will occur within two weeks of the initial interview. This portion of the study is a facilitated discussion designed to encourage group dialogue. This focus group will be approximately 45 minutes in length.
4. Lastly, I will ask all participants to complete a follow-up meeting, through Google Meet, to review their transcripts to ensure the data collected is accurate. This should take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Benefits: Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Compensation: Participants will be compensated for participating in this study. All participants that complete the study will receive a $25 Visa gift card. To receive compensation, participants must complete all aspects of the study.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.
- Participants will be assigned a pseudonym. I will conduct the interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored in an encrypted file on a password locked computer and in a locked cabinet and may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted, and all hard copy records will be shredded.
- Interviews and focus groups will be audio recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- I cannot assure participants that other members of the focus group will not share what was discussed with persons outside of the group

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from the focus group, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Sean Mulvaney. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at XXX-XXX-XXXX or XXX@XXX.com. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Dr. Jeffrey Savage, at XXX@XXX.edu.

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, XXX, XXX or email at XXX@XXX.edu.

The researcher will provide each participant with a copy of this signed consent.

Statement of Consent: 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-record me as part of my participation in this study.

_____
Signature of Participant   Date

_____
Signature of Investigator   Date

APPENDIX E: SAMPLE JOURNAL ENTRY

1. Thinking about your work and school experiences today:

    a. What was your main challenge(s) today?

    Finding the mental strength to complete two of the last three assignments I have left in one of my classes.

    b. Why was it so challenging?

    I've been getting up at 0400 to work out and prepare my spouse and I for the day. I am in a military course that requires me to be mentally engaged for 7 hours with an hour break in the middle of the day, then I am still a full-time student that has assignments that need to be done. I'm also a wife so I clean, cook, and try to spend time with my spouse and three dogs.

    c. How did you address the challenge?

    When I'm having days like today and I am feeling overwhelmed I make a list of everything I have deemed I need to do today. Then I move all the things that are not a priority for the next day. My family and my sanity will always be at the top of the list.

2. Did anyone assist you in overcoming these challenges?

    My spouse, he helps me around the house with cleaning and takes over cooking on days I have too much on my plate.

3. What would you do differently next time?

    When writing up my task for the day take into consideration my emotions and how hard I am working myself over long periods of time. It's okay to have one day to do nothing.

4. Are there any other experiences that impacted your day that you would like to share?

    I got to talk to one of my mentors in the military and with my education. It reminds me that I need to enjoy the ride and not look at just knocking out the goal. Seeing your own growth and learning from the experiences you have is the most important thing.

APPENDIX F: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. What do you most enjoy about attending college?

2. What do you least enjoy least about attending college?

3. What are you most looking forward to about finishing your degree?

4. What comes after you finish the degree?

5. What do you consider to be positive about naval service?

6. What do you consider to be negatives about naval service?

7. How do you balance school and military service?

8. To what extent is your command providing the necessary support for you to attend college?

9. Describe how your family feels about you attending college while serving in the Navy?

10. How do your fellow sailors view you as a college student in the Navy?

APPENDIX G: SAMPLING QUESTIONNAIRE

Please fill out each question. Your responses are completely confidential and only used to ensure the study utilizes a diverse group of individuals.

1. Name: _____

2. Age: _____

3. Preferred Email: _____

4. Personal Phone Number: _____

5. What is your sex?

    Male   Female

6. Highest level of education you have completed?

    GED   High School Diploma   Associates   Bachelors   Masters

7. Degree you are currently seeking (Please circle one):

    Associates   Bachelors   Masters   Doctorate

8. Which of the following best describes your current relationship status?

    Married   Widowed   Divorced   Single (Never Married)

9. What is your race or ethnicity?

    White or Caucasian   Black or African American   Hispanic or Latino   Asian

    Native American   Pacific Islander   Multiracial   Another race or ethnicity (Self-describe)-_____

10. What is your military rank? _____

11. What is your Rate? _____

12. Time remaining on station: _____ Less than six months remaining   _____ Six months to one year remaining   _____Over one year remaining

APPENDIX H: PERSONAL JOURNAL GUIDELINES

At the conclusion of each day, for nine consecutive days, please spend 10 minutes reflecting on your daily activities. Think about how challenging work was and the encounters your experienced throughout the day. The journal content is personal and requires no grammatical proofing. If you are more comfortable emailing or texting me your daily entries, that is perfectly acceptable.

Email: XXX@XXXXX.com

Send text to: (XXX-XXX-XXXX)

Please reflect on the Journal Prompt Questions listed below:

1. Thinking about your work and school experiences today:

    a. What was your main challenge(s) today?

    b. Why was it so challenging?

    c. How did you address the challenge?

2. Did anyone assist you in overcoming these challenges?

3. What would you do differently next time?

4. Are there any other experiences that impacted your day that you would like to share?

APPENDIX I: SEMI-STRUCTURED, OPEN-ENDED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about your Navy career to date.

2. Why did you join the Navy?

3. Please describe a typical workday.

4. What are your educational goals?

5. How many college classes are you taking?

6. Who inspired you to earn your college degree?

7. How does their college achievements influence your decision-making?

8. Why do you attend college?

9. How important is achieving your educational goals?

10. How do you envision your degree helping you in the future?

11. Describe how much your family influences your decision to attend college.

12. Describe how much influence your friends have on your decision to attend college.

13. How much do you believe faith influences your life?

14. We discussed quite a bit, is there anything else you would like to share about your motivation to attend college?

APPENDIX J: OBSERVATIONAL NOTES

Date	Comment
21 June, 2021	Completed my first set of interviews today. I experienced technical difficulties with the recorder on the first interview. The participant was very understanding. We reset and started again. The most surprising aspect of today's interviews was that two of the three participants stated they had no intentions of enrolling in college once the enlisted in the Navy. In fact, they mentioned that they viewed college with disdain.
22 June, 2021	Continued with the interviews. I find the differences in how the participants were raised to be remarkably interesting. Although I am aware of the diversity in the Navy, it is still fascinating to hear how sailors arrive at this point in their careers. I try to hide my interest in their stories as they tell me. I do not want to impact the data.
23 June, 2021	The interviews are still going. The data is rich, and I was faced with an emotional participant who is deeply concerned about failing her classes. I had to pause the recording to give the participant time to calm down. After finishing that interview, I had to refrain from trying to address her concerns. That is the job of a military leader. However, for the purposes of the study, I had to remain centered and focused on the data. It was a challenge, but the research was the primary goal.
24 June, 2021	I finished the interviews today. I am relieved that they are complete, but I enjoyed them. Having the opportunity to gain that type of knowledge from other service members was rewarding. I am pleased that I was able to remove myself from the data and control any biases.