UNIVERSITY STUDENT SUCCESS IN GRADUATION: A HERMENEUTIC

PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE AHA MOMENT, WHEN A COLLEGE GRADUATE

REALIZED THEY COULD FINISH THEIR DEGREE.

by

Justin M. Shannon

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University

2024

UNIVERSITY STUDENT SUCCESS IN GRADUATION: A HERMENEUTIC

PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE AHA MOMENT, WHEN A COLLEGE GRADUATE

REALIZED THEY COULD FINISH THEIR DEGREE.

by

Justin M. Shannon

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Liberty University, Lynchburg, VA

2024

APPROVED BY:

David T. Vacchi, Ph.D., Committee Chair

Breck L. Perry, Ph.D., Committee Member

Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to discover the college graduate experience of a junior officer who decided to finish their bachelor's degree despite any temptation to drop out of school; participants were selected from a midwestern military installation. The guiding theory of this study was Duckworth's grit theory; the study related to her theory by examining participants' passion and perseverance and their relation to the motivation in the context of choice to finish the goal of graduating from college and commissioning as an officer in the U.S. Army. This qualitative design used a hermeneutic phenomenological approach; data collection consisted of an interview, a letter to their former self, and a focus group. The participants were all junior military officers who leaned heavily on their family values and school standards, and each had established goals to match their plans; their chosen institution was culture-driven, cared for the wellbeing of the individual, and constantly worked to change the student's outlook. The study revealed that these one-time students expected both their college and military training to be a difficult lifestyle, but all were set to make the sacrifice and enrolled in school with the intention of joining the military. Each step of the study aimed to help participants clarify background information, bring to light behaviors, and help recall past events. The central research question addressed the experience of the participant's decision to push through their trials; the study described how motives affected them and what drove them despite the challenge. It also revealed the power of connection and the need for belonging in the context of community.

Keywords: grit, resiliency, motivation, choice, graduation, passion, perseverance, community, belonging, connection, success, higher education, college.

Copyright Page

Dedication

To my father, Ted Shannon, who passed away from cancer back in 2008. He gave me direction, understanding, and forgiveness and taught me that I could accomplish anything with hard work and discipline. And to my mother, who passed away from cancer back in 1977. She had high hopes for her children growing up and following Christ; it is my prayer that this accomplishment makes her proud, along with my many accomplishments, including ordination as a Pastor and U.S. Army Chaplain, my extensive education of three master's degrees and now completing a Ph.D., all of which I have pursued to honor her memory.

To my children, E., J., M., and P., may you continue to pursue your dreams. Remember, if your goals don't scare you, they are not big enough.

Acknowledgments

My wife, Terese Shannon, who loved, supported, and continued encouragement throughout the ups and downs of the hard work in the Ph.D. program, helped me see the value in balancing life, family, and completing a goal. My fellow Chaplains who have been here to help and encourage, specifically Chaplain (COL) Stanly Smith for investing his time for a junior chaplain, Chaplain (LTC) Bret Gilmore for his mentorship and guidance, Chaplain (MAJ) Paul Belcher for his solid advice, friendship, and willingness to listen, Chaplain (MAJ) Danny Crosby for being a good friend and confidant, Chaplain (MAJ) Taiwo Arowosegbe for his friendship and being present in my most darkest hours, Chaplain (MAJ) Raphael Eke for his sense of humor and readiness to listen, Chaplain (MAJ) Steven Glenn for his patience and understanding and Chaplain (CPT) Rye Bailey for laughing with me as I conducted data collection and finished writing chapter four and five of the dissertation. A special thanks to CPT Ruston Cleveland; he was helpful, supportive and assisted with several ideas during the last few months of the study and while I was writing my final chapters. Additionally, everyone else who has played a part in my progress toward this incredibly challenging journey toward my Ph.D. truly has been about better writing and learning doctoral-level research. I want to thank all my Liberty professors along the way, and lastly, I would like to offer a special thank you to Dr. David Vacchi and Dr. Breck Perry for all their help in this endeavor toward learning and growing in my walk with Jesus Christ.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

List of Abbreviations

Government Issue (G.I.)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Intelligence Quotient (IQ)

Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA)

New King James Version (NKJV)

Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC)

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)

United States (US)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

The high college dropout rate is a key point of discussion in contemporary culture, as it creates many issues for the education system and aspiring students alike (Sutter & Paulson, 2017). The U.S. national dropout rates can negatively affect a college's culture, cause the misuse of funds, and potentially drain campus resources, ultimately leaving students with a financial burden and no degree as if the student had never attended college but was still left owing money (Webber, 2018). This study examined the perception of reality shared by graduate students who ran into challenges yet still discovered a way to finish a four-year college degree; it aimed to identify the motivating factors for a scholarship student to resist all odds, persist through the challenges of academia, and graduate (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005). The design was a hermeneutic phenomenology and used Duckworth's (2016) grit theory as a theoretical lens. The collected evidence dictated that in the possibility of trials, amid passion and perseverance, an attitude of grit is born, survives, and appears to thrive; ultimately, this no-quit attitude seemingly assisted in completing the goal of finishing the degree program.

Background

A scholarship student, in many ways, can be defined in the same category as a nontraditional student, such as a single parent, a full-time employee, a part-time student, has a dependent such as a child, or someone without a high school diploma or delayed one year from entering school (Hittepole, 2019). For many modern students, both traditional and nontraditional alike, the ability to achieve a goal of a college degree can be derailed by unforeseen obstacles, which might be related to socioeconomic status, personal values, or race/ethnicity; the research suggests that most universities fall short in meeting the needs of a student population, and thus

many students drop out, never to graduate (Grodsky & Jones, 2007). Exacerbating this issue is that academic institutions are likely to still cater to the more traditional student needs despite the growing presence of modern, scholarship, and nontraditional students on college campuses (Hittepole, 2019). As such, it appears that in order to save access for the average person to higher education it is necessary to understand the unique stories behind student motivation and why they choose to enter school without an incentive of instant gratification of a paycheck; research indicates higher education might be more than about a weekly paycheck or just getting money but the pursuit of something greater (Trostel, 2015).

Historical Context

With the introduction of the G.I. Bill in 1944 and the allocation of government subsidies to sustain higher education, an opportunity became available to the general population, thus creating a new class of students (Goff, 2018). As time progressed, factors that historically led to a college degree—money and influence—went from private funding provided by wealthy citizens to slowly being replaced by government subsidies, loans, and regulation (Kolbe & Baker, 2019). Following this, research has indicated a steady rise in a different population of modern students; it created an opportunity for ordinary people to improve their life circumstances and, as a result, because of the challenges of college, the opportunity has led to an increase in dropout rates (Hittepole, 2019). Among the many reasons to drop out of school, the cost of tuition is but one issue where the modern, traditional, and nontraditional students all encounter many of the same trials (Whistle, 2019); the modern student is likely to need to work to pay the bills or the responsibility of caring for dependents, or a need to delay the transition from high school to college because of lack of funding; money seems to remain the deciding factor for many to complete their goal (Hittepole, 2019).

With increased taxpayer subsidies for higher education, the spotlight leans toward universities to justify the average student's cost and the need for a sizable population to meet institutional standards by completing the programs' requirements and the graduate's economic needs (Trostel, 2015). The institution must often adjust its model to assist the incoming modern student population and meet educational standards (McDermott et al., 2019). Nevertheless, the struggles faced by all students serve a purpose by propelling them through the difficulties of higher education (Vainio & Daukantait, 2016). The solution to this issue and an answer to the mystery of how high schools successfully function while numerous colleges fail has yet to be seen.

The research indicates that college students' motivation for success differs from gaining a mere status in a diploma to a high level of self-discipline leading to success (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005). As the responsibility for succeeding should be up to the individual, obtaining a college degree can be an equalizer, and it seems developing an inner drive is a central part of the journey for all students (Hamilton et al., 2018). Nontraditional students typically come from poverty-stricken households, might be adult learners, and have fewer resources, but at the same time they can also be highly motivated (Remnick, 2019). Alternatively, traditional students—mostly young and wealthy—were better equipped and well-connected to complete a college degree but, at the same time, might be less motivated (Carreira & Lopes, 2021). Consequently, there is a need for students to have passion and perseverance going beyond the funding, a need for community, parental help, moving into the adult world, or the establishment of values (Duckworth & Seligman, 2005). The transition for an undergraduate student from home to college life, from a simple established routine to self-discipline, could be where failure festers.

As it stands, tertiary education enrollment has grown, most notably due to the first of the

nontraditional students and now the more inclusive modern students; with this, the downfall seems to be more about lack of student integration into a new academic culture, in this dynamic, the institution is not innocent, but both student and school have a responsibility in a symbiotic relationship (Aina et al., 2022). While reasons for the influx and failure of this new population can vary, a push in the United States back in the 1990s to improve the rate of high school graduation can serve as a successful model for higher education, especially as federal money is invested in both stages of education (Whistle, 2019). Before the cultural shift when higher education was reserved for the wealthy, the need to drop out was a nonissue, as success in college was a family affair (Carreira & Lopes, 2021); the modern student can be presented with new problems but also opportunities resulting from the current cultural shift.

Social Context

In contemporary culture, high school students have a heavy expectation to transition and attend some form of higher education by parents, family, teachers, or mentors (Froiland et al., 2013). Because of this pressure, the influences of parents or the community may not be the help aspiring students need in difficult situations, but the general cultural consensus remains that getting a college education equals success (Milovanska-Farrington, 2020). However, parental expectations over and above gaining knowledge may be the only consideration; for some, it might be solely about obtaining a degree and status. Considering this perspective, the lack of long-term planning in obtaining a degree can raise problems for academic institutions and create false employment expectations for students, creating unforeseen stressors (Pascoe et al., 2020). Therefore, degree completion might be presented with unnecessary and unrealistic pressure to perform that level of worry the student may have never wanted in the first place.

The ideals set by contemporary culture dictate that a person needs a college degree to be

good enough and smart enough, equipping them to survive in the real world (Vainio & Daukantait, 2016). Still, a gritty attitude does not necessarily agree with elevating talent or giftedness, but the mindset might ask students to identify the drive of passion in perseverance— and their dedication to a craft (Duckworth, 2016). From a grit mindset, individuals with passion and perseverance will attempt to seek ways to improve despite any difficulty; it could be about the student's identity, discovering likes and dislikes, or it might be about establishing a core value system. When a goal is approached in the raw of life, a student's determination and wherewithal will set boundaries, along with self-awareness, which can prevent student burnout (Lucky et al., 2022). Inside the elevation of talent above determination, the university may be held ransom to a politically correct standard that everyone should be treated equally. However, in the end, good intentions of a school's administration and faculty may or may not assist students in achieving a goal.

When a student drops out, it is bad publicity for the institution and supporting faculty, but it can also damage the standard of providing everyone with a high-quality education. According to Millea et al. (2018), "Students who leave before they complete their degrees can cost universities thousands of dollars in unrealized tuition revenue and replacement recruiting costs (p. 309)." Students may drop out of school in the face of difficulty, not always because it is too hard, but it might be because they need to be better prepared for the rigors of academia and social changes (Olaya et al., 2020). The student might need to learn study techniques or social skills without knowing how to get help (Remenick, 2019); because of this lack of knowledge, the student may feel there is no hope, know-how, resources, or even the ability to persevere through difficult times (Vainio & Daukantait, 2016). The research indicates that the institution's success depends on creating a culture to prevent those dropouts and enable a thriving, student-friendly

environment (Whistle, 2019).

The institution's responsibility might be to increase graduation rates, but the solution could be outside the school's capability. Motivation is associated with individual achievement, and a student's well-explored identity seems essential for graduating from any college program (Barbosa-Camargo et al., 2021). The goal then of any level of education should not be to limit the student to a class system based on skin color, race, or religion but to give the student tools like social skills and opportunities to make friendships and to discover ways to connect with a life purpose and eventually with something greater than themselves (Hoffait & Schyns, 2017). Social programs like equal treatment and behavioral skill-building classes are common these days (Olaya et al., 2020), but according to a grit mindset, it is ultimately up to the student to find the inner drive, not accept mediocrity and push forward toward an established goal (Duckworth, 2016). While the institutions tend to suffer scrutiny for rising costs, maintaining access for all student demographics, and positive employment outcomes, it is most likely up to the student to try to build the needed life skills, but only if these resources are found within the institution, fostering success.

Theoretical Context

The premise of the aha moment is about self-awareness and personal discovery; in this context, the study was set to describe participants' experience and how the individual decided to finish a college degree amid life, social, and educational challenges (Casanova et al., 2018; Gray & Swinton, 2017). The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), Maslow's Hierarchy, and Self-Efficacy are three studies concerning how and why people do what they do about overcoming a difficult task (Kan & Fabrigar, 2017; Trivedi & Mehta, 2019; Yusuf, 2011). These three perspectives, each in their own way, describe how a person makes decisions, generates

motivation, creates choices, and eventually influences outcomes, even in the most challenging situations (Ajzen, 2020; Maslow, 1943; Williams & French, 2011).

TPB addresses an individual's decision-making process, lining a goal with a person's intentions, operating under three factors: what the person thinks, what others think, and if the person believes they can accomplish the task or the goal (Kan & Fabrigar, 2017). Internal, external, and expectations in the perception of the challenge, whatever the task in the issue, seem to be the premise of the planned behavior, which the theory seems to highlight how the person perceives the problem (Kan & Fabrigar, 2017); what is unique with TPB is in this theory the subject may not always be in control of the behavior (Blue, 1995). While grit theory equally weighs heavily on perception, it has more to do with connecting to the challenge, the motivation to finish, and how much they are in control, with self-discipline to stick to a plan and finish the goal (Duckworth, 2016).

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs is a motivational model comprising a five-tier system, with the first four levels reflecting the unmet needs arising from deprivation and the top level reflecting spiritual growth needs (McLeod, 2007). Maslow's argument is best described from the lowest level, taking each level's need and progressing to the next, so the person will move to the next level once the need is met (Hopper, 2020). With each choice to meet needs, it is unclear if Maslow's model addresses individual choices or more significant achievements or if it is a bigger picture and scale over the course of a lifetime (Poston, 2009). In this study, the intention was to describe the experiences of an individual, where the hierarchy took aspects of the experience, focusing on individual goals (Rouse, 2004); grit pushed aside all other needs and could only see the one step they needed to finish the obstacle bring them closer to their goal through choice, connection, and perseverance (Allen et al., 2021).

In the Self-efficacy Theory of motivation, specific tasks can be successfully completed based on a person's belief in his or her abilities to accomplish a difficult job (Cervone, 2000). The stronger the student's self-efficacy, the higher the success rate, the quicker recovery from problems, and a higher level of interest in the topic while maintaining a strong commitment to the task and finding enjoyment in what they are doing (Landry, 2003). On the other hand, the weaker the students' self-efficacy, the easier they will fail, avoid working issues, lack confidence in what needs to be done, lose control, and question why they should even finish (Cervone, 2000). Self-efficacy is task-focused and specific, with total reliance on the individual, their capabilities, and belief they can accomplish the job (Williams & French, 2011); full effort comes into play with each step toward a goal, and the motivation to succeed or fail comes from within and is solely powered by the individual (Yusuf, 2011). Grit theory is different in that personal belief remains unknown and unnecessary; in grit, the person relies heavily on the connection to the task at hand (Allen et al., 2021); it is through passion and perseverance focused on the goal that the individual experiences success (Bashant, 2014).

Problem Statement

The problem is high college and university dropout rates for modern students in the United States due to stressors like funding needs, family obligations, lack of academic skills, or necessary social connections (Remenick, 2019; Sutter & Paulson, 2017). The first year of college is often filled with uncertainty, confusion, and excitement, and graduation can be just as daunting, with plenty of unknowns (Pfund et al., 2020). The influence of behavior may help or hinder, regardless of finances, social status, grit, or intelligence (Postareff et al., 2011). In turmoil and stress from a new level of difficulty, study habits that may have worked in high school might not be enough to see students through to graduation (Tang et al., 2020).

Fortunately, the mission in education gives way to a likelihood of assimilating knowledge and the goal of learning how to learn (Carden et al., 2022). Ultimately, the accomplishment depends on the goal and ambition, but emotions could also play a substantial role in any educational endeavor (Goldrick-Rab, 2018). In the end, the student's self-perception of success is critical, as is any number of issues threatening to keep the student from achieving the goal (Donald et al., 2019).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this hermeneutic phenomenology is to explore the aha moment for junior officers who graduated from a state university or military institution, through Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) program, given a commission, and are currently serving at a military instillation in the midwestern United States (Hamilton et al., 2018; Sriram, 2018). In this study, the aha moment was defined as a student pushing forward through any hardship to complete an undergraduate degree. The moment seemed to arise for all participants; some experienced overwhelming discouragement; without help, many students would have given up and quit school (Hamilton et al., 2018). It seems that mix of thoughts and or emotions was not the ingredient that either broke or formed their path to graduation; success was found through learning or mentorship in the classroom (Sriram, 2018). As noted above, any departure from an established goal most likely creates problems for the institution; it can also create difficulties for the student who may have sacrificed a good-paying job, financial resources, or familial ties to transition to a college environment.

Significance of the Study

The opportunity of education to pursue a life-changing goal can be available to everyone, but the key to this success will always be up to the individual's demeanor, perspective, and

attitude. This study examined the motivational experience of participants when they realized the will to overcome the rigors of education to succeed in obtaining a bachelor's degree, ultimately improving their financial and future endeavors.

Theoretical Significance

Finishing a college degree requires more than intelligence; it is developing a knowledge base that helps students overcome the difficulties of attending college (Whistle, 2019). The current study will be conducted through the theoretical framework of Duckworth's (2016) grit theory, defined by passion and perseverance, and it presents a possible solution to the problem of high dropout rates for colleges in the United States (Aina et al., 2022). The research indicates that for increased graduation rates, students must be consistent, try new things, and acknowledge that struggles are part of the learning process (Bashant, 2014); soft skills like listening techniques, resiliency, and good study habits are necessary (Bashant, 2014). These qualities can assist most students by establishing a vision toward life satisfaction (Ain et al., 2021). Therefore, grit is developed through resources offered internally by the institution, through mentorship, and, most likely, a student must tap into personal determination (Bashant, 2014). Ultimately, the connection to grit might be the essential element that brings success to an academic career.

Empirical Significance

The research agrees with the need for assistance for nontraditional students with the goal of college graduation and eventual employability, especially if they need additional life skills training to help transition into a career (Succi & Canovi, 2020). In looking at grit and decision-making, similar studies address the presence of grit as a predictor of the ability to complete a goal and how defining that goal is essential for anyone learning the skill of being gritty (Tang et al., 2020). Therefore, it seems any level of school can be difficult, but emotional blocks like

disappointment or boredom could lead some students to be discouraged and possibly change the direction of a goal; it is the gritty person who has a better chance of finishing (Bashant, 2014). Ultimately, the research agrees that identifying the point of success, in-school programs, and obtaining the means to finish the goal will assist any student in realizing ways to overcome life obstacles through college and beyond (Locke & Latham, 2019).

Practical Significance

The increased number of nontraditional students in the college environment has had numerous benefits for society, but the movement has also brought many issues to the surface, the biggest of which is a rise in dropout rates (Whistle, 2019). If a better life is the objective, a student making a simple decision to finish a four-year degree, no matter the cost, would be ideal, even if they lack the wherewithal, which might be an answer to the dropout question (Bashant, 2014). Modern students are a different breed, they enroll in higher education for different reasons, maybe reenter the workforce, for self-improvement, or something as simple as meeting family obligations (Hittepole, 2019), so the life lesson of learning how to learn might be the best enticement for this new population of a student (Brown et al., 2014; García-Aracil et al., 2021). In this, all that is asked of the student is a mental shift toward a positive educational perspective and an understanding of what skills it takes to be employable, not just about getting that degree (Ain et al., 2021; Succi & Canovi, 2020). Therefore, providing educational institutions with practical methods to reach students meaningfully is beneficial, especially in difficult times (Tang et al., 2020). As it is, every student can represent a value added to the institutional setting, and if given the tools for success, the chances of graduation could greatly increase.

Research Questions

From the onset of the social and educational endeavor of graduating from college,

funding was provided and available only for the wealthy (Kolbe & Baker, 2019). However, due

to government funding, everyone can benefit from higher education (Carreira & Lopes, 2021;

Duckworth & Seligman, 2005; Goff, 2018). Because of this accessibility to college, the

institution of higher education has taken a new form, and students of all demographics enter

post-secondary school, which the new population creates new ways for these schools to pay the

bills. As a result, schools are held to a higher standard (Sutter & Paulson, 2017). The aim of the

study was to address why students remained in college despite all odds and examine the means

available to accomplish the individual's educational goals to get that degree.

The following questions guided this study:

Central Research Question

What was the perception of college students who experienced the aha moment when the

student realized a gritty motivation to finish the degree? A qualitative study began with

assumptions and used a theoretical framework to interpret the meaning given by individuals to a

social problem (Creswell, 2018). Data was gathered, sorted, and reviewed to answer this central

question regarding the aha moment (Creswell, 2018). This overarching question was ideal for a

phenomenological study because it captured the experience of the participants (Van Manen,

2016). The intent focused on the student's success. Furthermore, as this study questioned the

students' connection to the institution, the participants provided valuable information to inform

ways to improve the path for colleges to guide all types of students and accomplish a goal.

Sub-Question One

How could students establish gritty ambition in the context of held values? This question was based on the literature surrounding motives and family of origin (Bashant, 2014; Duckworth, 2016). The intent was to direct the participant to look inward at self-discovery, examine the motivation of students, what the participant did, what the participant needed to understand, and what drove the participant to move forward despite any adversity (Ahearn, 2021; Anwer, 2019; Benner et al., 2021).

Sub-Question Two

How did students use available resources to enhance a gritty learning experience? This question investigated what the participant used to be a successful student and further the educational experience (Van Manen, 2016). The question also intended to highlight what worked to help encourage or move the participant, emotionally and spiritually, to the next level of the experience (Andrade & Ariely, 2009). This question might have been the most critical outside the central research question because it explained how the participant moved away from personal motives and towards the practical side of improving the educational experience.

Sub-Question Three

How did grit play a part in the students' approach to success in school and add to the motivation to persevere and finish a degree program? This final sub-question circled back to the theoretical framework and readdressed the drive of a grit mindset in the context of the aha moment (Duckworth, 2016). The question was valuable for the study because of the connection to motivation and asking the participant about the role that grit played in finishing their college degree (De Jong et al., 2020; Dweck, 2016; Fishbach & Woolley, 2022; Lam & Zhou, 2021).

Definitions

1. *Grit* – is a combination of passion and perseverance despite life's difficulties (Duckworth, 2016; Huéscar et al., 2020). If one has a grit mindset, the value of working hard is understood, having a deep understanding of what is wanted and the limits to achieving any goal (Fite et al., 2017).

2. *Higher Purpose* – connecting to something greater, such as a spirit or being (such as God) that contains the strength, knowledge, wisdom, and power to affect nature, society, and individuals (Pfund et al., 2020). This line of thought drives motivation and possibly meaning in life; it is an outward connection with something greater than self and is not necessarily associated with religion (Matheson & Philosophy Documentation Center, 2018).

3. *Learning* is the acquisition of knowledge and skills that become available from memory. This process helps humans make sense of the world around them and solve future problems, thus creating opportunity (Brown et al., 2014; Low et al., 2019). Once perfected, learning is a life skill, as it creates a lifelong advantage (Brown et al., 2014; Pasha-Zaidi et al., 2019).

4. *Morals* – are standards God has set that society then deems acceptable behavior and have a deep spiritual meaning and origin (Schippers & Ziegler, 2019); moral standards guide and direct individual decision-making (Mirabella, 2018). These guidelines are established in human design and taught early in life as a guide to right and wrong, good and evil (McNally, 2020).

5. *Motivation* – describes the 'why' a person does something; it is the driving force behind human actions (Fishbach & Woolley, 2022; Nakata et al., 2022). It is essential to note

that human motivation is a process that can begin, direct, and preserve goal-oriented actions (Locke & Latham, 2019; Ng, 2018).

6. *Purpose* – is defined as having life goals and a direction to take, but meaning and purpose in life are different (Kotler, 2021). Engaging in purposeful behavior contributes to life's meaning (Carden et al., 2022), and if there is a purpose, it will likely produce positive feelings and connect to an ultimate reason to live and contribute to the world in a meaningful way (He et al., 2021; Kaufman, 2018).

7. *Success* – is the condition of meeting a favorable or desired outcome (Moeller et al., 2022; Polirstok, 2017). It might be viewed as the opposite of failure and defined by preset expectations (Tang et al., 2020). The criteria may be relative to a particular person or a belief system (Park & Lee, 2020).

8. *Values* – are neural processes that combine cognitive, emotional, and familial characteristics (McMullen, 2021). These thoughts bring together social culture, goals, and beliefs, resulting in positive or negative outcomes and affecting behavior (Milovanska-Farrington, 2020).

Summary

Attending college has numerous challenges, but the end reward can be worth the hardship for many students. Historically, education was not equally accessible to all classes of people, but as time has progressed, a college degree has become available for anyone who wants to try, no matter their social status (Carreira & Lopes, 2021). This fact leads to institutions being populated with a diverse population of modern students, both traditional and nontraditional, who, as it turns out, are, for the most part, ill-equipped to handle the rigors of college life (Remnick, 2019). This study examined a group of modern students, describing perceptions of their experience of their

aha moment when a scholarship student overcame the odds and finished school (Donald et al.,

2019). The intent was to describe the successes and failures this unique student population found.

The thought is that through a grit mindset, tertiary education can be successful for everyone by

informing social programs designed to provide soft skills training and future employment

guidance.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

High college dropout rates negatively affect both students and administrators (Whistle, 2019). This systematic literature review examines articles about the shared experience of undergraduate students who decide to overcome the difficulties of higher education and finish their degrees (Fite et al., 2017). The study employs a hermeneutic phenomenological study using Duckworth's (2016) grit theory as its theoretical framework. The first section of this chapter outlines grit theory before transitioning to the literature analysis, which outlines perceptions of grit in the context of emotional intelligence and maturity, expectations, desire, learning theory, elements of choice, flow, and creativity (Morton & Paul, 2019). In a society that thrives on instant gratification, the delayed reward and hard work required to achieve college-related goals can transcend the abilities of many students (Chandak, 2022; Duckworth & Seligman, 2005). This study examined why some individuals endure educational hardship that would push others to quit (Hanson, 2021; McDermott et al., 2019). By examining the problem statement of high dropout rates, this study provides an understanding of emotional stress and its contribution to high graduation attrition rates and the connection to a commitment with inner drive while highlighting student ambition (Alshebami & Alamri, 2020; Pascoe et al., 2020; Pinheiro et al., 2017). As the literature suggests, self-assessment and informed behavior might help equip students for success.

Theoretical Framework

The power of a theoretical framework for a qualitative study is its influence on the process and underpinning of the study, which explains why certain constructs can be used to connect the relationships in the research (Barczak, 2014). This study examines grit through the

lens of a hermeneutic phenomenological framework, highlighting a diversity of emotional and spiritual elements that foster a grit mindset and ultimately affect choices that facilitate the attainment of a goal (Duckworth, 2016). Ultimately, for the grit process to succeed, the discovery of a higher purpose—a basic human need—is necessary; establishing goals helps to overcome trials by connecting the student to something greater, which enables them to work through the pain and connect to their meaning in life all to finish what they started (Delgado, 2005; Schreiner, 2017). In the Gospels, the Sermon on the Mount Jesus speaks of a grit perspective regarding the way to abundant life is complex, but He encourages believers to keep praying, asking, and seeking, all the while displaying a grit mindset and working through suffering to create an effective God-like strategy to finish strong (Matthew 7:7, New King James Version).

Grit Theory

A primary advantage of Duckworth's (2016) grit theory is the use of a tactical and adaptive grit scale to identify characteristics of self-awareness in an individual; grit manifests itself in two dynamic ways through perseverance and passion, thereby defining the theory (Duckworth, 2016). Accordingly, as a grit mindset flows with life, a student might learn and progress through the lessons along the educational path, but their level of grit likely grows as they suffer through various trials. Duckworth (2016) proposes measuring grit with a test based on a person's perceptions; through this, they can identify what they feel, find their way through difficulties, and ultimately finish strong.

The model below (Figure 1) shows the emotional/spiritual path from the start of a goal to its achievement; its focus is how a problem transitions from hardship to opportunity. If approached with a growth mindset, combined with passion and perseverance, an individual will take every trial as an opportunity to learn something new and grow beyond their former self.

Figure 1.

Theoretical Framework

Problem

Grit
Duckworth (2016)

Transition

Goal

Opportunity

Diligence, Steadfast
(Romans 12:11-13 NKJV)

Joy in Trials
(James 1:2)

Redeeming the Time
(Ephesians 5:16)
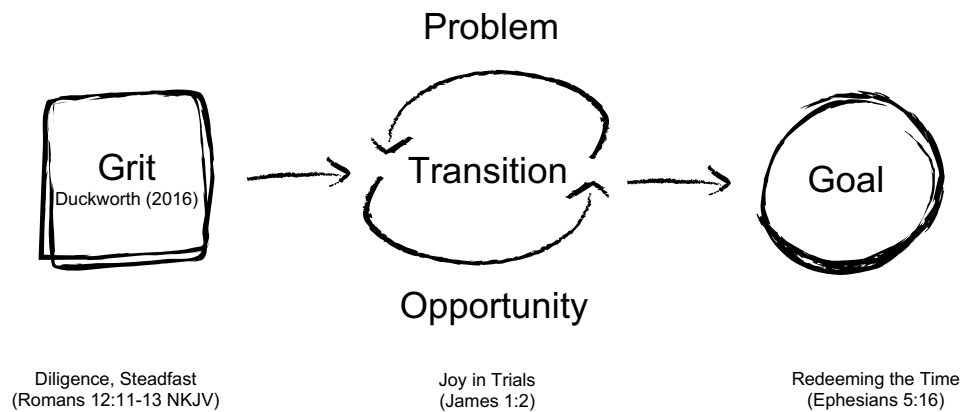
(Shannon, 2024)

Note. This figure illustrates the transition from grit to goal as the problem becomes a solution.

For the average student, emotions significantly affect academic performance, and a grit mindset combined with passion and perseverance can positively affect their circumstances (Fite et al., 2017; Morton & Paul, 2019; Romans 1:20). As people learn and grow, emotions represent the pivotal aspect of what it is to be human where emotional intelligence and grit reveal the feelings that affect many students in everyday life (Ain et al., 2021; Kotsou et al., 2019). Furthermore, while someone who has successfully faced their feelings and identified, understood, and gained control of their facilities is deemed emotionally mature (Postareff et al., 2017), the progression toward success in any endeavor may stem from grit combined with this maturity.

In a grit mindset, expectations can be a powerful force that affects what it means to be gritty; through this belief, a person can test the abilities and limitations of self-discovery through a three-step process of cultivating an environment, experimentation, and development (Khan et

al., 2021). Literature that views grit theory negatively criticizes the blurred lines between intelligence, talent, and drive, which ignore students preexisting expectations (Postareff et al., 2017). Conversely, grit theory embraces the unknown; it asks the students to confront challenges and, through passion and perseverance, reach their end goals and finish strong (Pfund et al., 2020).

In a grit mindset, a desire to graduate is key, but many factors, such as being an outsider, not being up for the challenge, or peer pressure to excel, can destroy this desire and lead to abandoned goals (Canning et al., 2020; Suhlmann et al., 2018). While grit can help to overcome these negative social implications and boost a student's desire, it can also emphasize their original passion (Schreiner, 2017). Although the difficulties of college, combined with aspirations to be strong and a solid desire, may not suffice, a desire infused with perseverance may lead to the objective being achieved.

When starting an endeavor such as university education, expectations may run high; more important than an active social life or even the right classes is the goal to finish strong. Students with a grit mindset encounter difficulty; they must set realistic expectations at any level, even if they are motivated and can control their emotions (Alhadabi & Karpinski, 2020). Setting high personal standards in learning can be developed through practice; the grittier the person during the lesson, the more durable the knowledge in the end (Brown et al., 2014). Although grit advocates for working through pain and managing expectations with passion and perseverance, the student must also acknowledge the long-term challenge to follow through with the goal (Duckworth, 2016).

In the face of these difficulties, choices must be made, and sacrifices must be endured, regardless of the path chosen or the number of mistakes, to potentially reach the goal (Canning et

al., 2020). However, when emotions take control, and external factors influence their course, the individual must choose their destination and the road to success (Johnson, 2021). Grit is about pushing through the discomfort of choice, seeking passion amid school difficulties, and tapping into perseverance to make decisions confidently and without regretfully (Woolley & Fishbach, 2022).

Grit demands increased interest and an alignment with intrinsic motivation, which leads the learner to ultimate joy in the task (Fishbach & Woolley, 2022). The theory encompasses a student's major or concentration, boredom in the school context, and the ability to persist despite a lack of interest (Shin & Grant, 2019). Indeed, motivation must be driven by curiosity and connection with a God-like love, which creates zeal, infatuation, or even an obsession (Colossians 3:23). As such, the advantage of grittiness guided by faith is that it is part of the human design to seek passion in the context of an eternal perspective (Matheson & Philosophy Documentation Center, 2018). This God-like inner determination is described as sustained by the perseverance of grit that seems to tap into a student's intense emotional state.

Grit need not necessarily consider a goal's intensity, but consistency over time and working through those negative and positive emotions to reach that goal are necessary (Schmuck et al., 2000). While feelings are not the best indicator of drive, grit's flow and resulting creativity are ultimately held within a decision to follow one's passion and perseverance (Mirza et al., 2021; Smith et al., 2020); achieving a goal may lie simply in an attitude of finishing strong.

Related Literature

This study examines self-discovery by elucidating when students realize they will finish college and what contributes to motives and ambition (Duckworth, 2016). If high dropout rates are an institutional issue, the focus must shift to the relationship between institution and student;

the solution must begin with institutional satisfaction and the value students place on education, class preparedness, and their social environment (Burke, 2019). Grit theory is best suited to frame this study; it can showcase students' success, including family values and ability to make friends, and the academic struggles, such as unrealistic expectations, desire for immediate gratification, emotional distress, love, fear, passion, interest, connection, intelligence, and talent.

The "Aha" Moment

The average institution is demographically diverse; not only are resources lacking for most students, but the U.S. is diverse in religion, color, race, creed, and values, creating disadvantages for many, the need for help to accomplish the goal of education is real (Fisher & Crawford, 2020). No matter a student's age or background, an educational goal can be met with an inner drive or help from a culture that embraces talent over effort and parents who push children to study at an early age toward perfection (Kotler, 2021). To overcome cultural stigma, this study sought to discover the "aha" moment when a student embraced the difficulties of education and finished their degree and completed their goal regardless of circumstances. Duckworth (2016) states that parents' desire for their children's perfect educational experience tends to start at a young age; she maintains that it is misguided to focus on individual skill too early. Instead, children should have the chance to experience the world through a variety of activities (Duckworth, 2016). Even in adulthood, it seems people need more and tend to search for identity not always discovering what is necessary, which holds true for the average college student; they might not truly know what they want in life or whether they want it bad enough.

The push toward higher education may begin with high school guidance; the student transitions and begins in a college environment, often in a new home and new community, but becomes discouraged from lack of focus or no direction and ultimately drops out, never to return

(Morton & Paul, 2019; Pariat et al., 2014). Many parents insert their children into stressful atmospheres, putting undue pressure on them to compete for perfection and planning a lifetime based on a few short years, assuming that a college degree is the only way to success (Morton & Paul, 2019). However, this drive might be not about the child but more about what the parent needs as proof of their own personal success.

This study aimed to identify ways to help students discover ways to achieve their goals, and finish their degrees, at any cost (Mapes, 2011). In terms of family values and decisions, students may need to take ownership of their chosen path. If allowed to decide for themselves, the choice might create the needed ground to cultivate a growth mindset. In the process of success, a safe space should be considered, and the student should decide their direction (Benner et al., 2021); because ownership of the plan may allow them to gather the internal wherewithal and necessary grit to see it through.

Grit requires a response to the challenge and the point of decision, which provides direction for the choice, like many things in life, considering the entire person, including emotional and spiritual blockages (Postareff et al., 2017). Duckworth (2016) discusses students' need to interact with the world; the environment triggers these interests, not introspection from various experiences. Grit's role is the inward act that activates a particular ingredient that will take the student to the finish line of their goal, not just to create interest.

As the study delved deeper, it uncovered the truth about the student's dependence on culture, community, and the direction in the educational journey. Parents and teachers have a role, but it is ultimately the students' choice (Fite et al., 2017). Although it is difficult to generalize, grit in academic circles only becomes apparent once students have been genuinely challenged in their educational experience (Stoffel & Cain, 2018). Additionally, there are too

many choices in school for new students, which could result in a less manageable environment, increasing their chances of dropping out (Franco et al., 2018). The challenges of academia serve a purpose, but recognizing the benefits of hardship may only come after the student passes through the trouble yet maintains resiliency.

Making Choices Intrinsically

From an internal standpoint, spiritual well-being influences the daily decisions people make—emotions, values, and social norms, to name a few (Duckworth, 2016). The goal of education might be improved quality of life, achievement, or monetary gain, and education has both intrinsic and extrinsic qualities that create an internal shift of negative emotions that could sway someone away from or push toward a goal. However, these emotions do not have total control, especially if an individual is aware of their feelings (Mirabella, 2018). In a world of unlimited options, students can choose a direction with little to no information or hope their decision is correct.

Nothing can take a more significant toll on intrinsic decision-making and personal satisfaction than a person's emotional state. It may be normal to experience emotions in most common daily activities, but these emotions might either help or hinder progress; after all, feelings are a part of life and add to the ultimate satisfaction of learning (Goleman, 1995). As much as emotions are a part of life, they are also the determining factor for most decisions; an intrinsic choice is a decision with no external reward or an act independent of compensation (Ng, 2018). This type of motivation is not about praise but something that makes the person happy and thus might gain satisfaction by learning something new or picking up a skill.

Scholars question whether these brief moments of emotional highs or lows truly impact life—as opposed to merely being fleeting (Andrade & Ariely, 2009). From a research standpoint,

however, in the first year of college, emotions have a high impact and may take a toll, and might become the most challenging part of the school experience; however, a grit mindset seems to improve focus on the goal and pushes someone forward through those negative and positive emotions alike. While student success or failure is an individual responsibility, with all levels of grittiness, the personal impact leading to negative emotions such as shame stops students from deciding to enter college and possibly keeps them from graduating high school (LeBlanc et al., 2020). Grief may come in many forms, but the emotional content stops a student's transition to the next steps.

It may be possible to develop a culture to help students overcome or push through their emotional state and make difficult intrinsic choices, whether they experience stress, depression, despair, or something worse. To resolve this, first, they must learn to acknowledge and identify their feelings during the experience (Smith et al., 2018). Institutions can help by offering soft-skills courses to assist in this complex but necessary emotional intelligence type of education (Scharl, 2020). Teachers may help students cope with their emotional states inside and outside of class; a self-start initiative for the individual is necessary because the university setting is a make-or-break culture that is much too large and easy to get lost in the crowd. Students' conscious states, decisions, and emotions play a significant role in learning (Neen, 2019). Any strides toward successful degree completion may benefit not only the student, university, or college, but it also might help society.

Making Choices Extrinsically

The "aha" moment assumes that a college student is enrolled and attending school, but it also acknowledges that not everyone is cut out to be in college (Duckworth, 2016). The current culture claims success only comes from attending higher education; however, many people who

enter college encounter limitations such as funding and roadblocks such as lack of academic skill, yet many believe education is a right not a privilege (Francis et al., 2017). Right versus privilege is a subject of debate in the US; the mission of education is about giving everyone an equal chance to attend school (Underwood, 2018); the cure for access appears to be through government involvement, but educational reform for equality is not enough. The journey should address physiological and spiritual needs, and increased education complexity suggests the need for motivation, not government help.

The practicality of school and the demand from all directions should be considered first when making any extrinsic decision, but this also requires money and takes resources; people must realize that school might not be possible for everyone, that life is unfair, and that poverty is a reality for many. Unfortunately, not everyone can afford college or is willing to make the long-term sacrifice (Winter, 2018). Many programs offer irrelevant degrees, with programs not providing a skill set for employment but working toward a politically correct population through indoctrination, and today seems the mission for many higher education institutions (Keating, 2021). To meet the needs of everyone, college should perhaps be offered for free, creating a full government-funded institutional system, but this would mean that taxpayers must contribute, not just those attending school, making a system that leans the other way on spectrum of fairness; as they say, "easy come, easy go." Evidence that, people, in general, do not value what comes at no cost.

There are ways to make education seem equal, and institutions try, but still, many are left without needs, skills, or resources being met. Of course, contemporary culture has created social justice, and an example is taking from one person to give to another through government intervention (McRell & Grace, 2022). These educators follow evolution and a humanist mindset;

they boast survival of the fittest and the improvement of humanity. However, the Bible discusses

the fallen nature of humanity, that is, no one is perfect, not improving, that everyone commits

sin, so from a biblical standpoint those evolutionary efforts are in vain; people will spitefully use

the system for selfish gain due to their sinful nature (Romans 3:10). In other words, equality and

fairness are a correct lines of thought, but in reality, the good intentions of one may not be

followed by others.

In fact, government management has never been as productive as the private sector,

especially in terms of money. If the classroom was not already challenging, schools closing due

to a lack of funds made it almost impossible for some of these poverty-stricken communities to

favor any student (Fisher & Crawford, 2020). Moreover, there are secondary bureaucratic effects

of government funding in k-12 and college being introduced to the educational system, which

rules and regulations might make a larger impact on dropout rates. Payment through personal

initiative generates motivation, but the goal has and should remain to keep the same standards for

everyone, both rich and poor (Zerquera et al., 2017). However, institutions perhaps need the

correct balance of personal responsibility and government initiative, assuming educators and

policymakers take the time and effort to extrapolate the requirements for an all-inclusive

educational system in a diverse culture (Winter, 2018). The monetary market, from private to

public funding, is a problematic tension, but it tends to be the primary reasons for an extrinsic

choice and the high dropout rate.

Student Ambition for Finishing a Goal

Ambition can be a powerful concept in discussing the "aha" moment and the necessary

inner drive and can be connected to grit. At the same time, students can also navigate using traits

such as ingenuity, creativity, intelligence, and talent (Brown et al., 2014; Lam & Zhou, 2021).

Ambition may assist students in completing goals and steering their attitude in the right direction, but despite their diligence and hard work, students without visible talent may be overlooked. Unfortunately, in a culture that celebrates talent and giftedness, grit does not always stand out as a worthwhile trait (Duckworth, 2016), and a part of the learning experience comes with the value of pushing through difficulties despite any abilities or inabilities. After all, if a person makes it look easy, they are assumed to be naturally gifted.

As such, talent in U.S. culture takes the form of being worshipped, so if someone is deemed talented, they are considered advanced, awarded, and given special dispensations (Lam & Zhou, 2019). Their special treatment will have lasting effects, both positive and negative, but these shallow praises often turns sour for the talented (Amemiya & Wang, 2018). Being socially praised creates an impact on education for the purpose of improving and learning a skill (Algoe et al., 2016). If too many people tell these talented students that they are unique, they may believe that they are better than their peers and thus that they may not need to learn the steps to develop or improve a skill. The individual might not seek new and innovative ways to improve their personal understanding and possibly make do with the status quo, thinking talent is enough.

Acting without a plan or strategy is probably not the best path to finishing any goal, and an approach to education that relies solely on talent will not automatically create the needed expertise; this line of thought suggests that wisdom brought through trials is far more effective for the learning experience. Moreover, failure seems almost necessary in identifying the "aha" moment; each mistake or problem can contain lessons, but only if a person recognizes the trial as a lesson and leans toward the problem (Zhou et al., 2020); without the hardship, they may not seek to improve. As lovely as it is to have that special talent, that same gift squelches any endeavor to pursue elusive improvement and lasting change (Duckworth, 2016). If the student

already believes in their own worth, they might not have a reason to try to improve and may never strive to develop a craft or develop a better skill.

Much of the effort sometimes goes unnoticed, but the hard work of a gritty individual still tends toward skill development. It may be humanity's norm to take a long time to learn, and although more effort might be less productive and look negative, it may not be a sign of failure. This visible contrast between development and talent may lead to a dysfunctional professional field as a consequence (Bashant, 2014). In contrast, expertise is produced through that same hard work, passion, and perseverance, and that experience develops into professionalism and further methods and systems within the context of specialized trade and expansion (Epstein, 2019). Examining oneself in the context of a skill requires humility, which is godly wisdom and ideal for the human design (Proverbs 11:2); however, even with or without the needed traits humility, ambition, or talent, grit may still add to the discussion about motivation and finishing strong.

Although the natural ability of the individual to produce a craft seems heightened, ambition takes a form and characteristics beyond a solid work ethic. Talent in a humble context may aid any student in working hard toward their aspirations, but mentorship and education are the best ways to accomplish goals. Unlike the idea of mentorship, a study tested the high-impact social practices of a school, demonstrating classes in interpersonal communication and sociology, and it suggested that these had no effect on finishing school (Johnson & Stage, 2018). Graduation rates should do more than an attempt to change attitudes unrelated to how fast homework is completed, social support, testing effectiveness, or even in-class performance. If the answer is ambition, education should be more than learning a set of instructions or skill development. Moreover, while praise or intelligence might positively affect class performance, they might not necessarily be evidence of ambition.

If an attitude presumably comprises more than talent, giftedness, or intelligence, even if the student is deemed an all-impressive natural, this does not always appear as a correct assumption. The Bible discusses the ways of humanity versus God, and the prophet boasts that God's thoughts are higher and are set apart (Isaiah 55:8-9). As noted above, special considerations do not seem to point to success in the human economy. More than hard work and ambition might be needed, these character traits can help students along the way, but they do not guarantee success. Ease of homework and good grades could indicate that the student has talent, but talent is nothing more than the ability to be effective without effort (Duckworth, 2016). They might be quick to take a test, but rather than a reliable measure, it is simply the ability to process quickly (Credé, 2017). It might be a fascinating subject that piques their interest, but that interest does not necessarily qualify as ambition.

If ambition is brought back to the context of grit, both seem necessary to the educational equation. If students are genuinely gritty, anything related to driving toward a goal is considered ambition (Tang et al., 2020). Additionally, even as much as ambition can become a measure of talent, it tends to be the standard for evaluating effort. In this context, if the skill is glorified, action may be diminished; it is no longer grit. Grit requires a cultural perspective shift from whatever form that success takes in the situation; Duckworth (2016) maintains that the ability to succeed is an opportunity for everyone, but ambition is left to the student, with many individual feats and failures adding up.

Students Can Still Recover from Difficulties

College tends to be complex and filled with high and low points, requiring time and energy. The challenges of advanced education might come from something as simple as a "bad" attitude, a lack of curiosity, or even a lack of desire to do the work. For example, students may

struggle with financial resources and become disconnected from their home community, resulting in no family support (Ahearn, 2021; Doyle & O'Donnell, 2020). In these challenges, a legalist or linear mindset might embrace a defeated demeanor, allow for negative assumptions, and cause even more problems (Doyle & O'Donnell, 2020; Dweck, 2016). College does not seem for everyone, and many do not seem mentally capable, patient enough, or interested in waiting for the delayed gratification that secondary education requires.

Academic problems discourage some students; the hard work and lack of pay only add to the difficulties. While some seem discouraged, others can rise to the challenge and work hard to reach their goals, despite the stress. Like most obstacles in life, this depends on attitude and the ability to push through any situation (Huéscar Hernández et al., 2020). No matter their mental or financial situation, students should learn to adapt and work within a seemingly impossible system if they want to achieve the elusive degree. Either way, every student should know and understand the skills required to recover from problems.

The New Testament teaches about this strength-building through resilience; as James counts life's problems with an attitude of joy and holds onto a promise of sustained hope through a trial (James 1:2). The text says that a form of resilience is contained within the life test, and the result of this struggle is character-building and increased patience (James 1:4). The word "grit" does not seem to appear anywhere in the Scripture, but the Bible does use the principle in Paul's writing. The First Epistle to the Corinthian church discusses being steadfast and immovable (1 Corinthians 15:58) and indicates that believers in Christ should exert a sustained effort, no matter the situation, due to their position and identity in Jesus Christ. Here Paul seems to challenge the church in Corinth to exhibit grit daily. In these two examples of James and Paul, the combination

of resilience and grit with a Christ-like purpose demonstrates a visible foundation, possibly fixed in direction and firm in purpose.

Accordingly, the most significant part of success after any failure is the ability to recover from the fall, with or without Christ; no matter the worldview or how much willpower or wherewithal, anyone can fail (Balraj, 2017). Any process toward reinstatement can be one of the best ways to define the recovery of resilience. Conversely, grit is perseverance and passion resulting in long-term goals (Duckworth, 2016), and true grit is a commitment to complete a task, regardless of setbacks or failures (Allen et al., 2021). Grit may ignore personal needs, but it gives the ability to push through, get the job done, and not only finish but finish strong.

The Power and Place of Resilience

To faithfully execute the difficult journey of academia, students should learn how to be gritty (Duckworth, 2016); however, this endeavor may not be problem-free, and it is difficult to make it through those tough times. Students must also understand resilience to recover from the moments of a fall (Skinner et al., 2020), so the origination of this type of attitude may depend heavily on the individual, family of origin, morals, values, beliefs, and search for purpose in life. The academic institution can also help, however by lending a hand through skill-building programs.

A comparison to resilience clarifies grit somewhat, but a comparison to Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs extends the analysis. Maslow's (1943) model requires each of the five levels to be experienced from the bottom up: physiological needs, safety and security, love and belonging, self-esteem, and finally, self-actualization. If a lower level is not fulfilled, the person will revisit it until corrected (Maslow, 1943). This hierarchy model concerns self-orientation in situations that cannot be ignored and involves meeting the most basic of life necessities

(Maslow, 1943). For example, a problem does not suggest character traits or lifestyle choices; it deals with specific situations, such as a lack of money for housing, food, or medical expenses (Smith & Knechtel, 2020). According to Maslow's (1943) model, an individual can only elevate to the next level when basic needs are met. The flow proves most helpful with the ability to make visible the most basic needs, such as air, food, and water (Maslow, 1943), alleviating the problem and possibly bringing the potential of resolution.

Maslow's (1943) research suggests the need for a resilient mindset and willpower to fulfill each need before moving to the model's next level. However, in contrast to Maslow (1943), the Bible discusses worry, stress, or fear brought on by the lack of essential human provision as a nonissue. In the Scripture, Christ's message encourages a resilient mindset without worry; that God the Father will provide for all earthly needs (Matthew 7:11). Christ compares the no-worry attitude to how God provides for all animals and how much God the Father cares for his creation (Matthew 6:26). In this case, the Christ-like mindset can instill hope and reduce pressure at all levels of need, instilling trust that God will meet basic human requirements (1 Peter 3:15).

Resilience through a humanist worldview such as Maslow's (1943) leaves little room at the top level of the scale for the basic human spiritual need of hope; Maslow (1943) describes effort as entirely extrinsic choices with limitations and consequences to any given decision. Whether basic requirements are physically met, a negative mindset or emotions would remain an issue, causing roadblocks, especially if a student is emotionally immature (Goleman, 1995). Additionally, self-awareness provides an alternate way to scale the Maslow's (1943) model and hints at deficiencies in the design and the need for purpose in the final level of the system; no matter what a student believes, there may always be a need to connect with a higher purpose.

While a resilience skillset might use a tool such as the hierarchy to help gain perspective, grit has no such need. Instead, grit ignores and pushes aside those essential survival needs (Duckworth, 2016) and seems to embrace the issue, problem, or challenge, providing the individual with the wherewithal to endure. If grit is informed by the eternal perspective and salvation in Christ, it is ever-sustaining (Maslow, 1943; Romans 3, 4). A gritty mindset transcends a linear defeatist attitude to embrace a more abstract idea of what can be achieved despite the deficiencies (Dweck, 2016). If grit is used as an aspirational tool for perspective, many internal navigational issues and emotional blocks must be overcome; even so, the reach toward a goal will prevail (Gale & Parker, 2015). Maslow (1943) maintains that if grit comes from within, resiliency is supported by an external social programs in government institutions such as high schools, community groups, or colleges and universities. It might come from a wise mentor or behavior learned from a parent.

The necessary skillset involved in overcoming trouble may be a resilience plan that provides emotional relief and empowers the next steps in taking a risk, and, more importantly, refreshes a goal by bringing a new perspective, noting that there are relevant strategies to help (Brewer et al., 2019; Low et al., 2019). The results and benefits of resilience for students might be successes in school, such as good grades, or a re-determination of a conviction to finish their program. Additionally, success in resiliency could come from a response linked to faith and connecting to a higher purpose (Schwalm et al., 2022). Students' use of resilience must be intentional and come from a well-maintained or newly regained self-awareness during or after a trial (Allen et al., 2021); as it stands, it seems this is only one strategy for success among many systems.

Growth Versus Fixed Mindset

For many pursuing a college degree, the task starts early in life; and the research suggests that this drive comes from inner motivation, curiosity, or even parental pressure (Anwer, 2019; Matzkin & Garvey, 2019). The need for excellence may originate from the desire for money or power or be more about possibilities and improvement due to deep-seated desire or interest. In many cases, this provides the ability to act toward improvement, which is as diverse as any student population (Loes et al., 2018). To succeed, a blossoming new college students should identify their drive and recognize the need for help, instruction, and, most importantly, the correct mentorship.

Research indicates that the best instructional strategy for students at all levels of education is to develop a path toward critical thinking skills (Rugutt & Chemosit, 2009). In this line of thought, a person might have two diverging choices. The first comes from a specialized interest early in life, possibly focused on and driven to perfection with only one life-long achievement in mind; through a fixed mindset, the individual will spend time contemplating how to perfect a singular skill without the need to try anything new (Epstein, 2019). The second, a broader approach, perhaps by accumulating experiences and sampling many activities, that demands a wide range of experience before finally settling on an object of passion (Yeager et al., 2022). This second skill development path indicates a growth mindset focusing on essential qualities, not specific activities, that can be honed through effort and strategy.

Choosing from these two strategies may profoundly affect the path and ultimate achievements of an educational journey. In either scenario, the focus should remain on what is practical, even if it seems impossible (Patrick & Joshi, 2019). The Bible continually addresses this idea of overcoming odds, discovering what is imaginable, and trudging through difficulties with prayer as the primary spiritual component (Romans 12:12). The needed attitude might come

from identifying an inner drive to push past difficulties. Hebrews exemplifies hope as the crucial

survival tool for school, found only in Christ (Hebrews 10:23); from the broad brush of God's

design, hope could be nestled within the growth and fixed mindset strategies. Hope should not

disappoint; it is a powerful substance in the spiritual arsenal, easy to lose and difficult to gain

(Isaiah 40:31). On the one hand, God claims a plan for all His children, a future filled with hope

(Jeremiah 29:11), and on the other, the believer must take the steps and be intentional with their

actions (Proverbs 21:5).

Grit has a place in these mindset strategies, described by Duckworth (2016) as passion

and perseverance; both paths deal with a mindset for completing the goal. The Bible refers to the

characteristics of grit in the form of the natural man, meaning how humanity lives and pushes

through trials, but without Christ (1 Corinthians 2:14). The natural man does not really

understand the all-powerful purpose of God, the possible path to a growth mindset could involve

a battle between the flesh and the soul, fighting uncertainty, learned behaviors, and unhealthy

family-of-origin norms. However, the growth mindset in God's economy differs for both the

broad and specialized paths; testing the difficulties reveals God's will and a way forward (Li &

Bates, 2019). Through experience, a person is transformed and gains insight through Christ,

renewing their mind (Romans 12:2).

The method parents use to raise their children possibly influences their lives and heavily

impacts a growth mindset; by developing skills early and relentlessly focusing on the goal, the

child may be coerced into a narrow decision followed by much practice. A successful resolution

to divergence from a toxic environment without choice can arise from the freedom to discover

and possibly followed by action, overcoming the difficulty. However, the change becomes more

significant if the family of origin does not have a background with education or enough financial

resources (Haimovitz & Dweck, 2017). Without external support to survive the rigors of school, novice students must develop the tools or techniques to overcome any issue without assistance (Limeri et al., 2020). As such, in any transition into higher education, an institution's success must focus on identifying and bringing awareness to life situations before these problems fester. The institutional process of understanding, identification, and decision-making might already be established, but it also requires continual work.

The literature suggests that grit and resilience can show students how to succeed, even under extreme college pressures (Millett-Thompson, 2017). After a student encounters a challenge and decides to push forward, a growth mindset can be sustained through grit; it also depends on connecting with a high purpose, such as belief in Christ (1 Peter 1:6, 7). The blessing of the trial is that it shows the individual that they can surpass the problem or find a way to get up again, especially in a community (Mapes, 2011). However, difficulties within the context of grit seem established in sustained effort and interest, not so much in recovery. If a student must take a break from school or fix an issue for something like a class but miscalculates their situation but chooses to move forward anyhow, this can be a problem in and of itself (Balraj, 2017; Tang et al., 2020). After all, choosing a growth mindset is a soft social skill, often challenging to realize and more complicated to develop (Succi & Canovi, 2020); this indicates the situation for what it is and does a world of good in this recovery mode.

The Influence of Fear

Emotions are an impulse to action, whether negative or positive; they are brought about instantly to help or hinder dealing with life (Van Kleef & Cote, 2022). According to Goleman (1995), from a worldly perspective, evolution has created emotions to protect the self, family, and community from danger. Whether religious belief or worldly, fear is paramount to any other

issue facing college students; in fact, it may be the most influential emotion (Yousuf et al., 2020). A series of what-ifs and should-haves can become a long list of regrets for many, but these are emotionally led mindsets that can and will change with every circumstance.

However, according to research, it looks like fear does have a surprising purpose, functioning in a way that says specific needs are not being met (Rosenburg, 2015). The awakening of these needs comes through different life triggers, not about the correct path in life but about what is wrong and the inability to handle the issue (Rosenburg, 2015). As such, the key to success with any emotion, especially fear, is learning to identify what is felt in that moment and expressing this feeling in a nuanced manner (Goleman, 1995). Anyone may feel fear, but knowing when the fear is present, accepting the reality of the fear, and moving forward despite that fear is powerful.

The trouble is that most students are young, and their experience is less than average, primarily upon embarking on a new culture toward the path of a college education. The Bible says everyone sins and makes mistakes, and in the case of fear and not trusting God (Morton & Paul, 2019; Romans 3), Jesus encourages the sinner not to be troubled or afraid: God is in control (John 14:27). He indicates the principle of pushing through the struggle and that God made within the human design a way to overcome every fear; in agreement, the psalmist exhorts everyone to look to the heavens because help comes from the Lord (Psalm 121). As such, the only person who truly overcomes fear is one who trusts in the Lord.

The Influence of Love

As much as fear controls and overwhelms, love does the opposite by empowering and calming an otherwise challenging situation (1 John 4:18). The key to these opposing views may be that love requires a choice; it is not automatic, but fear is involuntary (McMullen, 2021).

Scripture discusses the mystery of love as the ultimate solution to sinful nature, as God's love is perfected in Christ (1 John 4:18). The New Testament goes a step further, calling God love; as He is the essence of what cripples and drives out any harmful emotional intake (1 John 4:8). The Bible teaches that the possibility of true love cannot happen without God; and contained within the choice is a community, with relationships that equip the soul (John 13:34; Hebrews 10).

Although love is a powerful force in all cultures, regardless of worldview, but from a worldly perspective, and as an evolutionary thought process dictates, emotions are nothing more than chemicals colliding in the brain; the right mixture produces learned behavior (Goleman, 1995). However, the Bible argues that emotions are more than chemical reactions in the brain; the affected person will go above and beyond to great lengths and overcome great odds, moving mountains, crossing dangerous waters, and facing impossible tasks to finish a goal (Marazziti et al., 2021). The human-designed response suggests much more significance than a chemical reaction; it seems spiritually driven, perhaps an insight into the purpose of emotions, passions, and longings is the life guidance for humanity, especially in a college setting, no matter the worldview.

Feelings are essential to everyday life, yet many people refuse to acknowledge or even discuss their feelings (Van Kleef & Cote, 2022). Events may bring joy, but more often, it seems they spur sorrow and pain-filled memories, the bitter and sweet, all experiences wrapped into one perfect mess. However, it seems to remain a mystery why humanity has an ever-changing emotional obstacle to live in everyday life. Even intellect and reason appear to have little to say with the sway of a cloud of emotions (Goleman, 1995). When it is time to shape a decision, feelings might count as much, if not more, than logical thought. Even a level head and solid decision-making have little to do with an event that overcomes all reason or fear.

Experiencing Flow

While completing a degree is feasible, the various struggles within the system can sometimes make the student's journey feel clumsy and uncomfortable (Halimi et al., 2021). The trick to overcoming these struggles is not pushing the related feelings aside but completing the task, no matter the cost, and looking at the hardship as an opportunity to learn to excel (1 Peter 5:10). As such, earning a degree entails many obstacles beyond class assignments, homework, and academic trouble, but a need for the correct mindset and an opportunity to grow are necessary (Lederer et al., 2021). As with emotions, an individual's mental state may be swayed by more than physical barriers, stress, or lack of needs; people can experience the phenomenon known as flow, no matter how difficult the situation (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997).

The adventure of advanced schooling can cripple even the most resourced and intelligent students (Mckinney, 2021). Duckworth's (2016) grit theory calls on a student to reach within to find the needed strength and claims that the force of success comes through an evolutionary design, survival of the fittest, which depends solely on the individual and their internal purpose (Barnes et al., 2020). Again, the Christian worldview might call on the individual to embrace the belief that the higher power will assist them no matter the trouble; in God's economy, each person should bear their own load of responsibility (Galatians 6:4, 5). However, connecting with a divine purpose might be the essence of grit, while flow concerns using the available resources to finish any goal. The challenge might be connecting to a higher power or depending on oneself to see the situation through.

The choice surrounding a student's subject of study has traditionally led to deliberate practice until a skill is perfected (Ericsson & Harwell, 2019). Flow is more about spontaneity, where challenge and skill are balanced (Farina et al., 2018). After making a choice, the learner

enters a state of complete concentration, leading to spontaneity, and the ability to perform effortlessly even if faced with uncertain challenges (Duckworth, 2016). As such, introducing every student to the advantage of learning in a state of flow amid grit tends to make the trial enjoyable instead of tedious (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). Entering the flow state might bring relaxation to the task, not pain. Relaxing and observing the moment, in turn, could help trick the brain into deep diving into the potential enjoyability of the task and force everything to work together.

A good life can be measured by accomplishing goals such as obtaining an advanced degree. The problem in flow concerns not the exceptional but the mundane and ordinary, which in a learning environment might be tedious and inhibit flow (Pawlak et al., 2019; Pawlak et al., 2020). Boredom may be the most common emotional experience in an educational setting, whereas teachers might trivialize the state and mislabel it as laziness, inattention, anxiety, or depression. However, the intense emotion of boredom causes many to be unable to connect to an activity (Pawlak et al., 2020). An overwhelming state of boredom might squelch flow and any progress and thus causing failure and not obtain the goal.

When life tends to be ordinary, searching for flow, the ingredients that make it worth living may be found in the most unlikely places. Of course, family, friends, and community are all essential in any educational endeavor, successful or not (Dorrance et al., 2020; Dorrance et al., 2021). Atop this hierarchy is the emotional and spiritual support parents provide (Pariat et al., 2014). However, in *Mindset*, Dweck (2016), speaks about both the blessing and curse of a family; traditional, strict child-rearing methods can be detrimental and even condescending, and prevent children from achieving their potential. Even in college, childhood memories can cause emotional defeat, due to thoughts of failing to meet family or community expectations (Roksa &

Kinsley, 2019). Finding purpose might be the common thread that transcends time and culture. Anyone can create flow, no matter the outside influences, by understanding their mindset and identity.

Pariat et al. (2014) claim that self-esteem is bolstered by academic success. However, achievement does not always translate into a positive message from a neglectful community or a condescending parent who condemned or judged the student in their childhood (Dweck, 2016), from which flow may be disrupted. Scripture states that everyone sins and all students are children raised by imperfect parents (Jeremiah 17:9). In the end, God examines the heart, and He might test knowledge (Jeremiah 17:10). Nevertheless, in this world, as much as learning falls under the child's responsibility, the parents share the burden. However, it can also extend to the educational system (Proverbs 22:6). Humanity finds purpose in the Lord Jesus Christ; following God's design might be education's only pathway to flow and eventually grit (1 Peter 2:9).

Inner Drive and Motivation

Success in college involves deliberate decisions followed by conclusive action and critical thinking, to resolve problems (Franco et al., 2018). This line of thought is not effortless but must be developed and refined, liken a growth mindset (Brez et al., 2020). As noble as the endeavor of education is, too often, the educational decisions made to achieve a goal are not always well-reasoned or thought through and are often met with defeat and failure (Jungic et al., 2020). Within these moments of unwise choices and problems, students may gather the means to push forward; just as grit is affected by emotions, so is the hidden motivation to decide.

The central premise of improving begins by examining the impossible as able to become possible. In the moment motivation originates, the possibility is the push toward that becoming (Nakata et al., 2022). Although social characteristics drive many issues, be it shame or pride,

motivation remains an individual endeavor (Rafii et al., 2019). Reason pushes students past the impossible notion, but three subsets push a person forward to a goal they are grit, drive, and goals (Kotler, 2021). The unwavering attitude in motivation resembles a grit mindset, and the impact might be the energy inside that keeps a person going to finish strong. However, the goal is the most important for the gritty; without a destination, one may be merely a wanderer. The plan will count the cost, seek the value, and inform what success looks like, but ultimately, its meaning matters (Moeller et al., 2022). The impossible goal may eventually become intentionality and a decision to continue moving forward.

Establishing an appropriate goal drives a student's needs; setting goals increases productivity and enhances the experience (Locke & Latham, 2019). It thus stands to reason that framing homework, assignments, and even class time around that single goal will increase production regardless of difficulty level or workload (De Jong et al., 2020). In connecting various plans with purpose, motivation will find fuel for passion (Schippers & Ziegler, 2019). Although having needs seems essential to human nature to have needs, most people do not realize what is needed.

Aristotle noted how effectively setting a goal influences motivation and outcome and called goal-setting foundational for focusing a rational mind toward the causes of change (McCready-Flora, 2021). He asserted that outcome is a primary motivator for human behavior (Falcon, 2022). Goals tend to speak toward the need for the kind of resources required for the desired ending. However, not all plans are equal; some hinder performance, and others are inappropriate for the situation (Licata, 2019). As such, establishing a focused goal is the best way to increase motivation (Kotler, 2021). The field of opportunity might be large; narrowing it down

to one or two goals may make the endeavor realistic and significantly increase the chance of success.

In a Christian worldview, goals arise from more than a simple inner drive, particularly seeking higher education. Many refer to conquering the impossible task by setting a solid plan, and creating a goal is considered a calling (Park & Lee, 2020). In his first epistle, John warns his readers against loving the world, or the things in the world, lust-filled pleasures or material possessions, being self-consumed or thinking of themselves to highly (1 John 2:16). John seems to emphasize that when motivated by Christ, the person who connects with that which is beyond this life, and its pleasures has a lasting, eternal impact. As such, his message seems to agree with the argument that the educational journey occurs in the context of time; thus, time might be the only resource for honing in on a goal. Adjusting to an eternal perspective and doing any task according to God's will might have a much larger reward and impact in eternity, supercharging any destination.

Learning in Hardship

The spark of learning seems to remain a mystery because people are all different, and learning requires memory; grit, however, demands the long-term use of knowledge. In *Make it Stick*, Brown (2014) argues that this issue concerns acquiring knowledge for future problems and using new ideas to build on and connect with established information. Consolidating facts into wisdom is an acquired skill that becomes more durable when it is achieved through effort (Brown, 2014). The problem is when students seem to be poorly taught about the need to learn a skill to make knowledge stick. For example, rereading a text, a commonly used study technique, is rarely effective; however, trying to solve a problem before it is taught leans toward usefulness.

For the student, it looks like gaining knowledge and actioning it to a skill is the way to make the information ready and available when opportunities arise to use the information.

If high achievement through grit is a goal for college, motivation will take the student to the classroom, but the skill of learning keeps them in class (Kotler, 2021). In *The Art of the Impossible*, Kotler (2021) discusses the impossible in two forms, ranging from what has never been done to what the individual has never experienced; his claim seems to be that both paths require motivation to develop mastery. From a grit standpoint, skill involves forming the necessary passion and perseverance in an endeavor to achieve that skill unto excellence (Duckworth, 2016); as such, it seems, according to the grit model, a learning requires inner drive to gain the knowledge, but this drive is only the first step. Learning as a skill concerns having the information ready and available when opportunity meets problem (García-Aracil et al., 2021). The advantage of developing the learning skill might be creating the ability to apply the knowledge acquired when needed.

If grit is developed in a learning context through acquiring and retaining knowledge, any student gains an advantage by becoming a lifelong learner (Brown et al., 2014). Moreover, before a student can begin the path of a grit mindset, they must understand that the content of learning is possible for any topic or subject matter (Dweck, 2016). Grit's task is to overcome fears of the past and learned behaviors, so students must self-regulate the learning experience for their priorities (Zheng & Zhang, 2020). In addition, teachers inform their students of the need to adjust their perspectives, an adjustment known as a growth mindset, creating a gateway to learning and opening the student up for grit (Jaffe, 2020), which could result in the impossible turning possible.

Learning must settle in truth, and students must develop a filter for the resulting facts (Carnahan & Bergan, 2022). Everyone brings personal values and beliefs to the educational table; however, this depends on how deep of a conviction and intention of impact exchanging good for evil are (Isaiah 5:20). The collage of diversity of values in school brought by students and teachers alike suggests an impact of every dynamic of the classroom. In the discussion of evolution versus creation, for example, a student who believes in God may come under attack the minute they set foot on campus. Every individual journey brings a cloud of conflicting ideas that challenge every notion, belief, or understanding (Carson, 2020). For many, the thought of a teacher not presenting facts correctly or creating a spin from their political standard may be absurd. However, people often lie in their sin-fallen state (Romans 3:23), so teacher and students alike should be equally responsible; both should be on guard and vigilant to maintain respect for conflicting norms and values during any lesson.

Knowing fact as truth indicates a genuine concern for many students first entering the college environment. According to Walter et al. (2020), fact-checking helps positively influence classroom experiences. However, the tedious work of fact-checking might not be realistic for the average classroom, and it seems that seeing the truth requires a full-time position of discernment and sometimes a divine act. According to Paul in First Corinthians 2:5, the unsaved cannot understand the wisdom of God; divine wisdom is foolishness to the world. The ways of righteousness do not make sense because they are spiritually discerned, brought about by belief in Christ (Romans 3:24), and the gift of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:14). The issue may need to be learned through the power of the Holy Spirit, which is impossible without Christ (John 14:26).

All education's focal point is on a need to learn, so trustworthiness is essential (Carson, 2020). A lesson may become useless if the information intake turns out to be false or misleading or provides a sense of untrustworthiness. In a reliable classroom environment, people tend to survive; this is where grit thrives (Demerath et al., 2022). Human wisdom can only go so far regarding facts, but faith and trust in God will guide and protect (Proverbs 3:5-6). An educational journey requires critical thought, and a relationship exists between critical thinking, learning, and grit (Yoon et al., 2020). As such in the contemporary cultural and educational environment, critical thought becomes crucial, a necessity at any level of advanced education (Chan, 2019). This process becomes essential in college, when students often leave home and experience new cultures.

Creativity in Hardship

A college education is hard work and takes grit; creativity seems to work together with motivation from this drive. In *The Art of the Impossible*, Kotler (2021) maintains that creativity is how an individual can move through and around the difficulties of any educational journey. A good student seems interested in excellence at school and wants to achieve high grades, but must first must understand that creativity matters in studying. Duckworth (2016) indicates that a well-planned goal brings focus to the destination, but being creative makes the experience substantive and makes sudden moments of insight possible.

Secular research argues that curiosity originates from within and that this inner drive is essential to enhance student cognitive processes, academic engagement, self-regulation, and intrinsic motivation (Shubina & Kulakli, 2019). This line of thought contradicts the book of Exodus, where the Lord speaks to Moses, saying to the nation of Israel that all manner of wisdom, knowledge, and understanding comes from the Spirit of God (Exodus 31:1-6). With

insight into secular research's inner drive or a biblical worldview, both perspectives seem to point to the craft and creativity of a student's intentional action.

Creativity thrives in a fertile mind but, at the same time, can hinder tasks (Kaufman, 2018). For example, a good mood can increase learning capabilities through creativity, while a bad attitude stifles productivity. Scripture says that fearing God is where wisdom starts (Proverbs 9:10); fear concerns respect and can contain divine guidance. The apostle John boasts in his epistle that a God of perfect love is the cure for fear (1 John 4:8, 18); fear clouds judgment and can keep a person from connecting with God and possibly completing a task. Fear limits the senses and pushes individuals to rely solely on learned experiences (Grossman, 2012). The current push to remedy this hindrance to creativity is an attempt at mindfulness: stopping, taking a breath, and waiting for the fear to pass (Hensley, 2020). While emotions are only a piece of the learning puzzle, engaging creativity may require higher levels of thinking.

In an instructional context the all-too-familiar, creative activity of brainstorming (Al-Samarraie & Hurmuzan, 2018) stimulates new ideas from individuals or groups of collaborators. This process develops the imagination, driven by a goal, and employing grit, and developing new ideas to enhance the learning experience (He et al., 2021). The process is a mental exercise that includes the initial preparation and involves incubation, where the problem passes from the unconscious to the conscious mind, resulting in pattern development (Kotler, 2021). Through this illumination, these patterns produce ideas, or insight, verifying that the new concept is applied, tested, and ready for the real world (Wallas, 2014). Although complex, the brainstorming process is broken down into have steps to guide even the most novice learners.

Education and grit require more than just the process; there are standards to be kept and ways for students to see their improvement (Call et al., 2018). Early in modern education's

development, these learning measures needed a platform; intelligence testing and the intelligence quotient (IQ) were thus born (Dhanu et al., 2019). The downfall of these tests is their focus on convergent thinking: steps that funnel into a narrow, single-minded solution (Kotler, 2021). This seems to be a more linear way of thinking, which excludes grit and an abstract mind; while the IQ test are standard in education, they may not be best for every student. Academic measurement methods such as IQ tests will most likely leave the creative mind behind, thus limiting classroom success to a specific population of learner and stifling their originality.

However, the two paths may differ greatly; divergent or creative are free thinkers with set patterns and individual characteristics to their line of thought (Shettar et al., 2020). The first is fluency, wherein the individual seems to require less time to produce many ideas. Creatives might be more flexible, tackling a problem from multiple angles. The final characteristics of creativity are originality and elaboration, new and organized ideas, and the ability to act swiftly (Wallas, 2014). If creativity is to be a progressive process for developing valuable original ideas, practical creativity may be a re-combinatory process of bringing newer bits of information together with older ones to create something remarkably new.

Research claims that the brain's job is to process information gathered through the senses and internal processes and then turn those thoughts into action (Wallas, 2014). In this process, creativity is the ability to formulate options and is a hidden skill within the ancient craft of the consideration and execution of an actionable plan (Fischer, 2020). Research says that creativity and grit are foundational for high performance and achievement, but this research cannot define creativity itself (Wallas, 2014). All drive but no ideas can make any learning experience stale and not worth the time of the student or the teacher.

Restoration in Hardship

Advanced education is stressful and comprises much work; motivation and grit can only go so far without meeting the need for rest (Dyment & Milthorpe, 2020). The battle is to live in peace; all are challenged daily by needing essentials such as food, sleep, and work, which require time and resources (Pasha-Zaidi et al., 2019). The Bible discusses how to address life problems; it is through Christ that God is in control and has a plan for good and not evil (Jeremiah 29:11). Students will encounter problems along the educational path that disrupt motivation, grit, creativity, and, ultimately, the flow of the learning experience (Kibbey et al., 2021). The standard of effort can drop because these issues present a much larger problem of lack of rest, thus creating a situation that hinders success (American Psychological Association, 2020). Although the need might be just sleeping, the art of letting go of an anxious mind and finding methods of being restored may also be relevant (Dalton-Smith, 2017). According to Dalton-Smith (2017), exhaustion is a result of an overactive society; people should stop and discover paths toward restoration to improve not only sleep but also their overall quality of life.

The tools for success and maintaining motivation with grit in a chaotic world might address self-awareness and restoration; the Bible speaks of rest, but in connection with God and how He designed the activity of sleep, but then the rest of God as a command like a sabbath day, essentially this becomes a choice (Exodus 31:15). As such, it seems reasonable not to equate sleep with rest; the latter is often overlooked and neglected (Dalton-Smith, 2017). In addition, while there are many ways to rest apart from God, it seems the best method requires a connection with Him, specifically through the person of Jesus Christ. Although a biblically informed strategy, finding rest at school might not be as easy, pressure and separation from family will always create problems without that connection with Christ (Matthew 11:28-30). The gift of rest is freedom from life's agendas and schedules and is consistent with being good to nourish and

restore (Okano et al., 2019). There is no one rule for rest; it could be a sloppy peace, but it must be a peace that surpasses understanding as described in the scripture (Philippians 4:6-7).

Sleep is a physical activity, whereas rest penetrates the storm of daily living (Riemann et al., 2020). Students must face fear and anxiety between sleep and rest, but rest makes sleep sweet and beneficial for an improved lifestyle (Dore et al., 2021). A balance exists between rest and sleep; both seem necessary and form the basis for sustaining motivation and a grit attitude. The healing process requires awareness of specific stressors and solutions (Erschens et al., 2018; Morton et al., 2018). The need may be to foster a power from within and teach the students their capabilities and right and left limitations.

The truth in life seems that it is full of limitations; such realities can stop people in their tracks. However, a mental block is a much greater enemy, yet students can overcome this obstacle (Tyrolian & Jach, 2020). The most crucial to consider is the use of time, which is impossible to replace and the one thing everyone wants more, which is beyond human control (Dalton-Smith, 2017). According to God's economy, humanity's days are numbered; people have limited time (James 4:14). The value of restoration thus lies in the context of limited days and makes the concept of time the most valuable possession of human existence.

Lack of sleep or rest creates desperation and despair; the need to re-energize and recoup is an essential human function (Przepiórka et al., 2019). Grit might help overcome this lack, but in the end, that same grit may drive that person into the ground, exhausted. Students need a foundation that aids in their fight to complete school (Haktanir et al., 2021). As such, an attitude of grit, proper motivation, and a fluid flow work together to produce an abundant life.

Summary

High college dropout rates are a mystery for many school administrations, and the current state needs improvement to be better for everyone involved—the school system and the students alike (Pavelea & Moldovan, 2020). The study aims to discover the point of connection when the student realizes their ambition. For this, the next level of accomplishment takes many moving parts: help from family and friends and an inner drive and motivation, including grit (Polirstok, 2017). A school does not seem to act against a student; administrators want to provide an educational design supporting all types of students' success. However, high school transitions lead to first- and second-year college students lacking the wherewithal to finish (Lopez & Horn, 2020). The research does not address the moment that affected their decision, whether they chose to tough the challenge out or leave school completely.

University education is an equal arena: students from every social and economic background, religion, and ethnic group can seem to either succeed or fail. Although historically, this statement has not always held true, everyone has an equal right under the U.S. Constitution to attend school and reach their potential (Kim et al., 2021). Moreover, many students enter college with the idea of a guaranteed job when they finish, only to discover that all the effort and money may have been in vain if they fail to find work (Krasna et al., 2021). These factors affect graduation rates and the student's ultimate decision to complete their program.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

In determining what it takes to push through the turmoil or stress brought on by schoolwork, a determined mindset might be the main factor in achieving success. Moreover, while intelligence may be critical in academia, it will only take a person so far; the student's identity and possible family expectations can have an equal impact, often influencing the definition of successes and failures. When a contemporary culture tends toward celebrating individual talent or natural ability, success in any activity most likely comes down to personal wherewithal or determination. From the onset of academic discouragement, it appears that the resolution for many nontraditional students is to give up and quit school for various reasons. Still, from a determined mindset, the solution could be a simple decision to push-forward. This study aimed to discover how participants work through an individual problem despite difficulty and what brings personal success, which can involve more than immediate circumstances, individual decisions, or emotional content. The research was conducted through a phenomenological lens, examining the shared experience of college students at the point which they decided to overcome adversity to finish their degree.

Research Design

The design utilized the qualitative method to identify the *aha moment* when college students realized the contributing factors that helped them finish their bachelor's degree. The study was conducted through the researcher's philosophical assumptions, the qualitative method, grit theoretical framework, individual values, and perceptions of reality, but the center of the study is the participant's narrative, which makes their experience visible (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, a phenomenological design was appropriate because the participants identified

the decision-making processes that propelled them toward personal success (Van Manen, 2016). Further, the process analyzed this experience and compared it within a focus group context to examine how much of the experience is shared by looking through a social constructivist worldview (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The approach took the individual experience described from a universal tone, painting a picture of the nature of each circumstance, bringing them together as a whole and thereby defining the experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The design centered around an interview using open-ended questions, which guided the participants and allowed for insights that explained this shared experience (Van Manen, 2016).

Phenomenology takes a heavy philosophical approach, drawing from the writings of the German mathematician Edmund Husserl (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Van Manen later used the phrase "phenomenology of practice" to describe the process of methods in meaning-making and experience (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study used a hermeneutical approach to interpret the event from the researcher's perspective. The hermeneutic phenomenological method aimed to describe the meaning of each student's experience, making sense of their reality and reflecting on the moment of a shared human experience (Van Manen, 2016). Hermeneutic phenomenology interprets the reality of the situation, pulling information from the participant's experience of an event (Van Manen, 2016). The reason for using this design was that it is reflective and flexible, and it allowed for openness to encourage the participants to speak freely about their stories, both spiritually and emotionally (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It was also a viable process of recovering and articulating how humans live life, and in this case, the analysis helped connect to their aha moment (Van Manen, 2016). Contrary to observing day-to-day activities, phenomenology seemed to have a deeper meaning, examining the information that comes from within the participant, which was an ideal design to understand this experience.

Research Questions

In the early years of higher education, funding school was provided through private means available mostly for the wealthy, but today, the government has offered a method for the masses to attend university, started with the G.I Bill, but now additionally comes in the form of government loans and subsidies (Carreira & Lopes, 2021; Duckworth & Seligman, 2005; Goff, 2018). The constant influx of anyone who can enter college defines how colleges pay the bills, and rising tuition costs are a continual question, especially in the public eye, where schools are held to a higher standard (Sutter & Paulson, 2017). The study attempted to answer why students drop out of higher education and examined how to further their education and accomplish their goals.

The following questions guided the research:

Central Research Question

What was the perception of college students who experienced the aha moment when the student realized the grit motivation to finish their degree?

Sub-Question One

How could students establish a gritty ambition in the context of values?

Sub-Question Two

How did the student use available resources to enhance a gritty learning experience?

Sub-Question Three

How did grit contribute to the students' approach to success in school and motivate them to persevere and finish a degree program?

Setting and Participants

This section describes the selected setting and willing participants for this study. It begins

by describing the location and then describes any inclusion criteria for the student participants. Afterward, it details the sampling methods and parameters.

Research Site

The chosen site was a midwestern military installation. The setting was a melting pot in terms of ethnicity, race, and religion, making it ideal for a diverse study. The military operations environment has built-in government bureaucracy, but this challenge only strengthened the study. Additionally, the civilian staff, military personnel, and student population seem to understand what it means to work hard, push through difficulty, and rise to the other side in the form of success. Despite these multiple levels of apparent bureaucracy and diversity, the focus on discipline and communication in the military makes an ideal setting for the research.

Participants

Creswell and Poth (2018) suggest that a phenomenological approach needs a well-defined range of samples and experiences unique to the student. This study's criteria-based purposeful sampling had an initial driving force of two main points of interest; first, it was based on their rank, and then it depended on how eager they were to volunteer (Franco et al., 2018). The research was advertised throughout specific areas, depending mostly on the flier, word of mouth, and email blasts; after these three efforts were exhausted, the task then landed on face-to-face interaction with a personal invitation to participate, ultimately, this personal touch provided the most productive method of recruitment (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Rafii et al., 2019). The sample size of 10 participants included:

- Junior officer in the United States Army.

- A graduate with a bachelor's degree within the 4-year requirement of a military institution or university ROTC program.

- Each participant needed to be within a few years of graduation.

- Currently serving in a mid-western military installation.

- Scholarship secondary education students.

Researcher Positionality

In high school, I was not a successful student; looking back today, I would blame the education system for not recognizing my unique needs. More importantly, I have discovered over the years and through the struggles that I learn differently than traditional learning dictates. In his book, The Art of the Impossible, Kotler (2021) discussed the notion that intelligence quotient (IQ) testing, which has been a guide for the current educational model and its analytical nature, elevates linear thought processes, leaving the abstract thinker behind. Concrete thinking generates convergent patterns, narrowing the learner to one idea, whereas a creative thinker moves the student to discover multiple solutions (Kotler, 2021).

As a nontraditional student, I did not come from a family with resources or an understanding of how to get scholarships, so it would have been easy to drop out of college when things got tough with academics and money. As difficult as times were in college, my problem was not the issue of learning in an established and unaccommodating educational system; it was quite the opposite. In my creativity, I discovered a benefit in the tough parts; I was forced to work harder than other students to learn and simultaneously discover how to assimilate that information into something personally useful. I used my disadvantage to my advantage, which informed my worldview. I remember the evening I decided to finish my bachelor's degree; despite the lack of money, little academic help, and no family support, I discovered what is possible even when life is complex and the experience seemed impossible. The hard times solidified a lifelong skill in learning skill and established the wherewithal to finish my goals

against all odds.

Biblical Worldview

As a believer in Jesus Christ, I look at the world through the lens of the Holy Bible. My conviction runs deep for the precepts and principles taught by Christ; He is my guiding force (Psalm 119:105). In fact, with every new season and challenge, I look for a new lesson from what God teaches in the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16). The research, at its core, is about methods and means of learning through problems, and as the Scripture says in the book of James, hidden even within the trial is elevated wisdom for success (James 1:2, 3). Therefore, I found it natural to conduct the research study by assisting in an adjustment of participant perception and intentionally looking in their life difficulties for hard lessons that turn into lasting wisdom (James 1:4). In my own life, I have found that an attitude changes and the hardest lessons are the most useful when a problem turns to potential growth, a person emerges on the other side better for the wear.

Interpretive Framework

The position that I took for this project was a social constructivist research paradigm (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This framework was ideal because knowledge of the world is obtained by social interaction and cultural influences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through the shared experience of undergraduate work, the study set out to help the participants process the specific context of discovering the moments as they realized they would finish school (Van Manen, 2016). Inside constructivism, axiological beliefs were honored and discussed among the participants, and in this methodological premise, I used a literary style and inductive reasoning to generate ideas (Creswell & Poth, 2018). An additional strength of a phenomenological study was that the inductive approach had no theory to test but to develop something new in the method

(Creswell & Poth, 2018). The inductive approach also looked for patterns to understand how something works, and the reasoning relied heavily on patterns and trends, from specific details to more general concepts (Van Manen, 2016).

Philosophical Assumptions

The philosophical assumptions I brought to the study that drove every decision were ontological, epistemological, and axiological. The drive for these assumptions helped frame the research study questions and problem statement in the participant's experiences. The researcher was the instrument, acknowledging conservative biases like personal accountability and values such as God first and family second while I brought a clear biblical ethical stance to the study. The data points were derived from participants' perspectives of making meaning from their experiences of completing school despite college's difficulties.

Ontological Assumption

The study was a part of what was observed and perceived and thoughts and feelings that were authentic to a student's reality (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I believe in one reality and one God, and though human understanding is less than perfect, as described in the Bible, this fall of humanity is the truth as God has presented it in this world (1 Corinthians 13:12; Romans 3:10). The assumption continues that I believe feelings to be accurate for the individual and their experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Memories played a significant role in a person's life and was treasured rather than dismissed because past events construct the shared life experience (Van Manen, 2016).

Epistemological Assumption

The study fed into the participants' experiences and perspectives, constructing the interviewer's interpretation and assumptions as knowledge (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants

wrote letters to their former selves, explaining advice and what they would do differently for their educational experience, including ideas to help them through difficult times or at least some form of encouragement (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The second data point was a one-on-one interview with the participant and researcher, and the final data point was obtained through a focus group consisting of a selection group of participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In the process, the individual had control of their own outcome; even in the multiple-person sample for the focus group, their experience, combined with the other participants, formed the data.

Axiological Assumption

The extent to which the researcher had biblical values allowed the study to be a foundation of conservative ideology (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Additionally, the researcher served as an officer in the same military community as the sample participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Even though the researcher is in the military, I have a unique job and title as an active-duty Chaplain in the Army, which is different from any other military position. The researcher's responsibility was confidentiality with the data, which allowed participants to be more open with what they shared in the safe space he provided. In addition to having no command authority, the researcher had a skill set in pastoral counseling that proved ideal and almost identical to what's needed to conduct effective interviews with the participants. (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Researcher's Role

The researcher's primary role was to code and interpret the content of the discussion and data collected. The data collection methods fed into the interview; each collection point intentionally guided the participant toward self-discovery. Therefore, the researcher's goal in the data collection process was to allow the participants to ponder and freely speak about their experiences, revealing the truth as it was perceived. Thus, the central idea was to allow the

participants to be stilled, talk about emotions, express memories, and let the information they gave guide the study; in fact, participants were the subject matter experts of the content, not the researcher. Throughout the conversation, spiritual connections were expected. As a biblical theologian, spiritual leader, and expert on the divine, the researcher led the unique insight to interpret at each level of the study.

Procedures

The application was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB), and after completion, it was submitted to the research site. The study was conducted after IRB approval was obtained. Participants were selected through the local company and battalion command, inviting participation from a group setting, using fliers and announcements, and maintained that participation in the research was strictly voluntary. Any additional participants were obtained through word of mouth and connecting with leadership at the company command level.

Participants were given an informed consent form to read and sign, including an option to withdraw from the study at any time. Only after I received verbal and written consent did I move forward with collecting the data for the study. At this time, I followed up with the participants to set up a date and time to conduct the interview.

The interview and focus group method was face-to-face, and an audio recording device was used to help with transcripts. The interviews were structured and used open-ended questions to explore how participants perceive and use support systems in higher education and what friendships, personal and family values, and relationships contributed to their success in higher education. In addition, audio notes were taken during and after the post-interview, recording the researcher's thoughts and feelings about the discussion.

Permissions

The main component of the permission process was the IRB from Liberty University. The site permissions followed the Liberty IRB. My position and title in the Army helped streamline the process; therefore, institutional approval required some paperwork, but it was much easier than Liberty University's process with the IRB regarding site permission. The IRB consent form and institutional approval were shared with all participants.

Recruitment Plan

The main portion of participants were at the company level, and connections were established through relationships with those working in the different areas of operation. The researcher announced the study with the staff sections in a group setting if they wanted to help, allowing the individual to respond to the request without any researcher pressure. The invitation was only to junior officers to the group announcement to keep the criteria aligned with the intended sample. The sample size was ten junior officers. Criteria-based Purposeful sampling acted as a means of quality assurance by ensuring that participants meet the standard for consideration in specific criteria for sampling. For example, it is assumed they had completed a bachelor's degree because they were Army officers.

<div align="center">

Data Collection Plan

</div>

The data collection lasted approximately two months, and the analysis lasted approximately four months. Data was collected on-site at the midwestern military installation in the United States. Data points were analyzed, and as a result, motivation, skill sets, and talents became evident when working through the participants' complex decisions and how much discipline was displayed concerning their aha moment. The first collection point was a letter to their younger self, offering advice or guidance. The participants were interviewed face-to-face using an audio recorder; the dictate feature in a Word document was used for transcription and

then uploaded to an online platform called Dedoose, which was used for descriptive, spiritual, and emotional thematic coding. The researcher made three passes of the data: open coding, descriptive coding, and in vivo coding were all used.

Letter to Self

The letter-to-self was a pre-assignment for participants to address their younger selves, and the premise was based on the advice they might give themselves before or during their time in college (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The letter was intended to stir up memories, assist in discovering the original motives of the educational path they chose, and help better understand the difficult journey to finish school (Creswell & Poth, 2018). It was an inward look, bringing self-awareness and eliciting themes, expressions, and meaning from the student's experience (Van Manen, 2016).

Letter to Self - Data Analysis Plan

In the letter-to-self, open, descriptive and in vivo coding were all used, and the analysis was focused on the Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA), which had a two-stage interpretation process; as the participant tried to make sense of their experience, the second the researcher interpreted the words, concepts, and phrases the participant used (Pringle et al., 2011). Therefore, this activity was focused on patterns and themes in the letter given to the researcher before the interview in the form of a prompt. The analysis leaned on the perception of the participant's self-concept and the advice they gave to their former self.

Individual Interview

The study's most valuable data collection point was the face-to-face interview, where participants were asked 15 open-ended questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). As beneficial as the interview discussion was, the biggest problem they produced was sudden, on-the-spot questions

that could elicit defensiveness and cause the interviewee to shut down. To help overcome this obstacle, the participant in the study received the questions before the interview to enable them to prepare their answers. While the researcher was not an experienced interviewer, his extensive background in counseling from being a Chaplain improved the depth of the conversation, thereby gaining valuable information pertinent to this experience (Van Manen, 2016).

Individual Interview - Data Analysis Plan

The interview leaned heavily on the audio recording to gather the needed data, not only for the interview but also for the post-interview recording of the researcher's impression of thoughts and feelings. The recording was transcribed to a Word document using its dictation feature and then uploaded to an online platform called Dedoose. The IPA's two-stage interpretation process started with sense-making activity from the participant's perspective, but the analyst played a significant role in the post-interview audio notes and data collection (Pringle et al., 2011). The researcher made three passes of the data: open coding, descriptive coding, and in vivo coding were all used. Because data analysis started with open coding, there was no pre-set standard for specific words, but the openness revealed themes, thus enabling patterns to become evident through the IPA process, and the double hermeneutic of researcher and participant meaning-making uncovered a richer content of the experience (Pringle et al., 2011).

Individual Interview - Questions

1. Please tell me about your college experience. Did you have any problems that caused you to want to quit, and what influenced your decision to finish?

2. Describe the family values you held when you started your education.

3. Considering your family history, why did you decide to pursue a degree in higher education?

4. Describe your goals from when you started college, compare them to your college experience, and then compare your current goals.

5. Considering your faith/belief system, what were your original motives for being in the program of study you chose?

6. What programs did your school offer to help with future goals?

7. Assuming you wanted to be an officer, describe the challenges you foresaw. Did you consider these challenges before you began your educational experience?

8. What school community support did you have as a student? What about community support now that you have entered the military?

9. What was challenging for you in transitioning into higher education?

10. What purposeful inner drive or amount of grit did you find useful in your journey?

11. What relationships and support systems with family, peers, and colleagues help push your motives or grit to complete the task?

12. What soft skills did you use in your education, and in what way did grit help you with these skills through the difficulties of college?

13. What else would you like to add to the discussion? What questions or facts have I missed in the interview process?

The first five questions were intended as information (Patton, 2002) that was straightforward and non-threatening (Patton, 2002). The next set of questions was designed to bring the student into the moment of decision, what fueled their thinking, and ultimately, what kind of help they received throughout their education (Van Manen, 2016). The interview aimed to discover if their primary motivation was grit, family values, talent, or if it was something else entirely (Duckworth, 2016).

Focus Group

The only focus group included half of the participants; a total of five participated. They were asked 15 open-ended questions, including some from the one-on-one interview that guided the discussion. The questions were provided to participants before the meeting to allow them to formulate responses and better enhance the discussion. The group was audio-recorded for the study, which then was transcribed into a Word document for analysis in the online platform Dedoose. The expectation was that participants only needed to interact with each other and discuss their college experience at the gathering; the discussion created an insightful brainstorming session that helped provide memory recollection and insight into interpersonal behavior and motives. This enabled the discussion of multi-layered concepts from the participant's point of view.

Focus Group - Data Analysis Plan

The two-stage IPA interpretation process allowed participants to make sense of their college experience as they relate to others in the group (Pringle et al., 2011). In turn, as part of the double hermeneutic in IPA, the analyst attempted to interpret the event from the standpoint of the participants (Pringle et al., 2011). The focus remained on the individual's perception of the major live event, something that happened to them, and the meaning of the experience was left to the researcher's interpretation. The focus group analysis followed similar guidelines to the interview process, as each question was addressed around the room, and willing participants shared; the audio recorder captured and transcribed the essence of what was said. Using open, descriptive and in vivo coding all together identified words, patterns, and phrases which were recorded in the Word document and ultimately the online platform Dedoose for analysis.

Focus Group - Questions

1. Please share a troubling college experience with the group that made you want to quit.

2. Talk about the values your family held during your education. Did these values change?

3. Give one reason why you pursued a degree in higher education.

4. Share your main goal from college. Did it come true? Why or why not?

5. Did you always want to be an officer in the Army? What brought you this decision?

6. Name a beneficial school program that helped with your goal.

7. Talk about the problems you thought would come with commissioning. Did you consider these issues before your college experience?

8. Give an example of any support in college. Contrast that support with your current community.

9. As you understand grit, in what way did it help with college?

10. Did anyone help your success academically? Describe an instance.

11. In your estimation, what helped you most through the difficulties of college?

12. Any final thoughts or questions we missed in this process?

Data Synthesis

All the information was gathered first into Word then Dedoose from the three data collection points for the synthesis process (Drisko, 2020). As coding started, themes and patterns emerged by assigning the codes and condensing them into useful information. The data was then connected and written in a discussion format (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To aid in synthesizing the data, the ideas about culture and context from the interview, the letter to self, and the group discussion were all brought together (Drisko, 2020). The collection point ideas were listed, and looking for similarities to develop new concepts or perspectives revealed how they could work

together more than the parts alone (Suri, 2011). I used the online platform called Dedoose to help organize the data. The information generated a single set of themes, thus constructing a new idea and allowing the researcher to interpret it from a new perspective.

<div align="center">**Trustworthiness**</div>

In the current study, military instillation has an essential consideration for trustworthiness. It revealed additional scrutiny above a school campus; preserving the privacy of service members was a priority, but it also kept the researcher on the highest level of accountability and the strictest above-board processes for any results. The elevated liability assisted in the study's validation and results; a standard provided by Lincoln and Guba (1985) recommends a fourfold process to generate trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

The researcher established credibility through the following techniques: established methods, variety of the sample in terms of culture and values, and triangulation with the use of a letter to self, interview, and a focus group (Creswell & Poth, 2018). At the top of the list was the importance of using correct measures for data collection. The interview and focus group established the baseline for the experience (Shenton, 2004). Next, though the participants were not randomly sampled, they were brought together by the military from different universities worldwide; these different cultures naturally created a random sample, bolstering credibility (Shenton, 2004). The last in the process of triangulation was multiple data collection points through the letter, the interview, and a focus group; a more in-depth picture was created, and all three of these strategies form the major technique used in modern qualitative research (Shenton, 2004).

Transferability

In its simplest terms, transferability gives the reader a thick description of the phenomenon to apply the study in other contexts, cultures, and populations (Treharne & Riggs, 2015). It is not necessarily up to the researcher to prove the findings but to provide evidence of the study and its application (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The defined boundaries, as the research dealt with emotional and spiritual issues, will be easily duplicated at any educational institution (Shenton, 2004). The study setup enabled future studies using thick and profound descriptions of the participants' experiences through interviews, letters, and the focus group (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The researcher attempted to create conditions for future research from the different collection points, which depends on peer review and the investigator's responsibility to enable such transfers (Shenton, 2004).

Dependability

Dependability established the results as consistent and repeatable and asked if similar findings would happen if someone else undertook the same study (Treharne & Riggs, 2015). It demonstrated a dependable examination of the participants' experience through the triangulation of data collection points and used the methods of letter to self, an interview, and a focus group (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The letter to the former self was a simple task with minimal instructions; it revealed thoughts and feelings, highlighted the struggles, and captured how events could have unfolded differently if given a second chance (Shenton, 2004). A deeper dive into the experience further informed the interview through carefully chosen discussion questions (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The final data point collected was the focus group, which helped confirm the thoughts, themes, and patterns found in the first two methods and reinforce the constructed image of the shared experience (Shenton, 2004).

Confirmability

This last criterion of trustworthiness is confirmability, which dealt with confidence in the participant's words and narrative instead of researcher biases (Treharne & Riggs, 2015). Here, steps were taken to ensure that the recorded experiences of the three collection points were interpreted from the participant's perspective and not the researcher's preferences (Shenton, 2004). Through the letter to self, the interview, and the focus group, the main ideas were recorded; after coding and writing the thoughts about facts and emotions, the reasons were given for the actions taken, and an in-depth explanation given of the themes (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Therefore, through this analysis, the study's confidence level was increased through these triangulation efforts, and the participants confirmed and shaped the experience (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ethical Considerations

The following ethical issues were considered: site approval, participant access, and informed consent from the site and participants. The study was conducted in a military setting across different military branches. The intent was only to target officers as participants—specifically, junior officers. The participant rights included the voluntary nature of the study and the right to withdraw from the study at any time. In addition, the study used site and participant pseudonyms. Both physical and electronic data were secured, and the plan for this study was to destroy the data after three years, per the Liberty University IRB. The participants' risk was revealing personal truths and vulnerability, but the benefit was a better knowledge of self and job performance for each volunteer.

<div align="center">

Summary

</div>

College is full of hardship and stress from many things, like lack of time, money, and a

new culture. The answer to their issue might be finding the inner drive to succeed. It seems in academia that intelligence has its place toward success, but smarts only go so far; in the process of learning, the self-concept and family norms could play a major role in influencing student successes and failures. This study examined the motives and circumstances used by nontraditional students, but more specifically scholarship students, who overcame academic discouragement, worked through the challenges of full-time school and graduated college. Where the contemporary U.S. culture tends to celebrate a person's talent and natural ability, for many of these students, success came from wherewithal and determination, which highlight contributing factors that aided in higher graduation rates. The study was conducted through a hermeneutic phenomenology; it took an in-depth look at the meaning of the experiences of college graduates when they decided to finish their degree.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

This phenomenology examined the experience of scholarship college students who had finished a four-year bachelor's degree—the sample of participants comprised junior U.S. Army officers who originated from major universities around the United States. Their common goal was to finish college and be commissioned in the military; while most participants were set to enter the Army, a few were open to other branches but eventually settled on the Army. The rigors of university life left many of them needing help in different forms but, unfortunately, never received what was needed from the institution itself; most depended on family values, formed connections through teammates and friendships, and sought individual mentorship from teachers and some attempted to no avail seeking out skill building course intensives, instructional seminars, and even tutoring services. Throughout the themes section, patterns of passion and perseverance as staples of motivation turned into a "no-quit" attitude that was apparent despite the challenges a full-time education brings.

Participants

The selection criteria for recruiting the 10 participants included junior officers in the U.S. Army assigned to a midwestern military instillation, each originating from different civilian universities from across the United States; the data collection points of an interview, letter, and focus group all discussed topics of family, values, funding, high school, college experience, study, and social skills, officer training, and current happenings. Most of the interview process brought to the forefront both the participant and institutional cultural norms, values, planning, goals, community culture, dominant religious belief, and external influence; the discussion was directed to the military culture because each participant had graduated from a military institution

or an ROTC program on a path to becoming commissioned in the U.S. Army (Ahearn, 2021; Schippers et al., 2019). To achieve this goal, each student was required to participate in Army training, choose a major, and earn a four-year bachelor's degree, highlighting the uniqueness of each experience and the impact of the programs (Park & Lee, 2020).

Shawna

Shawna is a female in her late twenties. She was raised in a two-parent family and had one sibling. She grew up in a midsized northeastern city and has strong family ties. She is not married but lives with her boyfriend. She came from a well-off family that was not rich but could afford to pay for her college if needed. It seems the goals for college were set early, when she was about ten. Her dad, in an off comment, suggested eventually she should become a dentist, and that statement created a spark within her to the point she could not imagine doing anything else. Throughout her undergrad years, she was inspired to work hard for her goal, and her determined mom set an outstanding example. Her mom never went to school but started her own business. Although Shawna attended Catholic school as a child, her parents did not really engage in the faith, and as it stands, she currently is not practicing. She finished ROTC in college and entered the active-duty army with a service obligation to serve as a dentist. Shawna fit the study's parameters, fresh out of dentistry school yet receiving her bachelor's degree within three years. As a brand-new dentist, she said her greatest strength: "My true passion lies in mentoring others."

Brad

Brad was not married but had a fiancé. He is a white male in his mid-twenties. He was raised in a two-parent family and had two siblings. He grew up in a large city in the northeast. His family was part of the working class, meaning they "didn't have a lot of money," but they

were also not poverty-stricken. He had a passion for sports and discovered the possibility of

attending college in a military institute through this chosen passion for athletics. He applied to

his school and was eventually accepted; not fully understanding the process of entering college,

he took out loans during his first semester but eventually got into the ROTC program to pay for

the rest of his college. He came from a Jewish family and was bar mitzvahed at thirteen, but he

was not practicing his beliefs. His education had no connection with what he was doing for the

military, but he was still interested in attending graduate school but in a different field of study.

He considered hard work one of his greatest strengths: "My motto is work harder, not necessarily

smarter." He was not interested in skipping any difficult task because the values taught by his

college were engrained within his very being; in fact, he did not care about the size of the task or

the challenge.

Molly

Molly was a single woman, an African American Filipino mixed, from a biracial family.

She was a female in her early thirties, raised in a two-parent family, and had one sibling. She was

a military kid, growing up in many different locations, but considered herself Hawaiian,

spending most of her childhood at that duty location. Her dad was relaxed with her educational

experience, but she had lots of pressure from her mom to excel in school; she boasted the high-

pressure requirement of getting what she described as an Asian "F." The culture said that

anything less than an A was considered a failing grade, creating internal pressure. As a teen, she

was told that school, a job, or moving out were her options; the pressure was on because of the

quickly approaching age of eighteen and adulthood. Neither parent was devoutly religious, but

she found her identity within the protestant Christian realm, attending church regularly

throughout her time at school. She completed her bachelor's degree and attended ROTC but was

injured during school, which created many new challenges. She joined the military as enlisted with the intention of eventually becoming an officer. Her life exemplified a no-quit attitude: "Trust the process; it is easy to fall into a dark hole not knowing where your life is headed. Just keep going."

Rick

Rick was an only child, born to a two-parent house and middle-class family. He went straight from high school into college; though his parents could afford to pay for his college, he sought out scholarships and joined the ROTC program. He grew up in many places as an Army kid, but his father retired, and he spent his high school years in the southern United States, where he attended college not far from where his parents lived. He had many friends in school but preferred the more independent academic life; he was naturally adaptive and a problem-solver. As he grew up, he had a Catholic background; his faith was driven by his parents; as we spoke, by choice, he was enrolled in a confirmation class at a local Catholic church. He started off college working toward a career in the medical field with the idea of becoming a nurse but changed his mind after he was commissioned, with no future thoughts of school. He considers his greatest strengths, "I have a fear of failure, so I keep pushing forward, establishing new goals and working hard."

Henry

Henry is a white single male in his early twenties. He was raised in the Midwest and is best described as a good ole' boy; he did not really dress like some rustic but carried himself with the demeanor. He came from a two-parent family with two siblings, raised in a mid-western town; for all purposes, he came from a lower-class family, so he had no choice but to find funding for school, and it is clear the Army ROTC program covered most of his tuition cost, only

needing to work during the summer. Henry was a devout protestant Christian, enjoyed church, and even said his childhood pastor thought he should go to seminary, but ultimately chose a regular state college. He graduated and was commissioned in the Army but has since decided he would rather work on the civilian side and said he was submitting paperwork to leave the military as soon as his service obligation is finished. He considered college a strength, "What can I say? College was fun for me. It was full of new and challenging stuff. Lots of unexpected, some hurt, but mostly a positive experience."

Flint

Flint is a single Asian American male in his early twenties. He came from a two-parent family and had one sibling. He grew up in a middle-class family in a larger city in the northeast. Though his family had the money to send him to college, he chose to find his own way partly because he desired his independence and partly because he did not want his parents to control any part of his education. He did not come from a religious background, and his parents did not believe in God, so he never really considered a higher power, but as we spoke, it became apparent he held a humanistic worldview, something like Star Trek: humanity is improving and has a heightened standard to life. He held family in high regard and quoted several times a value his father held that he seemed to embrace throughout school and now in the Army, "I gotta get there to provide for my future family." His bachelor's degree was in line with his job in the Army, stating that he would love to continue into college graduate work and would most likely seek the same type of degree in that higher level of education. His battle cry for the challenges of his life, he quoted Dr. Seuss, "Don't cry because it's over, smile because it happened."

Rob

Rob is a married white male in his early thirties with two small children. He was raised in

a two-parent family and had three siblings. He grew up as a military kid until high school. When his father retired, he ended up in a smaller southern town. His family was lower-middle class, so they could afford to pay for his education, but he opted to find his own way as an adult. The emphasis for school was to join the military as an officer, so this college career was planned with the most direct path to get to that goal to commission. He grew up as a Greek Orthodox and held firm religious values from childhood all the way through college and into the military. He has no aspirations to further his education, but he wants to gain rank while still in the Army and ultimately retire. Rob considers one of his greatest strengths "The deadlift." He laughed, "But seriously," he said, "The best thing you can do with yesterday is learn from it." It seems both physical well-being and learning are among his top values.

John

John is married, has two kids, and is a Latino male in his early twenties. He grew up in a large city in the southern United States and is one of four children in a one-parent household; the siblings are two full and two half. His childhood was tough, and he set out to attend college where no one else in his family was successful. As it turned out, he had difficulties getting into the military for medical reasons, and his only chance at the needed funding was through an ROTC program. It took a full year to get an exemption. He said he was a devout Catholic as a child but gave up on religion when something bad happened to his sister; at which point, he asked himself how there could be a good God with evil in the world. John's mindset is to look for opportunities and accomplish small goals to achieve something greater than before. He was unsure about what was next, but he considered it an honor to serve in the military and took the job one step at a time.

Vivian

Vivian is a single Latino female; she exemplifies the persona of grit in her life. She is in her early twenties and came from a broken home and divorced parents; she lived with her mother and three siblings as she grew up in a large city in the Deep South. She did not come from a military heritage, and she really did not know anyone who served. To join was her mom's idea, who carried the value of pursuing happiness. She said that one day, sitting on the couch, God told her she should apply for school with the intention of eventually becoming an officer. She enrolled in a private Catholic university, signed up for their ROTC program, and found an on-campus job, and it seems she was set for a great college experience. She enjoyed her time in her undergraduate program but expressed no desire to continue her education; she did not even know how long she wanted to remain in the military. She considers one of her greatest strengths is making friends, "Oh yeah, I loved school. I am a social butterfly and made connections and friendships that will last a lifetime."

Wade

Wade identified as a married white male in his early twenties but without kids. He came from a traditional family with two parents; he had one sibling and a twin. He grew up in an East Coast city; his parents were working professionals, and they did not have an issue paying for his college because he wanted independence, so he sought a program at miliary academy. Wade attended a private Christian high school but confessed that he fell away from his religious beliefs during college, until he met his wife. At the time of the interview, he was enrolled in a master's program. His undergrad was in English, but he switched his field of study to become a financial advisor, as he was planning to leave the Army. Wade did not regret going to his college, even though it was difficult, but he said, "The strict schedule and daily grind really got to me, my only place of safety was when I played tennis and hanging out with the team."

Table 1

Officer Participants

Participants	Long-Term Goal Changed	Major	Community
Shawna	No	Public Health	Within program
Brad	Yes	Political Science	Sports team
Molly	Yes	English	Outside school
Rick	Yes	Kinesiology	In school
Henry	Yes	Geography	Sports/gym
Flint	No	Maritime Transportation	Classmates
Rob	No	History	ROTC
John	No	History	ROTC
Vivian	No	Counseling and Human Services	In school
Wade	Yes	English	Sports team

Results

In this study, the overarching theme of grit came to light through awareness and perspective shifts from each participant. Flint asserted, "I know myself personally; I try to keep things balanced, open-minded, and just try to stay positive even though I know what the reality is

or what's surrounding me." Flint engaged his inner grit through self-awareness, keeping a balanced life, and trying new and different approaches to problems despite whatever challenges he encountered. Change can, and usually does, occur within established long- and short-term goals; however, it became clear to each participant that the goal itself was generally only realized through passion and perseverance.

Community is Essential for Success in College

In this diverse group of participants, the most common definition of community was acceptance; many bonds were formed through shared suffering, perhaps due to similar interests, common problems, or belief systems. Rick stated, "…when we had to go do ROTC, like I had my group there, and with the study groups, I had my group there." It became clear through the interviews that these groups formed naturally and were necessary to help solve problems, improve study time, and, most importantly, be a source of encouragement in times of doubt and stress.

Community Creates Connections

Within a group of people, there is a common interest and a bond, which results in relative worth and importance. In this context of community, values are a connection point—that is, it is something each person has in common with each other. Wade noted, "The tennis team provided buddies you can hang out with and lean on, creating a work ethic." Reaching beyond the tennis connection, he continued, "I mean, in situations like you're in your room studying late at night, teammates would seek each other out for study help." According to Wade, the shared challenge of playing tennis created the needed bond to expand to other interests; if it was one point they had in common or a similar field of study, the connection created a deeper relationship than a friendship and closer than a brother.

Community Creates Hope

In any educational goal, the study revealed hope is mostly established in the context of a community; while hope is beyond any emotion, it helps to create an awareness of the possibilities of what can be achieved and, if ignited, brings the person toward accomplishing the impossible. John asserted, "After that year, I felt like I belonged because we went through so many shared sufferings." Without a sense of belonging, there is separation, despair, and possibly depression, yet in a group, there is strength. He continued, "We went through so many trials together that, near the end, we were an inseparable group because of the encouragement we offered each other." His connection with his group pointed him toward his inner need for hope, and hope does not disappoint; it is difficult to gain and super easy to lose.

Academic Help for Students

The more modern educational institutions seem to provide some form of help for new and academically unskilled students. The problem is that this help might not be the kind they need or, worse, not receive enough; it could be misleading for the intended lesson or instruction is flat-out wrong information for a particular class. The participants reinforced the symbiotic relationship between the school, which should provide the necessary resources to enable the needed skillset, and students must intentionally reach out for help as needed. Henry commented, "The summer between my junior and senior years, I took a short course developed for building resumes and portfolios." He liked the idea of the help, but it was one short summer class, nothing more; he went on, "We would then reach out to companies that we might want to work for and explain how you would use your degree to further your career and get your name out there." He did find help, but it was minimal compared to the vast field of study and any future career. This track of education might be good for someone connected, like through family or friends, but someone

who just decided to go to school for a better life might not be as lucky to have those same connections.

Culture-Driven for Student Success

The overall culture of a school is driven by its mission; if it is one of the many military institutions, it would be a much different experience than a state school with an ROTC program. The military side of any school's mission creates cultural norms, which drive not only the attitude of the student population but also that same culture that educates, equips, and creates ethical guidance for graduates, generating values for whatever difficulties the military may pose. Wade's school was tough and rigid with rules, customs, and standards. He stated, "Just the daily grind, it is tough to stay motivated, and just the cost and academic stress combined with you're always tired." These comments confirmed a strict social structure and difficult adjustment for anyone entering a military-minded environment. He continued, "There's always military bearing, ceremonies, parades, there is always something going on that you start to get annoyed at because you have all the other requirements." Our conversation reached a point: as difficult as the challenge, he thought it was worth the effort, "It was hard, but looking back, it was good and forced me to grow up quickly." In the end, he gained a whole new outlook on life with high standards that he would carry into the military and any future endeavors.

Culture Can Help and Harm

Pressure in achieving academic success, such as that faced when attempting to earn a perfect grade point average, can foster an environment ready for excellence in education, especially if the student has a solid end goal in mind or a passion for the studied subject; on the other hand, pressure from class work can cause problems. For example, in Molly's interview, she asked, "Have you heard the term Asian Fs?" She explains, "They are any grade that falls short of

being an A." For her, family values play a significant role in the educational experience, and the resulting attitudes impacted by her family seeped into friendships and peers, resulting in the possibility of an experience tainted with guilt and shame. Molly continued, "Growing up, if my sister or I didn't have mostly A's, we wouldn't necessarily get punished, but it would be a grim thing, and I realized that inherent pressure in college, the inner need to be perfect." Her story revealed that while the drive toward an A is helpful, if the student falls short of a goal, the inner struggle can be too much to handle, or it could potentially help a student forge the pathway past the challenge but with a faulty motive.

Values Solidify in Trials

When everything else seems to fail, the weight of stress or pressure overtakes a situation; thus, people fall back on value as a personal principle that brings a worthwhile attitude or highlights the importance of an ethical standard, a code to live by, and a means to measure life's difficulties. Flint noted, "There's only one value that comes to mind when I was struggling with difficult teachers and not understanding homework; it was just working hard and then building your future for yourself and your future family." At every challenge, he leaned forward into his established family values, using them as a foundation to help overcome and learn from each difficult situation, creating a whole new system by incorporating the experiences of school.

School-Influenced Values

The main idea behind going to school is not to obtain a degree, title, or even identify with the institution itself, but rather, it is about growth and learning how to learn, and ultimately, it is forming a self-concept in one's motives, pushing forward, and achieving something worthwhile in life. Henry asserted, "If you have a very strong leader, like if you're on a long run and you're about to tire out, they get right beside you and say you're not going to quit." Highlighting the

motivation was helpful as Henry describes one aspect of a no-quit attitude, "The downfall is that you're tapping into their motivation, not your own, and while leaning on that leader can help, without them, the motivation fades." In this formed value system, Henry expressed a need for others in the middle of a challenge but also demonstrated the need to be independent; in his illustration, he proved useful as a friend or mentor, but, in the end, he insisted on personal responsibility and adjusting to meet the challenge, a value he learned at his school.

Failure is Not an Option

There are many paths to achieving success, and while failure is always possible, it seems the military culture attracts grit-filled, determined perfectionists who do not understand what it means to fail. For these individuals, quitting is never an option; as a matter of fact, the idea of losing does not even enter their minds. Shawna confesses, "Because it was in the moment where I was truly like, I might fail this test." As she explains in the loneliness of her basement during summer vacation, she recalled taking practice test after practice test, "If I fail the real test, I can't attend the master's level program. My dream since I was ten years old was about to vanish; I was stressed and overwhelmed, but I needed to get to work and move forward." It was not that she could not fail; she was unwilling to quit on her dream, and amid her passion and perseverance, she was set to complete the goal no matter the cost.

<div align="center">

Research Question Responses

</div>

In the past, attending college through private means was available only for the connected or the wealthy; when the government opened funds for the underprivileged and provided an incentive for veterans to attend school, this changed modern education and how universities and colleges do business (Goff, 2018). This study has provided insights into the results of that dynamic culture and the high student dropout rates in higher education; it examined how to aid in

students' education, enhance their grit, and ultimately ensure that they graduate with a degree.

Central Research Question

What was the perception of college students who experienced the "aha" moment when the student realized the grit motivation to finish their degree? With a change of environment and being away from home for the first time, the reality of life comes with culture shock for these students; the participants generally agreed that hard work with a no-quit attitude is essential for success; however, the interviews also revealed the need for help, mentorship, and connection. Henry mentioned that throughout childhood, his father talked about his discouragement in his sports experience. "[my dad's] like, you know you're not going to quit; you're not a quitter." Throughout the interview, Henry remained adamant about this type of influence, "If you see someone telling you something and you have any sort of respect for them and that they are living by those values, it becomes instilled within you." While people can have a positive impact, Henry's values contrasted with Flint's negative school experience, "Even the teachers were no help, some of whom I didn't like because they didn't teach well." Despite this, Flint maintained his no-quit attitude, "As it was said on Finding Nemo, 'Just keep swimming.'"

Sub-Question One

How could students establish a gritty ambition in the context of values? For all participants, ambition was a primary aspect of grit, but it became clear that ambition was void without developing intentional relationships. Vivian stated, "My mom always told me to keep going, just keep pushing; it's a new day." She pushed forward with the idea, stating, "After my mom and dad's divorce, my mom's motto was the pursuit of happiness." Happiness for Vivian came with graduating college, being commissioned in the Army, and establishing a career. The same motherly force steered John, "My mom never went to college, so she served as an example

of wanting more for my life; with my graduation, I had far surpassed my siblings." She boasted, "I'm the only one who graduated, and now I have a steady income and career, which, in my mind, leads back to my mom and family values." John's outlook was a better life for himself and his family, a life he did not think he could have outside of pushing through the difficulties and, ultimately, having the ambition to gain an education.

Sub-Question Two

How did the student use available resources to enhance a gritty learning experience? Family values were the most dominant resource and played a major role in all participants' success. For Brad, "As far back as I can remember, my dad said the only thing you control is how hard you work." With his father's influence, it was no wonder that his chosen school provided the critical elements and traditions of his educational experience: "As hard as they [the school] could make it, they instilled daily routines, making it difficult for the students just to live." Brad testified the culture was another resource; it was a tough and rigorous environment that set values, re-educating and overriding childhood-learned behaviors. From the first impression, the culture was painful, and he never saw it as a benefit, but with each new day, the rigors became the primary instruction tool that he quickly realized was a blessing. Brad asserted, "Not everybody should graduate from this school; it's what makes the education and school special." Notably, people of this type of grit usually realize that a military lifestyle is difficult but are willing to sacrifice for a better life and to serve something greater.

Sub-Question Three

How did grit play a part in the students' approach to success in school and add to the motivation to persevere and finish a degree program? Rob's goal was set in high school, where he decided to join the Army, be commissioned as an officer, and retire from the military. In his

freshman year of college, Rob began with high ideals and sought to excel in academia; however, he was distracted easily. He said, "I think part of the reason it was a struggle was that I thought I had that leniency when I didn't, and I needed to be more personally disciplined about homework and class time. That lack of personal awareness and discipline led me to failure." This failure resulted in him earning a Grade Point Average (GPA) of 2.8 and losing a scholarship. He said, "I think the first thing I would tell myself is that I need to stay focused on academics. No matter how easy it gets." His solution was to "take more of a course load." Where most people would attempt to improve their study techniques, Rob needed to feel pressure and play mind tricks with himself by using his free time to remain focused and organized and not be distracted by life.

Summary

The diverse group of participants came from all walks of life, had varying skill sets, and were from different college campuses and programs. They all shared themes of suffering through pain and heartache, developed coping mechanisms and social skills, and built community to help accomplish their goals. Awareness is a powerful change-maker, which comes through perspective shifts, as change can and usually does occur for everyone; this study's participants exhibited this change through their passion and perseverance. It was clear that everyone's experiences and challenges had been intense, and they often needed to take perspective and adjust their plans. However, failure was never an option for this group, and the glimmering light of hope was a solid education, resulting in life skills and a successful career in the Army.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

This phenomenology examined the experience of modern scholarship college students who overcame the difficulties of higher education and finished a four-year bachelor's degree. Community was the primary element of success in the study and a highlight topic throughout this final chapter, which will cover the moments of frustration, a no-quit attitude, the need for resources, family values, and school cultural adjustments, as well as discuss the influence an institution has on the attending students. The need to seek help is voluntary, but the study proved participants were much more successful when they realized how to get help and reached out to college academic resources and sources of support, especially within their chosen community or circle of influence. Ultimately, the study has proven the need for gritty persistence amid school and personal challenges and the choice to move forward, no matter the cost or inner struggle.

Discussion

The research discussions kept circling back to goal setting and motivation, specifically emotions, and how feelings are an incredible force that can interrupt a perfect plan. For example, during the focus group, it became apparent that although the participants came from different schools, the emotionally overwhelming aspects of their military college experience created a connection between the participants; during the individual interview, the conversation verified the common bond in an established goal of commissioning as an officer in the U.S. Army. Additionally, with each question I asked in the focus group, participants were prompted to ask their peers questions about the other's difficulties in school, comparing who did what training with the military and how much it impacted their education, clearly demonstrating the central

point of how the challenge will bring people together and the discussion point of goals and motives are only real when stress is placed against the objective.

Interpretation of Findings

Regarding the *aha moment*, the study continually returned to what generated an incentive despite hardship, confusion, anxiety, or even fear in determining where a student is motivated to finish school. As the interviews progressed, across the board, the data collection revealed that all participants' motivation centered on a "no-quit" attitude; it could be said they embraced a harder, not smarter, outlook, implementing a plan, forming a process, and setting both small and large goals, no matter what, their mind was set and not going to back down.
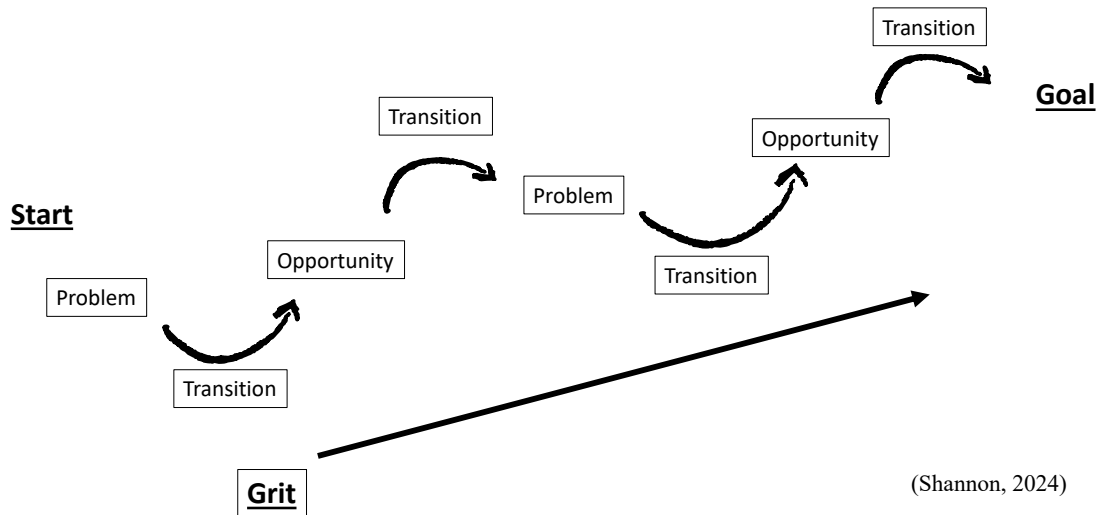
In the New Testament of the Holy Bible, a gritty, persistent state is described using words like constant, faithful, steadfast, and loyal; one of the best pictures of this type of grit is displayed in the attitude seen in Paul's letter to the Ephesians (NKJV). In chapter 6, verses 10-17, he uses the word picture of standing to fight darkness and spiritual wickedness in the world. Paul explains that his illustration is not about a person casually standing to pose for a picture, standing waiting in a line, or even just standing; it is about holding the line, standing like a warrior in a fight stance. Here, the attitude is found in descriptive words like stubborn, combatant, and forward movement, which all illustrate the gritty tone and add to a long list of personal requirements to enter any battle, even the challenge of finishing a college education.

As broad-brushed as the term *motivation* sounds, the participants described many specific trials from their life experiences, depending on each perspective. Though they dealt directly with issues related to the physical, these trials were just as much a spiritual issue. The figure below (Figure 2), demonstrates an undulating path explaining the process from problem to recognition

of the trial to embracing a gritty persistence through transitioning to opportunity, bringing a

student to the next lesson to learn.

Figure 2.

Gritty Persistence

Transition

Goal

Transition

Problem

Opportunity

Start

Opportunity

Transition

Problem

Transition

Problem

Transition

Grit
(Shannon, 2024)

Note. The above figure shows how a gritty attitude moves through life's challenges.

Summary of Thematic Findings

       The discussion topics included values, community, goals, and achievement, highlighting

the thematic findings that constituted feelings of acceptance, confidence, and a solid

understanding of tradition, all of which have an underlying need for motives. Throughout the

study, it became clear that motivation was a purpose-oriented and values-driven internal process

where it is necessary to connect with people in the context of a community; the participants

needed the feeling of connection as a sense of belonging to the group in which they were

involved, and overwhelmingly this acceptance was obtained through following a clearly set

planned path guided by a goal and maintaining the vision for a bright future.

Creating a Necessary Culture #1.

The most success among the participants started with the culture fostered by their chosen institution, and with each of these choices, the student adopted a sense of ownership for the school that went beyond school spirit; each participant presented a heavy value in the school itself, almost to the level of reverence found in religious belief. The school's culture was as much a part of their education as was the classes with instruction, teachers, and grades. Strict adherence to rules does cripple creative thought; however, rules have useful aspects as they will define necessary boundaries and create a feeling of comfort and safety. By holding a high standard and through this safe environment, an atmosphere fostering growth will be evident even with the hardship, trials, or any adversity that comes from this formed culture and academic realm and thus causing a thriving environment of which the students can learn and grow.

In the New Testament, the book of Hebrews, the author writes about the first coming of Christ and how a culture of animal sacrifice is established as a foreshadowing that Jesus would make the world new by cleansing sin because, as the text indicates, animal blood could not take away sins, merely cover them (Hebrews, 10:4). The idea of animal sacrifice in the Old Testament was to establish a culture, to bring understanding to the coming sacrifice that Christ would make for all mankind on the cross; just like the culture of the Old Testament is established through sacrifice, so can an educational institution influence the student population through establishing traditions, creating customs, and firmly holding to school standards and values all the while holding up the broad concept of school pride.

Success Starts with Belonging #2.

Innovation begins with a few steps in a risky direction; judging from the participants' data, the best form of bonding through community is established through some form of shared

suffering, like a sports team or a group in a similar field of study. For most modern students, money speaks toward security, offering more scholarships for different clubs or activities, which would bring people together for a common goal. No matter the method or means an institution proposes, one thing is certain: being disconnected from the family, a student needs something to replace that void to be successful.

The task is not necessarily about creating an environment but building a culture that connects to student interests, engaging their passion, and addressing immediate needs, yet difficult enough to be worthwhile; the result should be everyone has a feeling of belonging, like the safety of family and friends. According to the three participants who were heavily involved with sports teams, Division One, which ranked them just short of professional sports, their passion came with a connection to the group and internal energy and drive, demonstrating that no obstacle was too great to overcome. The team created a sense of security necessary for a season of transition and drastic change where a student embarks on a new and unknown scholastic mission, a new living space, and unfortunately, all alone, but still in the middle of a crowd.

The mystery remains of how a disconnected student can find some form of belonging in the context of a community. What comes to mind is something like an old-style front porch, which dictates a picture of the social and cultural aspects of small-town American living; the sense of the front porch is warm and welcoming where everyone is known by name and a place that cultivates safety and comfort. The origins of the American porch find its place in the bible, as noted in the gospel of John chapter 10, where it was the feast of dedication, and Jesus was caught up teaching the Jews on the temple mount at Solomon's porch. The space in the Jewish Temple traditionally served as a safe and open place to contemplate and discuss the principles of God, one of the few places to seek refuge from the outside elements while visiting the temple.

The space is known as Solomon's porch, which has that equal feeling of comfort and safety of home; it comes down to not where someone goes, not even the cultural norms, but what is experienced, how the soul is touched, and in the case of the front porch, what connects people, as if it were a team atmosphere.

Money Becomes Priority #3.

Money and worry took an enormous amount of energy for many of the participants; surprisingly, everyone was independent from their parents, using their intellect and practical skills to research, gain knowledge, make connections, and use good old-fashioned grit to sign up for college during high school and to find funding to pay for their tuition. None of the participants took time off in their transition from high school to college, but all were independent in finding the money to pay for college through scholarships or loans or working; the defining factor that separated them from a traditional means of college access was that the participants did not receive help from their parents.

The Old Testament indicates that those people who make plans will lead to prosperity, but those who act quickly will most likely fail (Proverbs 21:5). College military incentive programs like the ROTC provide easy access and a smooth path to get into school for all the participants, but the college military culture the institutions facilitated proved to be difficult to adjust and had the potential to cause questions of methods on how to complete each unique goal. The study clarified that money matters to enhance the educational experience, but as difficult as a stressor, it would not stop a person with an established vision, a set mission, and the wherewithal to finish, no matter the personal cost.

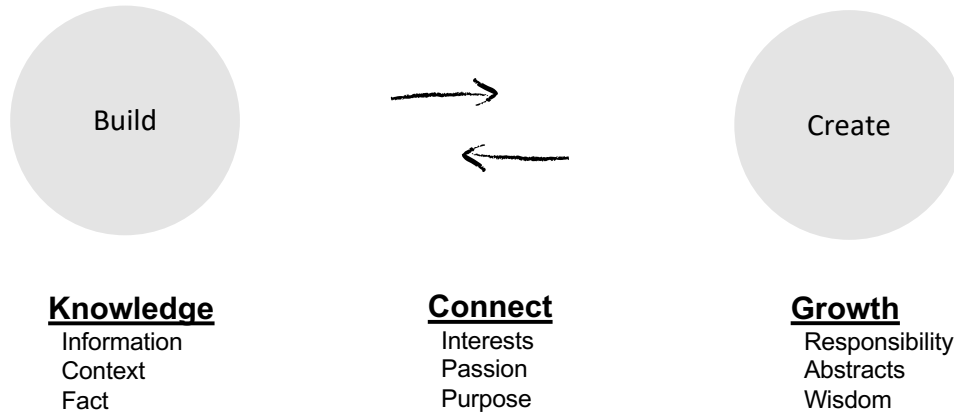### *Difficulties of Delayed Gratification #4.*

Throughout the study, the question of worth in school arose, but it seems that investing in secondary education comprises more than making money, getting that perfect job, or even establishing a long-term career. As the collection of data presented, the educational experience is more about self-discovery and fulfillment; the scripture highlights that hope is the essence of a full life, that God has a plan, and that plan will come to fruition for those who wait (Jeremiah 29:11). Most of the participants had a vision about school but couldn't see much further past those four years and earning that degree; as they stated, a commission and the beginning of a career in the Army was the hope. The book of James, the New Testament, questions the human experience of making plans; the experience of life is a mist that appears for a time and then vanishes. It asks for a reason for making plans a year or two out because who knows the future but God alone (James 4:14); therefore, redeem the time, for the days are gone as quick as they have come (Ephesians 5:16). It is healthy for everyone to plan for a future, even those to trust in Christ, but it is the Lord that directs the steps (Proverbs 6:9).

Higher education poses many challenges; in many cases, it would be easier to give up and get a regular job to make a living and get a steady paycheck, even if it is less than ideal. Giving students a glimpse into the future, showing their ability and capability, and what is available on the other side of the difficulties can be prosperity, and these are key ingredients to establishing a vision and mission and a place to flourish even amid a storm of emotions, mental blocks, and life problems. Even though the reward for all the hard work and attending college without pay, all the participants had no regrets about the hard work of school or even joining the military and becoming officers because hindsight is always clear and focused; the future is unknown.

Education is Not Intelligence #5.

Learning how to learn is more than gaining knowledge and working toward a skill set; as the study indicated across all the individual interviews, the participant's goals were more in line with creative thinking, which required abstract thought, looking for solutions considering the goal, understanding what motivates, and pushing through any difficulties one situation at a time, which demonstrates a growth mindset. Those with the greatest challenges from their college experience suffered difficulties; the study emphasized that learning needs to be difficult, but inside of that difficulty, it must also be creative and sustaining. Therefore, it stands to reason that when learning is difficult but still creative, it is more likely to have a lasting impact, changing the traditional school educational model into something useful for all types of students, like the lasting impact on the participants.

In her theory, Duckworth (2016) created a representation model called *Effort Counts Twice*; this model shows how talent times effort equals skill; following a sloping line down to the second part of the explanation, her model continues saying that skill times effort equals achievement. The figure below (Figure 3) illustrates the same concept of Duckworth's (2016) model, showing how connection in place of talent will carry a person from talent to achievement; only here, in the figure below, the connection of intelligence to creativity carries a person from interest, passion or purpose to the desired goal and achievement.

Figure 3.

Intelligence vs. Creativity

Knowledge
Information
Context
Fact

Connect
Interests
Passion
Purpose

Growth
Responsibility
Abstracts
Wisdom

(Shannon, 2024)

Note. The above figure shows the exchange where connection meets creative thought.

One participant was asked what brought meaning to their life; notwithstanding, it was no surprise to discover family was at the top of the list, but it was also no shock that his goals kept changing because, as he grew and made achievements, with each step, he would move the goal post. His achievements seemed never to be fixed, but he adjusted according to the flow of his life; when pressed as to why his goals changed was that he kept achieving each goal so that it would require establishing a new one, and despite the hardship, he would continue because whatever the end goal was, he remained determined. As the Proverbs promises, this type of devotion is to the Lord, but it is God that will establish a goal and accomplish it as He sees fit (Proverbs 16:3). It takes intelligence to progress toward an education, move through the process, and gain knowledge, but establishing and completing a goal is up to a creative mind.

The Old Testament indicates that a wise, determined person will take a situation head-on or recognize a potential learning event and be humble enough to seek advice and mentorship

(Proverbs 1:5). The idea of what it takes to be a lifelong learner came to the forefront with each interview, and acquiring knowledge and realizing that some information is helpful when needed, is essential for any Army Officer. Looking closer at the details in the data, the study revealed that the purpose of college, at least for the participants, was to grow into something more than before; it was not necessarily about obtaining that piece of paper but learning how to learn. The apostle Paul considers suffering, or in other words, learning, to be the root of glory, which is a shadow of understanding heaven, and that instant gratification never outweighs the satisfaction of hard work in obtaining a goal (Romans 8:18).

Choose to Finish Strong #6.

It was a dark moment for one of the participants working on coursework in her basement back home on summer break. The emotional content of her experience was overwhelming and encompassed her thoughts: what if she failed? The unknown consumed her thinking, crippling any creativity and blocking hope or any positive thought process necessary to complete school. For the bigger plan, she was taking several practice exams to assess her knowledge for the next step and acceptance to a master's level program, which was her reason for starting school in the first place. She did not want encouragement from family, but instead, she reached out to a friend from school for perspective and relief from internal thoughts of failure.

Another participant merely pushed through any problems he experienced without the same family or peer support; he never sought personal relationships at school but viewed his community in the context of his future goal of joining the military, repetitively looking to an eventual commissioning for the necessary hope to push through the challenge. Sure, he had challenges in his path, but by keeping the goal in mind and tapping into his inner passion and perseverance, his wherewithal brought him to the next step and through all his trials. The

difference between the two was that he never sought a community where she did, neither wrong, but both worked within how God designed their performance and how they would function in the world (Romans 12:2); the critical element in both examples was the choice to continue despite the odds stacked against them.

In another interview, one of the participants stood out, unlike all the other participants; she went to a small Catholic university, and out of everyone, she spoke of her relationship and connection with God. The book of Hebrews talks about sustainment, how it is impossible to please God without a measure of faith in everything done, that He rewards those who diligently seek His will (Hebrews 11:6). While ambition carried her interest before, throughout, and after her graduation, in the end, her faith assisted in her decision to enter school sustained her throughout and even now is her lifeline, resulted in her praise and adoration for the Lord (Proverbs 16:3). That same element of faith caused her to generate a vision and goal for the future; as a teen, she lay on the couch, thinking about possibilities and what was next in her life. In her description of what happened, it was a sudden "spark," an idea of what could be, and a solid, unwavering decision to step forward toward a seemingly impossible goal, but in this stood her choice to push forward and from her perspective, even though she had enormous trials, she chose to push through no matter the cost.

Implications for Policy or Practice

Schools that want to survive the difficult task of increasing dropout rates, government standards, and funding regulations should examine policies and practices to enhance the culture generated by the school's mission, producing an alumnus aligned with that mission. This study's data collection exemplified successful education practices regarding student passion and perseverance generated solely by the school's culture reflected by its mission and values. Over

the course of the study, it became clear that the culture of military institutes such as West Point and Virginia Military Institute outperformed the culture driven by ROTC programs, but both military cultures were more effective in setting the stage for student success with traditions and standards than with the regular cultures produced by public universities or colleges. To succeed in college, all students need the safety and security of high ideals that any tradition can dictate; this measure must be guided by hardline rules and regulations over and above the gray area of double standards and lower ethical codes, where concepts like groupthink run amuck.

Implication for Policy

What has come to be known as a traditional American front porch has an invisible protective barrier in which the space shelters all who come, based on an attitude of embracing the right and shunning the wrong; the safe space of a porch is revered as a sanctuary connecting good times and memory-making to groups of family and friends. The study revealed that all participants needed to connect with some form of community, either in the good or bad times, and it seems like the participants all needed some form of front porch space; when college proved to be the most challenging, they sought to find their people, their group, but it was not an easy task. Therefore, establishing a front porch culture in a college seems like a policy worth exploring; the culture could be created by establishing rules surrounding a variety of different spaces, accommodating activities, promoting clubs, or facilitating a wide array of different types of sports teams, all of these group could come through aligning shared values to guide goals and the mission of the school through intensifying the plan and change attitudes to what type of graduate the school desires to produce.

For a university or college to achieve this sense of belonging associated with a front porch, the school must consider implementing policies to foster a type of brotherhood or

sisterhood like the military institutions naturally create. Adjusting on an institutional level, holding to strict, unwavering equal standards and shared values, guiding and mentoring, establishing a sense of identity and opportunities for common bonds, and building a place to grow and learn for all levels and types of students. Therefore, as policy can impact, it seems best to strive toward this front porch culture to meet individual needs but also fall in line with the mission of the school; all the while, the student must be motivated, passionate, and persevere in connecting to a values-driven attitude, providing ways for students to be bought into their program.

Implications for Practice

Based on the study and data collected, an ideal practice for freshmen is to establish a major focus toward a career early and institutions giving a track of courses specifically designed for direct engagement with the professionals of their chosen career path; without a goal, a student will have no mission, no process or plan, and really no motivation or purpose. No matter the values or standards of the institution, the build-up toward an individual career path should be a driving force for school culture; again, if the students do not know where they are going, they will have no motives to get there. In turn, the institutional practice should support students by building a robust program encompassing classes that are dedicated to stages of growth and mentor-driven for the career tract, not just one type of class, highlighting how each step aligns with what future employers want to see from graduates. The points of connection may lead to internships and are well within the possibility of any policies, laws, or regulations, but in the current culture, the help resources for all students are more distant. In a school-driven culture, talent tends to be celebrated, but as this study revealed, success only comes from a choice, determination, shared suffering, solidifying a vision, and driving toward deliberate practices; if

the school can look past surface-level talent and encourage drive mixed with potential, the practice of success for everyone will surely follow.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

The framework used for the study was Duckworth's (2016) grit theory, which defines grit as passion and perseverance for whatever goal; when confronting a task or hurdle, passion is an internal, emotional state, perseverance leans more on the physical, determined to achieve, and both work together through the challenge and not avoiding an obstacle. Her theory became relevant within each participant's choice to push forward, but this power of choice required an underlying motivation originating from within, and, therefore, as participants acted on their passion, their grit shifted from theory to practical observations and notable experiences. The way grit theory informed the study was tactical and adaptive; the empirical implications revealed the students' drive, how they suffered to finish school and graduate, and were eventually commissioned as U.S. Army officers. The study demonstrated how grit's usefulness came from self-awareness; based on the student's perception, it was revealed how grit would grow as they processed toward their goal, even with suffering through individual trials. Granted, the participants all matriculated from different schools and had different areas of focus in their education, but at the same time, each had similar challenges as they processed through problems, transitioned, and moved toward opportunity, all in the context of grit.
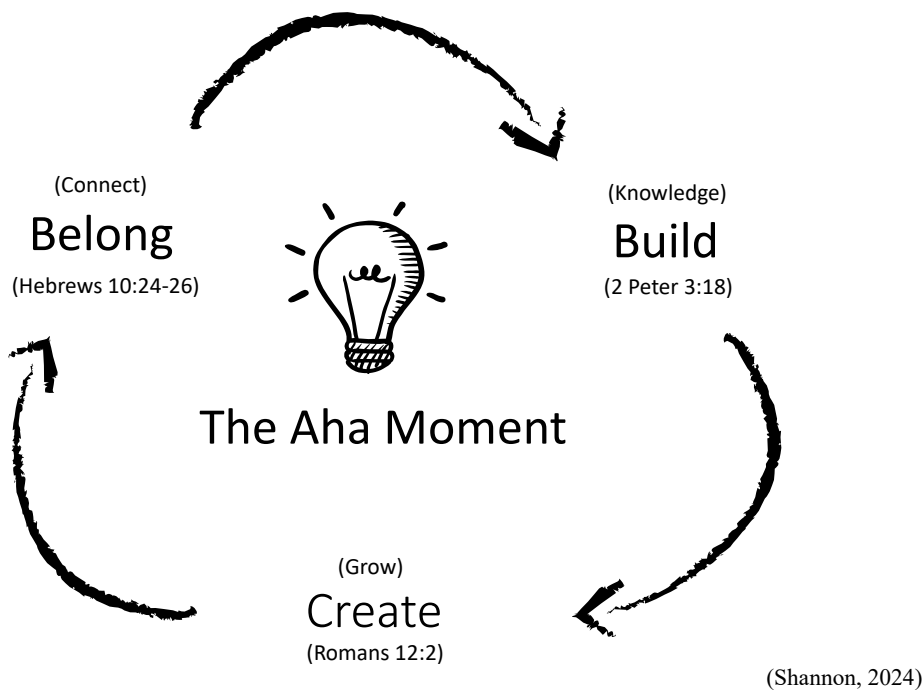
Empirical Implication

Grit during the *aha moment* occurs when an unwavering decision is made; within this moment, grit moves from theoretical to empirical, where the person does not back down but finishes what they started, and they take ownership of their chosen path. Grit is activated by a particular unidentified soul ingredient, guiding a person toward the established goal and thus an

empirical byproduct, thereby creating the participant's interest where their interest is mixed with hope (Ng, 2018). Developing the needed culture to accommodate this aha moment is not about micromanaging individuals but creating a place where diverse students can thrive despite the challenges that emerge from different expectations, emotional blocks, and peer or parental pressure (Mirabella, 2018).

As the research indicated, the aha moment is not exactly about finding acceptance from a group but connecting with a community to find assistance in making it through a challenge; as it stands, this necessary type of motivation cannot be bought, convinced, coerced, or forced, the connection is sought through building relationships and connecting with people (Delgado, 2005). The study of the aha moment started off as a theory, but through the data collection, passion originating from within was evident through observations and recording experiences, usually from an interest or desire for something greater (Moeller et al., 2022). The necessary inner strength comes partly from connecting to people of common interest in serving one another, loving, and supporting, especially in the context of community, but also with morally upright motives embracing the opportunity to grow within this safe space in time, location, or experience (Delgado, 2005).

The illustration below (Figure 4) indicates the process leading up to and from the aha moment; it connects to the area of interest, gathering information, and growing from what was learned. As the figure illustrates, the aha moment is not bound to a specific area of the cycle but is the centerpiece; it is placed in the model where it can influence or affect any part of the process. In regular occurrences and after the cycle is complete, there is room to start over brand-new; throughout the belong, build, and create process, there is a time to discover and grow beyond who the individual was before, growing and making way for the next goal.

Figure 4.

The Aha Moment

(Connect)
Belong
(Hebrews 10:24-26)

(Knowledge)
Build
(2 Peter 3:18)

The Aha Moment

(Grow)
Create
(Romans 12:2)

(Shannon, 2024)

Note. The above figure shows the flow of The Aha Moment.

Self-awareness might not necessarily be the exact way to describe the phrase "the aha moment," but as participants described in the interviews, self-awareness is in partnership with motivation, and these together reveal the moments leading up to the challenge and how a student may favor during the empirical implication. In this instance, the aha moment is like a crack of light in a pitch-black room, where light creeps in to vanquish the nothing that the darkness produces; not knowing exactly where the glow originated, the student is drawn to this light. The crack of light feeds hope into the room, and in this illustration, the aha moment is that light shining in the darkness, creating a path to victory and accomplishing the goal. The challenge or trial fades, hope emerges, and the end goal is revealed; thus, the light from the crack is exposed because of the darkness, and a student can now see the possible.

Harnessing the power of grit has become popular recently, especially since Duckworth (2016) conducted her study and developed the grit test for the West Point military academy. Throughout this study's data collection, specifically the interviews, grit's empirical evidence was demonstrated through student experiences; the participants kept recounting stories of how grit and a no-quit attitude assisted during the challenges of finishing school (Schreiner, 2017). The inner drive showed empirical implications for everyone, but the origin of their motivation was still theoretical. From the theoretical perspective, it seems that motivation was as unique as it was to the individual; in this case, the study revealed connecting with immediate family was a core value in the drive, but, for the most part, the family did not exhibit the same drive, only a few parents were exceptions holding their own form of passion (Schippers & Ziegler, 2019).

Their drive was considered from many levels, including personal motivation and how they would help motivate others (Park & Lee, 2020). In this context, love as a driving force was highlighted in connection to the individual's passion, but the notion of love took a back seat to the overwhelming power of fear (Van Kleef & Cote, 2022). This negative emotion became prevalent as the participants spoke of parental pressure, uncertain futures, and finances to fund their education (Yousuf et al., 2020). Wherever grit derives, creating that no-quit attitude and its origins remain a mystery, but connecting people to a greater purpose, like spirituality or school pride, seems to overcome this fear and bring students closer to the elements needed to go the distance (Duckworth, 2016).

Theoretical Implications

Modern culture is disconnected from personal relationships and community for many reasons; though current technology and social media can unite the world, these resources have also made relationships distant and, in many cases, almost nonexistent (Amedie, 2015). Social

media sites can create a void of personal interaction, making it easy to hide from problems; as far as the data collection, the participant's success seemed to depend on their face-to-face community and the in person relationships they established connecting with similar interests (Bhargava & Velasquez, 2021). Because of social media's lack of human connection, the theoretical implications suggest the battle against the social sites lure of likes and comments is a current threat to education at all levels; its existence fights the essence of community support, both the good and the bad, in terms of personal interaction and relationship building (Amedie, 2015). Even though social media has brought the world together, it is easy to remain isolated without the discomfort of the messiness of friendship because of the convenience of mobile phones, tablets, and computers (Bhargava & Velasquez, 2021). The value of the study exemplified the rich need for friends and community to talk face to face, especially in difficult and challenging times and dealing with the issues that arise while attending college (Osterman, 2000).
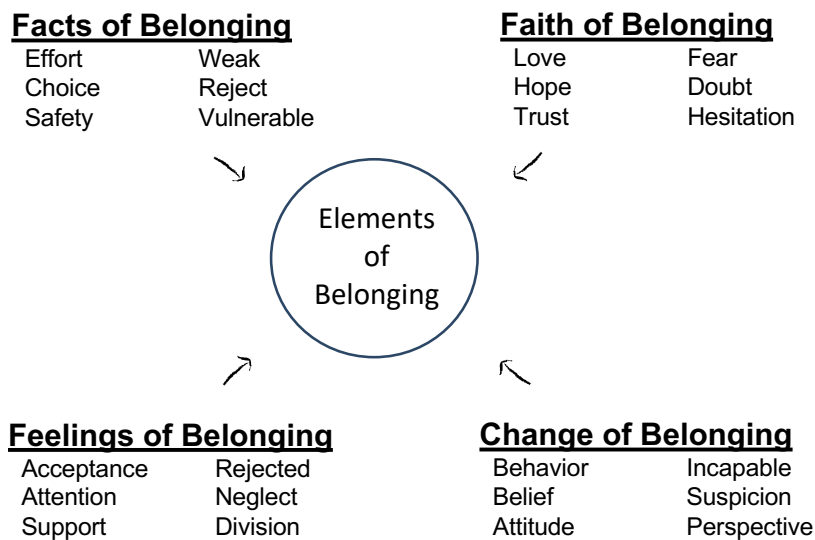
In a story of success, a basic human need is to share the experience with someone, family, or friends; the desire to tell the story is strong, and the event is much richer when the story is told to someone who cares to hear what happened (Jewkes & Murcott, 1996). Therefore, as the example of telling a story illustrates, empathy must be the centerpiece in any healthy community; numerous emotional and spiritual bonds are involved, but compromise and perspective-taking are the most important (Osterman, 2000). The Book of Hebrews says that humanity was designed to be in a community; more importantly, it describes the meaning of belonging, indicating that this design aims to show love and be loveable, help each other, and encourage the group (Hebrews 10:24-25). From this biblical example, it is clear the foundation

of a community relies heavily on hope, the driving force to overcome all odds and fulfillment of any goal, no matter how grand.

By contrast, when someone is rejected, it leaves a considerable impression and can bring even the most resilient person down (Osterman, 2000). The theoretical implication in the contrast between discouragement and hope is the point of contention for what it means to feel welcome, like a reservation and a place at a table, is something special or, to the contrary, being the outcast and rejected, often leaving an emptiness (Duckworth, 2016). These points highlight that belonging is related to perception, emotional content, and a willingness to lean into discomfort, but as impossible as belonging might be to describe through observations, it becomes fundamental to whoever wants to experience acceptance (Jewkes & Murcott, 1996). Because perception is dominant in life experiences, belonging can be defined by its conscious state, like love, joy, peace, depression, despair, anxiety, and suffering; where ultimately, the hypothesis is that the pain in the challenge of this need to belong drives people towards the reward of acceptance (Duckworth, 2016).

Figure 5.

Emotional and Spiritual Discussion

Facts of Belonging

Effort	Weak
Choice	Reject
Safety	Vulnerable

Faith of Belonging

Love	Fear
Hope	Doubt
Trust	Hesitation

Elements
of
Belonging

Feelings of Belonging

Acceptance	Rejected
Attention	Neglect
Support	Division

Change of Belonging

Behavior	Incapable
Belief	Suspicion
Attitude	Perspective

(Shannon, 2024)

The figure above (figure 5) illustrates the negative and positive elements necessary to feed meaning into the sense of belonging, especially for the individual in any given community. It is noteworthy that the figure includes the negative side of the discussion because the dark tends to define the light, and as it is, both are necessary to understand this convoluted state. Therefore, locating a community can be easy, but becoming accepted and invested in the meaning and fulfillment of the group is difficult; the problem for many in today's culture is that people tend to be drawn and guided by their emotional state instead of opening to vulnerability, communicating, and working through the challenges relationships bring (Bhargava & Velasquez, 2021).

Limitations and Delimitations

The study began in a southwestern military hospital, where I was initially stationed, serving in the active-duty U.S. Army. After the study was designed and approved by Liberty's Institutional Review Board, but before the data collection could begin at that base, I was ordered

to a new duty post by the Army to a midwestern military instillation, so the study design had to shift and be adjusted for a new site. After surveying the small hospital on the new duty post, it became apparent there were not enough junior officer nurses to complete data collection the study was originally designed for, so the adjustment expanded to include all junior officers who still had obtained a bachelor's degree but were open to whatever job they served in the Army. The study's required parameters were still met despite these design changes at the new duty post and recruitment went smoothly.

The site required establishing new relationships and navigating the schedules for each of the junior officers, ensuring each felt comfortable with participating and not interfering with their job or conflicting with their responsibilities, and though I was a higher-ranking officer, I still reaffirmed to them that I did not have direct authority over them or their positions. In the post-study, in addition to limitations, it became apparent that each participant graduated from a different school, each campus unique with standards, cultural norms, and local vernaculars, even originating from different parts of the country, but it became clear that all the different colleges the study benefitted in this diversity to include the different approaches to academia but also revealing the collective basic human struggles and needs all participants had in common.

The delimitations for the original study were set to select only service members because the military hospital had civilian nurse employees as well as service members, and it seemed the research would be better off keeping to the single standard of military personnel. The study originally considered college graduates with a four-year degree for the site because the proposal did not necessarily single out the actual college experience, and there was the slim possibility of nurses with a two-year degree, but in the shift of study sites, this delimitation became less of an issue, and it was permissive to broaden the selection parameters to include all junior officers.

The intent of the study was to capture a challenging experience during a four-year degree, originally focused on nontraditional students, but it quickly became apparent that every junior officer seemed to go straight from high school to college, and none of the participants received funding from their parents so thus they needed scholarships; therefore, each entered the military to pay for school. It seems the defined selection then shifted again and narrowed to scholarship students, but as it turned out these would still fit the parameters of the study looking for challenges of school, resulting in the aha moment.

Recommendations for Future Research

Throughout the study, motivation and the participant's no-quit attitude became a centerpiece for the drive toward higher education, planning, and goals, and after the data collection, I realized that each challenge was as unique as the individual; equally, their no-quit attitude became apparent, their trials were specific, but each had an educational direction all their own. The surprising element was how each student had established their own form of support group or community, and as it turns out, community was their lifeline when they encountered school challenges. Therefore, there is a need for further research into the dynamics of what makes a community and how it can be effective on a college campus for all types of people. The following research topics address what it means to belong: creative thought versus intelligence and community versus groupthink, all of which deserve a deeper understanding of how a typical college functions.

Quantitative Study of What It Means to Belong

In line with further research in developing communities, the study highlighted school sports teams and shared elements of suffering that resulted in better relationships. The participant's use of time while in school was packed with hourly wage jobs, ROTC physical

training requirements, summer training, etc.; the busy schedule made it more difficult to establish friendships, and none of the skill-building classes offered by the institution seemed to help, i.e., professional development courses, writing labs, etc., as these resources were established in a school-wide culture they did not appear effective. If a college is truly interested in helping students succeed, the front porch feeling of belonging to a community needs to be further understood, and that would be ideal through a quantitative study, possibly through surveying students to help understand their experiences of successfully integrating into communities, or it may need the data collected through research already done in peer reviewed articles to assess perceptions and understand experiences.

A Repeated Qualitative Study Looking Deeper for the Aha Moment

The study participants' inner drive pushed them through any challenge, especially when they engaged in creative thought or a growth mindset, which is the opposite of intelligence or a fixed mindset. Duckworth's (2016) grit research highlights that no one has natural talent, but motives lean more on connecting to interest and effort; through passion and perseverance, a person with a high level of desire will find the path, generating intrinsic motivation through a connection to that field of study, inner drive, and pursuit.

A deeper dive into the aha moment with further research is needed to understand how the institution is prone to elevating the talented and intelligent person and does not necessarily accommodate creative thinking, it was the growth mindset that found its way through the struggle for all the participants and not how much knowledge they had. The study showed that these conflicting principles of creativity and intelligence were needed to better understand what constitutes natural talent over and above creative problem-solving because, ultimately, the participants used both in their class work and problem-solving challenges. Therefore, further

research is necessary to understand their creativity because the highest success of getting through the aha moment was when they engaged in a more creative line of thought. A repeat of this same qualitative study would be ideal, in which the data collection has two interviews instead of a letter to self, a focus group to understand their academic skill levels and how they learn, as well as looking at the institutional approach to accommodate the needs of students and how the system facilitates different types of learners possibly through prior research.

Change the Culture: Community Development vs. Groupthink

Generating community in the college experience is not unique, but the points of connection vary; these communities must consider not only the educational experience but also look beyond college into potential careers. Further research is needed to understand why students gravitate toward certain groups and ways of thinking. The natural tendency toward groupthink and tribalism aligns with the community emerging in American colleges; it is negative for the group to speak as one for all because that eliminates individual thought, and the path is then guided by the group, eliminating personal responsibility and any goal-setting. As important as a community is to the success of the college, groupthink can decimate the educational experience; colleges must understand the effects and counter-giving way to the individual. From a qualitative perspective, a study with participant interviews and focus groups would always be successful, but maybe understanding more about their past and family might give further insight, maybe a family picture or some traditional relic as a form of data collection. The topic could also benefit from a quantitative side of research with the use of closed research questions directed at the main theme of the study but looking at the policies and practices of the institution; after all, people are taught how to behave through culture and social interaction, the college might be teaching students values without the institution being aware it is even happening.

Conclusion

The uniqueness of this study is the determination exhibited by the participants; they entered school with an idea of a goal, knew what they wanted, and rigorously perused it till the end state. With that in mind, the advantage of attending a military institution was caring for that individual goal, driving a specific culture, and working to change their outlook, which usually was radically different than their family of origin. Ultimately, the students' passion and perseverance made them successful no matter what trouble they faced. For all of the participants, their college seemed to require them to declare a major and establish a goal early on in the educational journey; of course, these were military academies and ROTC programs with the requirement of a term of military service on the backside, and each institution had to offer resources connected to that goal, such as internships, resume building, required extra courses, and mentorship. As for institutional success, from the standpoint of this study, the only way to help graduation rates is through personal relationships and developing specific communities in the context of interest. It is clear if the school does not become involved in this process of planning and goal setting, the student might not make it to graduation.

Grit was the dominant force for everyone interviewed in the form of passion and perseverance; despite their effort in pushing through the challenges, their determination was not the only substance they used to aid with their goal, but they leaned heavily on family values, school standards, and established goals for the outcomes of their plans and of course communities. In fact, the power of connection and belonging in a community was a high point throughout data collection. As the Bible clearly describes, this need for others in the challenge is illustrated in Exodus 17:11-13: "When Moses' hands grew tired, they took a stone and put it under him, and he sat on it. Aaron and Hur held his hands up—one on one side, one on the

other—so that his hands remained steady till sunset." This excellent picture in the recount of Moses' life shows support from the community that grit is real and perfected in a community of support, connection, caring, and common goals.

References

Ahearn, C. E. (2021). Planning for college and careers: How families and schools shape the alignment of postsecondary expectations. *Sociology of Education, 94*(4), 271–293. https://doi.org/10.1177/00380407211039272.

Ain, N. U., Munir, M., & Suneel, I. (2021). Role of emotional intelligence and grit in life satisfaction. *Heliyon, 7*(4). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2021.e06829.

Aina, C., Baici, E., Casalone, G., & Pastore, F. (2022). The determinants of university dropout: A review of the socio-economic literature. *Socio-Economic Planning Sciences, 79*, 101102. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.seps.2021.101102.

Ajzen, I. (2020). The theory of planned behavior: Frequently asked questions. *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies*, *2*(4), 314-324.

Algoe, S. B., Kurtz, L. E., & Hilaire, N. M. (2016). Putting the "you" in "thank you" examining other-praising behavior as the active relational ingredient in expressed gratitude. *Social Psychological and Personality Science, 7*(7), 658-666.

Alhadabi, A., & Karpinski, A. C. (2020). Grit, self-efficacy, achievement orientation goals, and academic performance in university students. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth, 25*(1), 519-535. https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2019.1679202.

Allen, R. E., Kannangara, C., & Carson, J. (2021). True Grit: How important is the concept of Grit for education? A narrative literature review. *International Journal of Educational Psychology, 10*(1), 73-87. https://doi.org/10.17583/ijep.2021.4578.

Al-Samarraie, H., & Hurmuzan, S. (2018). A review of brainstorming techniques in higher education. *Thinking Skills and Creativity, 27*, 78-91. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2017.12.002.

Alshebami, A. S., & Alamri, M. M. (2020). The Role of Emotional Intelligence in Enhancing the

    Ambition Level of the Students: Mediating Role of Students' Commitment to University.

    J. Talent Dev. Excell, 12, 2275-2287.

Amedie, Jacob, "The Impact of Social Media on Society" (2015). *Pop Culture Intersections. 2.*

    https://scholarcommons.scu.edu/engl_176/2.

Amemiya, J., & Wang, M. (2018). Why effort praise can backfire in adolescence. *Child*

    Development Perspectives, 12(3), 199-203. https://doi.org/10.1111/cdep.12284.

American Psychological Association. (2020). *Stress in America 2020: A national mental health*

    crisis. https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2020/report-october.

Andrade, E. B., & Ariely, D. (2009). The enduring impact of transient emotions on decision

    making. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 109*(1), 1-8.

    https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2009.02.003.

Anwer, F. (2019). Activity-based teaching, student motivation, and academic achievement.

    Journal of Education and Educational Development, 6(1), 154–170.

    https://doi.org/10.22555/joeed.v6i1.1782.

Barczak, G. (2014). From the editor: Importance of a theoretical framework. *The Journal of*

    Product Innovation Management, 31(5), 878-878. https://doi.org/10.1111/jpim.12219.

Barnes, M. E., Dunlop, H. M., Sinatra, G. M., Hendrix, T. M., Zheng, Y., & Brownell, S. E.

    (2020). "Accepting evolution means you cannot believe in god": Atheistic perceptions of

    evolution among college biology students. *CBE Life Sciences Education, 19*(2), ar21-

    ar21. https://doi.org/10.1187/cbe.19-05-0106.

Bashant, J. (2014). Developing grit in our students: Why grit is such a desirable trait and practical strategies for teachers and schools. *Journal for Leadership and Instruction, 13*(2), 14–17.

Benner, A. D., Fernandez, C. C., Hou, Y., & Gonzalez, C. S. (2021). Parent and teacher educational expectations and adolescents' academic performance: Mechanisms of influence. *Journal of Community Psychology, 49*(7), 2679-2703. https://doi.org/10.1002/jcop.22644.

Bhargava, V. R., & Velasquez, M. (2021). Ethics of the attention economy: The problem of social media addiction. *Business Ethics Quarterly, 31*(3), 321-359.

Blue, C. L. (1995). The predictive capacity of the theory of reasoned action and the theory of planned behavior in exercise research: An integrated literature review. *Research in nursing & health*, *18*(2), 105-121.

Brewer, M. L., van Kessel, G., Sanderson, B., Naumann, F., Lane, M., Reubenson, A., & Carter, A. (2019). Resilience in higher education students: *A scoping review. Higher Education Research and Development, 38*(6), 1105-1120. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2019.1626810.

Brez, C., Hampton, E. M., Behrendt, L., Brown, L., & Powers, J. (2020). Failure to replicate: Testing a growth mindset intervention for college student success. *Basic and Applied Social Psychology, 42*(6), 460-468. https://doi.org/10.1080/01973533.2020.1806845.

Brown, P. C., McDaniel, M. A., & Roediger, H. L. (2014). *Make it Stick: The science of successful learning*, Massachusetts: Cambridge.

Burke, A. (2019). Student Retention Models in Higher Education: A Literature Review. *College and University, 94*(2), 12-21.

https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/student-retention-models-higher-education/docview/2232610556/se-2.

Bynum, W., & Varpio, L. (2018). When I say … hermeneutic phenomenology. *Medical Education, 52*(3), 252-253. https://doi.org/10.1111/medu.13414.

Call, K., & the University of the Sunshine Coast. (2018). Professional teaching standards: A comparative analysis of their history, implementation, and efficacy. *The Australian Journal of Teacher Education, 43*(3), 93-108. https://doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2018v43n3.6.

Canning, E. A., LaCosse, J., Kroeger, K. M., & Murphy, M. C. (2020). Feeling like an imposter: The effect of perceived classroom competition on the daily psychological experiences of first-generation college students. *Social Psychological & Personality Science, 11*(5), 647–657. https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550619882032.

Carnahan, D., & Bergan, D. E. (2022). Correcting the misinformed: The effectiveness of fact-checking messages in changing false beliefs. *Political Communication, 39*(2), 166-183. https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2021.1963358.

Carreira, P., & Lopes, A. S. (2021). Drivers of academic pathways in higher education: Traditional vs. nontraditional students. *Studies in Higher Education (Dorchester-on-Thames), 46*(7), 1340-1355. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2019.1675621.

Carson, A. S. (2020). Good faith and trustworthiness in university governance. *Journal of Philosophy of Education, 54*(5), 1220–1236. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9752.12434.

Casanova, J. R., Cervero, A., Núñez, J. C., Almeida, L. S., & Bernardo, A. (2018). Factors that determine the persistence and dropout of university students. *Psicothema, 30*(4), 408-414. https://doi.org/10.7334/psicothema2018.155.

Cervone, D. (2000). Thinking about self-efficacy. *Behavior modification*, *24*(1), 30-56.

Chan, Z. C. Y. (2019). Nursing students view critical thinking as 'Own thinking, searching for truth, and cultural influences. *Nurse Education Today, pp. 78*, 14–18. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nedt.2019.03.015.

Chandak, S. R. (2022). Challenges of teaching moral and ethical values in an age of instant gratification. *International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arts, and Literature*, *10*(10), 25-28.

Creswell, J. W. & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches.* (4th Ed.). Sage.

Csikszentmihalhyi, M. (1997). *Finding Flow: The psychology of engagement with everyday life*, New York: NY.

Dalton-Smith, S. (2017). *Sacred Rest: Recover your life, renew your energy, restore your sanity*, New York: New York.

De Jong, E. M., Ziegler, N., & Schippers, M. C. (2020). From shattered goals to meaning in life: Life crafting in times of the COVID-19 pandemic. *Frontiers in Psychology, 11*, 577708-577708. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.577708.

Delgado, C. (2005). A discussion of the concept of spirituality. *Nursing Science Quarterly, 18*(2), 157-162. https://doi.org/10.1177/0894318405274828.

Demerath, P., Kemper, S., Yousuf, E., & Banwo, B. (2022). A grounded model of how educators earn students' trust in a high-performing U.S. urban high school. *The Urban Review*, 1-30. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11256-022-00635-4.

Dhanu, G., Havale, R., Shrutha, S., Quazi, N., Shafna, T., & Ahemd, A. (2019). Assessment of intelligence quotient using raven's-colored progressive matrices among school children of Hyderabad Karnataka region and its correlation with prevalence of dental caries.

Journal of the Indian Society of Pedodontics and Preventive Dentistry, 37(1), 25-30. https://doi.org/10.4103/JISPPD.JISPPD_236_18.

Donald, W. E., Baruch, Y., & Ashleigh, M. (2019). The undergraduate self-perception of employability: Human capital, careers advice, and career ownership. *Studies in Higher Education, 44*(4), 599-614.

Dore, E., Guerero, D., Wallbridge, T., Holden, A., Anwar, M., Eastaugh, A., Desai, D., & Clare, S. (2021). Sleep is the best medicine: How to rest facilities and Energy Pods can improve staff wellbeing. *Future Healthcare Journal, 8*(3), e625-e628. https://doi.org/10.7861/fhj.2020-0261.

Dorrance Hall, E., Scharp, K. M., Sanders, M., & Beaty, L. (2020). Family communication patterns and the mediating effects of support and resilience on students' concerns about college. *Family Relations, 69*(2), 276–291. https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12386.

Dorrance Hall, E., Shebib, S. J., & Scharp, K. M. (2021). The mediating role of helicopter parenting in the relationship between family communication patterns and resilience in first-semester college students. *Journal of Family Communication, 21*(1), 34-45. https://doi.org/10.1080/15267431.2020.1859510.

Doyle, C. B., & O'Donnell, G. M. (2020). The theory of emerging adulthood: Parents' experience of their child's transition to college. *Higher Education Research and Development, pp. 1–16.* https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2020.1857342.

Drisko, J. W. (2020). Qualitative research synthesis: An appreciative and critical introduction. *Qualitative Social Work, 19*(4), 736-753.

Drozdowski, M. J., (2022). *7 Challenges Threatening the Future of Higher Education.* Best Colleges. https://www.bestcolleges.com/news/analysis/7-challenges-threatening-future-

of-higher-

education/#:~:text=Today's%20colleges%20and%20universities%20face,college%20alte

rnatives%2C%20and%20political%20interference.

Duckworth, A. (2016). *Grit: The power of passion and perseverance*, London: Vermilion.

Duckworth, A. L., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2005). Self-discipline outdoes IQ in predicting

The academic performance of adolescents. *Psychological Science, 16*(12), 939–944.

http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fscholar

y-journals%2Fself-discipline-outdoes-iq-

predictingacademic%2Fdocview%2F68842277%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085.

Dweck, C. S. (2016). *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success.* Kindle: Random House.

Dyment, J., Stone, C., & Milthorpe, N. (2020). Beyond busy work: Rethinking the measurement

of online student engagement. *Higher Education Research and Development, 39*(7),

1440–1453. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2020.1732879.

Epstein, D. J. (2019). *Range: Why generalists triumph in a specialized world*, New York:

Riverhead.

Ericsson, K. A., & Harwell, K. W. (2019). Deliberate practice and proposed limits on the effects

of practice on the acquisition of expert performance: Why the original definition matters

and recommendations for future research. *Frontiers in Psychology, pp. 10*, 2396–2396.

https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02396.

Erschens, R., Herrmann-Werner, A., Keifenheim, K. E., Loda, T., Bugaj, T. J., Nikendei, C.,

Lammerding-Köppel, M., Zipfel, S., & Junne, F. (2018). Differential determination of

perceived stress in medical students and high-school graduates due to personal and

training-related stressors. *PloS One, 13*(1), e0191831-e0191831.

https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0191831.

Falcon, A. (2022). Aristotle on Causality, *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, Edward N.

Zalta (ed.), https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2022/entries/aristotle-causality.

Farina, L. S. A., Rodrigues, G. D. R., & Hutz, C. S. (2018). Flow and engagement at work: A

literature review. *Psico-USF, 23*, 633-642.

Fischer, B. M. (2020). Developing and sustaining creativity: Creative processes in Canadian

junior college teachers. *Thinking Skills and Creativity, 38*, 100754.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tsc.2020.100754.

Fishbach, A., & Woolley, K. (2022). The structure of intrinsic motivation. *Annual Review of

Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior, 9*, 339-363.

Fisher, M. H., & Crawford, B. (2020). "From School of Crisis to Distinguished": Using

Maslow's Hierarchy in a Rural Underperforming School. *The Rural Educator, 41*(1), 8-

19.

Http://ezproxy.liberty.edu/login?qurl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.proquest.com%2Fscholar

ly-journals%2Fschool-crisis-distinguished-using-

maslows%2Fdocview%2F2407570767%2Fse-2%3Faccountid%3D12085.

Fite, R. E., Lindeman, M. I. H., Rogers, A. P., Voyles, E., & Durik, A. M. (2017). Knowing

oneself and long-term goal pursuit: Relations among self-concept clarity,

conscientiousness, and grit. *Personality and Individual Differences, 108*, 191-194.

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2016.12.008.

Francis, B., Mills, M., & Lupton, R. (2017). Towards social justice in education: Contradictions

and dilemmas. *Journal of Education Policy, 32*(4), 414–431.

https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2016.1276218.

Franco, A., Rui, M. V., & Celina, T. (2018). Education for critical thinking in university: The criticality of critical thinking in education and everyday life. *Essachess, 11*((2)22), 131-144.

Fritzsche, D., & Oz, E. (2007). Personal values' influence on the ethical dimension of decision making. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *75*, 335-343.

Froiland, J. M., Peterson, A., & Davison, M. L. (2013). The long-term effects of early parent involvement and parent expectation in the USA. *School Psychology International, 34*(1), 33-50. https://doi.org/10.1177/0143034312454361.

Gale, T., & Parker, S. (2015). To aspire: a systematic reflection on understanding aspirations higher education. *Australian Educational Researcher, 42*(2), 139-153. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s13384-014-0165-9.

García-Aracil, A., Monteiro, S., & Almeida, L. S. (2021). Students' perceptions of their preparedness for transition to work after graduation. *Active Learning in Higher Education, 22*(1), 49-62. https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787418791026.

Goldrick-Rab, S. (2018). Addressing community college completion rates by securing students' basic needs: Addressing community college completion rates. *New Directions for Community Colleges, 2018*(184), 7-16. https://doi.org/10.1002/cc.20323.

Carden, J., Jones, R. J., & Passmore, J. (2022). Defining self-awareness in the context of adult development: A systematic literature review. *Journal of Management Education, 46*(1), 140-177. https://doi.org/10.1177/1052562921990065.

Goff, A. (2018). The G.I. bill: A case study in behavioral economics. *Policy Perspectives (Washington, D.C. 1994), 25*, 42-54. https://doi.org/10.4079/pp.v25i0.18349.

Goleman, D. (1995). *Emotional Intelligence: Why it can matter more than IQ*, New York: Random House.

Grodsky, E., & Jones, M. T. (2007). Real and imagined barriers to college entry: Perceptions of cost. *Social Science Research, 36*(2), 745-766. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2006.05.001.

Grossman, D. (2012). *On Combat: The Physiology of Deadly Conflict in War and Peace*, eBook: Human Factor Research Group, Inc.

Haimovitz, K., & Dweck, C. S. (2017). The origins of children's growth and fixed mindsets: New research and proposal. *Child Development, 88*(6), 1849-1859. https://doi.org/10.1111/cdev.12955.

Haktanir, A., Watson, J. C., Ermis-Demirtas, H., Karaman, M. A., Freeman, P. D., Kumaran, A., & Streeter, A. (2021). Resilience, academic self-concept, and college adjustment among first-year students. *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice, 23*(1), 161-178. https://doi.org/10.1177/1521025118810666.

Halimi, F., AlShammari, I., & Navarro, C. (2021). Emotional intelligence and academic achievement in higher education. *Journal of Applied Research in Higher Education, 13*(2), 485-503. https://doi.org/10.1108/JARHE-11-2019-0286.

Hamilton, L., Roksa, J., & Nielsen, K. (2018). Providing a "leg up": Parental involvement and opportunity hoarding in college. *Sociology of Education, 91*(2), 111-131. https://doi.org/10.1177/0038040718759557.

Hanson, M. (2021, November 22). College Dropout Rates. EducationData.org. https://educationdata.org/college-dropout-rates.

He, R., Jain, Y. R., & Lieder, F. (2021). Measuring and modeling how people learn how to plan and adapt their planning strategies to the structure of the environment. *In International conference on cognitive modeling.* https://mathpsych.org/presentation/604/document.

Hensley, N. (2020). Educating for sustainable development: Cultivating creativity through mindfulness. *Journal of Cleaner Production, p. 243*, 118542. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclepro.2019.118542.

Hittepole, C. (2019). Nontraditional students: Supporting changing student populations. *The University of Denver*.

Hoffait, A. S., & Schyns, M. (2017). Early detection of university students with potential difficulties. *Decision Support Systems, 101*, 1-11.

Hopper, E. (2020). Maslow's hierarchy of needs explained. *ThoughtCo, ThoughtCo*, *24*, 1-3.

Huéscar Hernández, E., Moreno-Murcia, J. A., Cid, L., Monteiro, D., & Rodrigues, F. (2020). Passion or perseverance? The effect of perceived autonomy support and grit on academic performance in college students. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 17*(6), 2143. https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17062143.

Jaffe, E. (2020). The mindset in the classroom: Changing the way students see themselves in mathematics and beyond. *The Clearing House, 93*(5), 255–263. https://doi.org/10.1080/00098655.2020.1802215.

Jewkes, R., & Murcott, A. (1996). Meanings of community. *Social science & medicine, 43*(4), 555-563.

Johnson, E. J. (2021). *The Elements of Choice*, New York: Riverhead Books.

Johnson, S. R., & Stage, F. K. (2018). Academic engagement and student success: Do high-impact practices mean higher graduation rates? *The Journal of Higher Education (Columbus), 89*(5), 753–781. https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2018.1441107.

Jungic, V., Creelman, D., Bigelow, A., Côté, E., Harris, S., Joordens, S., Ostafichuk, P., Riddell, J., Toulouse, P., & Yoon, J. (2020). Experiencing failure in the classroom and across the university. *The International Journal for Academic Development, 25*(1), 31-42. https://doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2020.1712209.

Kan, M. P., & Fabrigar, L. R. (2017). Theory of planned behavior. *Encyclopedia of personality and individual differences*, 1-8.

Kaufman, J. C. (2018). Finding meaning with creativity in the past, present, and future. *Perspectives on Psychological Science, 13*(6), 734-749. https://doi.org/10.1177/1745691618771981.

Keating, J. F. (2021). Woke religion. *First Things (New York, N.Y.), (312)*, 50.

Khan, R., Neveu, J., & Murtaza, G. (2021). Is grit hurting you? The dark side of psychological resources in goal pursuit. *Applied Psychology, 70*(3), 1323-1344. https://doi.org/10.1111/apps.12279.

Kibbey, M. M., Fedorenko, E. J., & Farris, S. G. (2021). Anxiety, depression, and health anxiety in undergraduate students living in initial US outbreak "hotspot" during COVID-19 pandemic. *Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, 50*(5), 409–421. https://doi.org/10.1080/16506073.2020.1853805.

Kim, E. H., Flack, C. B., Parham, K., & Wohlstetter, P. (2021). A theoretical framework and systematic literature review is equity in secondary career and technical education in the

United States. *Review of Educational Research, 91*(3), 356-396.

    https://doi.org/10.3102/0034654321995243.

Kolbe, T., & Baker, B. D. (2019). Fiscal equity and America's community colleges. *The Journal*

    of Higher Education (Columbus), 90(1), 111-149.

    https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2018.1442984.

Kotler, S. (2021). *The Art of Impossible: a peak performance primer*, New York: HarperCollins.

Kotsou, I., Mikolajczak, M., Heeren, A., Grégoire, J., & Leys, C. (2019). Improving emotional

    intelligence: A systematic review of existing work and future challenges. *Emotion*

    Review, 11(2), 151–165. https://doi.org/10.1177/1754073917735902.

Krasna, H., Gershuni, O., Sherrer, K., & Czabanowska, K. (2021). Postgraduate employment

    outcomes of undergraduate and graduate public health students: A scoping review. *Public*

    Health Reports (1974), 136(6), 795-804. https://doi.org/10.1177/0033354920976565.

Lam, K. K. L., & Zhou, M. (2019). Examining the relationship between grit and academic

    achievement within K-12 and higher education: A systematic review

    of the relationship between grit and academic achievement within K-12 and higher

    education. *Psychology in the Schools, 56*(10), 1654–1686.

    https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.22302.

Lam, K. K. L., & Zhou, M. (2021). Grit and academic achievement: A comparative, cross-

    cultural meta-analysis. *Journal of Educational Psychology*,

    https://doi.org/10.1037/edu0000699.

Landry, C. C. (2003). *Self-efficacy, motivation, and outcome expectation correlates of college*

    students' intention certainty. Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical

    College.

LeBlanc, N. J., Toner, E. R., O'Day, E. B., Moore, C. W., Marques, L., Robinaugh, D. J., &

Lederer, A. M., Hoban, M. T., Lipson, S. K., Zhou, S., & Eisenberg, D. (2021). More

    than inconvenienced: The unique needs of U.S. college students during the COVID-19

    pandemic. *Health Education & Behavior, 48*(1), 14–19.

    https://doi.org/10.1177/1090198120969372.

Li, Y., & Bates, T. C. (2019). You cannot change your basic ability, but you work at things, and

    that is how we get hard things done: Testing the role of growth mindset on response to

    setbacks, educational attainment, and cognitive ability. *Journal of Experimental*

    Psychology. General, 148(9), 1640–1655. https://doi.org/10.1037/xge0000669.

Licata, G. (2019). Aristotle's doctrine of causes and the manipulative theory of causality.

    Axiomathes: Quaderni Del Centro Studi Per La Filosofia Mitteleuropea, 29(6), 653-666.

    https://doi.org/10.1007/s10516-018-9398-y.

Limeri, L. B., Carter, N. T., Choe, J., Harper, H. G., Martin, H. R., Benton, A., & Dolan, E. L.

    (2020). Growing a growth mindset: Characterizing how and why undergraduate students'

    mindsets change. *International Journal of STEM Education, 7*(1), 1–19.

    https://doi.org/10.1186/s40594-020-00227-2.

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). Naturalistic inquiry. Sage.

Locke, E. A., & Latham, G. P. (2019). The development of goal setting theory: A half-century

    retrospective. *Motivation Science, 5*(2), 93–105. https://doi.org/10.1037/mot0000127.

Loes, C. N., Culver, K. C., & Tyrolian, T. L. (2018). How collaborative learning enhances

    students' openness to diversity. *The Journal of Higher Education (Columbus), 89*(6), 935

    960. https://doi.org/10.1080/00221546.2018.1442638.

Lopez, J. D., & Horn, J. M. (2020). Grit and retention among first-year Hispanic college students

at a Hispanic serving institution. *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences, 42*(2), 264-270. https://doi.org/10.1177/0739986320910153.

Low, R., King, S., & Foster-Boucher, C. (2019). Learning to bounce back: A scoping review about resiliency education. *The Journal of Nursing Education, 58*(6), 321–329. https://doi.org/10.3928/01484834-20190521-02.

Mapes, A. C. (2011). You need to realize it in yourself: Positioning, improvisation, and literacy. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, *54*(7), 515-524.

Marazziti, D., Palermo, S., & Mucci, F. (2021). The science of love: State of the art. *Advances in experimental medicine and biology* (pp. 249-254). Springer International Publishing. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-74046-7_16.

Maslow, A. (1943). A theory of human motivation. *Psychological Review, 50*(4), 370–396. doi: 10.1037/h0054346.

Matheson, J., & Philosophy Documentation Center. (2018). Gritty faith. *American Catholic Philosophical Quarterly, 92*(3), 499-513. https://doi.org/10.5840/acpq201858152.

Matzkin, E., & Garvey, K. (2019). Youth sports specialization: Does practice make perfect? *NASN School Nurse, 34*(2), 100-103. https://doi.org/10.1177/1942602X18814619.

McCready-Flora, I. C. (2021). Aristotle on reasoning and rational animals. *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, pp. 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1080/00048402.2021.1986081.

McDermott, E. R., Donlan, A. E., & Zaff, J. F. (2019). Why do students drop out? Turning points and long-term experiences. *The Journal of Educational Research (Washington, D.C.), 112*(2), 270-282. https://doi.org/10.1080/00220671.2018.1517296.

McKinney, L., Gross, J. P., Burridge, A., Inge, B., & Williams, A. (2021). Understanding loan default among community college students. *Community College Review, 49*(3), 314–342. https://doi.org/10.1177/00915521211001467.

McLeod, S. (2007). Maslow's hierarchy of needs. *Simply psychology*, *1*(1-18).

McMullen, A. M. (2021). The choice to love. *The Lancet (British Edition), 398*(10312), 1680-1681. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(21)02383-7.

McNally, R. J. (2020). Shame, guilt, and pride after loss: Exploring the relationship between moral emotions and psychopathology in bereaved adults. *Journal of Affective Disorders, 263*, 405-412. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2019.11.164.

McRell, A. S., & Grace, B. L. (2022). Social work, social justice, and Americentric by design: Transnationalism in united states social work education. *Higher Education Research and Development, ahead-of-print(ahead-of-print)*, 1-16. https://doi.org/10.1080/07294360.2022.2052816.

Millett-Thompson, A. (2017). Dealing with college students' stress, anxiety, and depression. *The Journal for Quality and Participation, 39*(4), 24.

Milovanska-Farrington, S. (2020). Reasons to attend college, academic success, and post-college plans. *Education Economics, 28*(5), 526-547. https://doi.org/10.1080/09645292.2020.1801597.

Mirabella, G. (2018). The weight of emotions in decision-making: How fearful and happy facial stimuli modulate action readiness of goal-directed actions. *Frontiers in Psychology, 9*, 1334-1334. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01334.

Moeller, J., Viljaranta, J., Tolvanen, A., Kracke, B., & Dietrich, J. (2022). Introducing the
Dynamics Framework of moment-to-moment development in achievement motivation.
Learning and Instruction, 101653.

Mokher, C. G., Rosenbaum, J. E., Gable, A., Ahearn, C., & Jacobson, L. (2018). Ready for
what? Confusion around college and career readiness. *Phi Delta Kappan, 100*(4), 40-43.

Morton, J. M., & Paul, S. K. (2019). Grit. *Ethics, 129*(2), 175-203.
https://doi.org/10.1086/700029.

Morton, T. R., Ramirez, N. A., Meece, J. L., Demetriou, C., & Panter, A. T. (2018). Perceived
barriers, anxieties, and fears in prospective college students from rural high schools. *The
High School Journal, 101*(3), 155–176. https://doi.org/10.1353/hsj.2018.0008.

Nakata, Y., Nitta, R., & Tsuda, A. (2022). Understanding motivation and classroom modes of
regulation in collaborative learning: An exploratory study. *Innovation in Language
Learning and Teaching, 16*(1), 14-28. https://doi.org/10.1080/17501229.2020.1846040.

Neen, G., Awan, R., Maan, Y. A., & Abid, A. (2019). Motivational factors for in-service
students enrolled in higher education programs—*Journal of Behavioral Sciences, 29*(2),
74.

Ng, B. (2018). The neuroscience of growth mindset and intrinsic motivation. *Brain Sciences,
8*(2), 20. https://doi.org/10.3390/brainsci8020020.

Okano, K., Kaczmarzyk, J. R., Dave, N., Gabrieli, J. D. E., & Grossman, J. C. (2019). Sleep
quality, duration, and consistency are associated with better academic performance in
college students. *NPJ Science of Learning, 4*(1), 1-5. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41539-019-
0055-z.

Ornstein, A. (2019). Wealth, legacy and college admission. *Society, 56*(4), 335-339.

Osterman, K. F. (2000). Students' need for belonging in the school community. *Review of educational research, 70*(3), 323-367.

Pavelea, A. M., & Moldovan, O. (2020). Why some fail and others succeed: Explaining the academic performance of PA undergraduate students. *NISPAcee Journal of Public Administration and Policy, 13*(1), 109-132. https://doi.org/10.2478/nispa-2020-0005.

Pariat, L., Rynjah, A., Joplin, M., & Kharjana, M. G. (2014). Stress levels of college students: The interrelationship between stressors and coping strategies. *Journal of Humanities and Social Science, 19*(8), 40-46.

Park, Y. L., & Lee, H. J. (2020). The mediating effect of grit in the relationship between cal, academic achievement, and career stress. *The International Journal of Advanced Culture Technology, 8*(1), 98-106.

Pascoe, M. C., Hetrick, S. E., & Parker, A. G. (2020). The impact of stress on students in secondary school and higher education. *International Journal of Adolescence and Youth, 25*(1), 104–112. https://doi.org/10.1080/02673843.2019.1596823.

Pasha-Zaidi, N., Afari, E., Sevi, B., Urganci, B., & Durham, J. (2019). Responsibility of learning: A cross-cultural examination of the relationship of grit, motivational belief, and self-regulation among college students in the US, UAE, and turkey. *Learning Environments Research, 22*(1), 83–100. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10984-018-9268-y.

Patrick, S. K., & Joshi, E. (2019). "Set in stone" or "Willing to grow"? Teacher sensemaking during a growth mindset initiative. *Teaching and Teacher Education, pp. 83*, 156–167. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2019.04.009.

Patton, M. Q. (2002). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods: Integrating theory and practice* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.

Pawlak, M., Zawodniak, J., & Kruk, M. (2019). The neglected emotion of boredom in teaching English to advanced learners. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics, 30*(3), 497-509. https://doi.org/10.1111/ijal.12302.

Pawlak, M., Kruk, M., Zawodniak, J., & Pasikowski, S. (2020). Investigating factors responsible for boredom in English classes: The case of advanced learners. *System Linkoping, 91*, 102259-10. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.system.2020.102259.

Pfund, G. N., Bono, T. J., & Hill, P. L. (2020). A higher goal during higher education: The power of purpose in life during university. *Translational Issues in Psychological Science, 6*(2), 97-106. https://doi.org/10.1037/tps0000231.

Pinheiro, D. L., Melkers, J., & Newton, S. (2017). Take me where I want to go: Institutional prestige, advisor sponsorship, and academic career placement preferences. *PloS One, 12*(5), e0176977-e0176977. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0176977.

Polirstok, S. (2017). Strategies to improve academic achievement in secondary school students: Perspectives on grit and mindset. *SAGE Open, 7*(4), 215824401774511. https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244017745111.

Procon. (2021). History of College Education. Britannica. https://college-education.procon.org/history-of-college-education/.

Postareff, L., Mattsson, M., Lindblom-ylänne, S., & Hailikari, T. (2017). The complex relationship between emotional approaches to learning, study success, and study progress during the transition to university, *Higher Education, 73*(3), 441-457. http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s10734-016-0096-7.

Poston, B. (2009). Maslow's hierarchy of needs. *The surgical technologist*, *41*(8), 347-353.

Pringle, J., Drummond, J., McLafferty, E., & Hendry, C. (2011). Interpretative

phenomenological analysis: A discussion and critique. *Nurse Researcher, 18*(3), 20-

24. https://doi.org/10.7748/nr2011.04.18.3.20.c8459.

Przepiórka, A., Błachnio, A., & Siu, N. Y. (2019). The relationships between self-efficacy, self-

control, chronotype, procrastination, and sleep problems in young adults. *Chronobiology*

International, 36(8), 1025-1035. https://doi.org/10.1080/07420528.2019.1607370.

Rafii, F., Saeedi, M., & Parvizy, S. (2019). Academic motivation in nursing students: A hybrid

concept analysis. *Iranian Journal of Nursing and Midwifery Research, 24*(5), 315-322.

https://doi.org/10.4103/ijnmr.IJNMR_177_18.

Remenick, L. (2019). Services and support for nontraditional students in higher education: A

historical literature review. *Journal of Adult and Continuing Education, 25*(1), 113-130.

https://doi.org/10.1177/1477971419842880.

Riemann, D., Krone, L. B., Wulff, K., & Nissen, C. (2020). Sleep, insomnia, and depression.

Neuropsychopharmacology, 45(1), 74-89. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41386- 019-0411-y.

Roksa, J., & Kinsley, P. (2019). The role of family support in facilitating academic success of

low-income students. *Research in Higher Education, 60*(4), 415-436.

https://doi.org/10.1007/s11162-018-9517-z.

Rouse, K. A. G. (2004). Beyond Maslow's hierarchy of needs: what do people strive

for? *Performance Improvement*, *43*(10), 27.

Rosenburg, M. B. (2015). *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life-Changing Tools for*

Healthy Relationships. California: Puddle Dancer Press.

Rugutt, J., & Chemosit, C. C. (2009). What Motivates Students to Learn? Contribution to

Student-to-Student Relations, Student-Faculty Interaction, and Critical Thinking Skills.

Educational Research Quarterly, 32(3), 16-28.

https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-

journals/what-motivates-students-learn-contribution/docview/216207853/se-2.

Scharl, J. C. (2020). Lonely and Scared: College Students' Culture of Immaturity: AQ. *Academic*

Questions, 33(1), 71-81. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12129-019-09858-6.

Schippers, M. C., & Ziegler, N. (2019). Life crafting is a way to find purpose and meaning in

life. *Frontiers in Psychology, 10*, 2778-2778. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.02778.

Schmuck, P., Kasser, T., & Ryan, R. M. (2000). Intrinsic and extrinsic goals: Their structure and

relationship to well-being in German and US college students. *Social Indicators*

Research, 50(2), 225–241.

Schreiner, L. A. (2017). The privilege of grit. *About Campus, 22*(5), 11-20.

https://doi.org/10.1002/abc.21303.

Schwalm, F. D., Zandavalli, R. B., de Castro Filho, Eno Dias, & Lucchetti, G. (2022). I*s there a*

relationship between spirituality/religiosity and resilience? A systematic review and

meta-analysis of observational studies. SAGE Publications.

https://doi.org/10.1177/1359105320984537.

Shenton, A. K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects.

Education for Information, 22(2), 63-75. https://doi.org/10.3233/EFI-2004-22201.

Shettar, A., Vijaylakshmi, M., & Tewari, P. (2020). Categorizing students as convergent and

divergent thinkers in problem-solving using learning analytics framework *Procedia*

Computer Science, 172, 3–8.

https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877050920313247.

Shin, J., & Grant, A. M. (2019). Bored by interest: How intrinsic motivation in one task can

reduce performance on other tasks. *Academy of Management Journal, 62*(2), 415–436.

Shubina, I., & Kulakli, A. (2019). Pervasive Learning and Technology Usage for Creativity Development in Education. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning (Online), 14*(1), 95-109. https://doi.org/10.3991/ijet.v14i01.9067.

Skinner, E. A., Graham, J. P., Brule, H., Rickert, N., & Kindermann, T. A. (2020). I get knocked down, but I get up again: Integrative frameworks for studying the development of motivational resilience in school. *International Journal of Behavioral Development, 44*(4), 290-300. https://doi.org/10.1177/0165025420924122.

Smith, A. C., Marty-Dugas, J., Ralph, B. C. W., & Smilek, D. (2020). Examining the relation between grit, flow, and measures of attention in everyday life. *Psychology of Consciousness (Washington, D.C.)*, https://doi.org/10.1037/cns0000226.

Smith, R., Killgore, W. D. S., & Lane, R. D. (2018). The structure of emotional experience and its relation to trait emotional awareness: A theoretical review. *Emotion (Washington, D.C.), 18*(5), 670-692. https://doi.org/10.1037/emo0000376.

Smith, R., & Knechtel, L. (2020). When student housing is a car: In college and homeless. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice, 57*(3), 322-337. https://doi.org/10.1080/19496591.2019.1671854.

Sriram, R. (2018). *Learning about learning*. SAGE Publications. https://doi.org/10.1177/1086482218765747.

Stoffel, J. M., & Cain, J. (2018). Review of grit and resilience literature within health professions education. *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education, 82*(2), 6150-134. https://doi.org/10.5688/ajpe6150.

Succi, C., & Canovi, M. (2020). Soft skills to enhance graduate employability: Comparing

    student's and employers' perceptions. *Studies in Higher Education (Dorchester-on-

    Thames), 45*(9), 1834-1847. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2019.1585420.

Suhlmann, M., Sassenberg, K., Nagengast, B., & Trautwein, U. (2018). Belonging mediates the

    effects of student-university fit on well-being, motivation, and dropout intention.

    Social Psychology (Göttingen, Germany), 49(1), 16-28. https://doi.org/10.1027/1864-

    9335/a000325.

Suri, H. (2011). Purposeful sampling in qualitative research synthesis. *Qualitative research

    journal, 11*(2), 63-75.

Sutter, N., & Paulson, S. (2017). Predicting college students' intention to graduate: A test of the

    theory of planned behavior. *College Student Journal, 50*(3), 409-421.

Tang, X., Wang, M., Parada, F., & Salmela-Aro, K. (2020). Putting the goal back into grit:

    Academic goal commitment, grit, and academic achievement. *Journal of Youth and

    Adolescence, 50*(3), 470-484. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-020-01348-1.

Treharne, G. J., & Riggs, D. W. (2015). Ensuring quality in qualitative research. *Qualitative

    research in clinical and health psychology, 2014*, 57-73.

Trolian, T. L., & Jach, E. A. (2020). Engagement in college and university applied learning

    experiences and students' academic motivation. *Journal of Experiential Education, 43*(3),

    317-335.

Trostel, Philip. (2015). It's Not Just the Money. *Lumina Foundation*.

    https://www.luminafoundation.org/resources/its-not- just-the-money.

Trivedi, A. J., & Mehta, A. (2019). Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs-Theory of Human

    Motivation. *International Journal of Research in all Subjects in Multi Languages*, *7*(6),

    38-41.

The Bible, New King James Version*,* Thomas Nelson, 1982.

Underwood, J. (2018). Education as an American, right? *Phi Delta Kappan, 99* (5), 76-77.

Vainio, M. M., & Daukantaitė, D. (2016). Grit and different aspects of well-being: Direct and

    indirect relationships via a sense of coherence and authenticity. *Journal of Happiness*

    Studies, *17*, 2119-2147.

Van Kleef, G. A., & Cote, S. (2022). The social effects of emotions. *Annual Review of*

    Psychology, 73(1), 629-658. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-020821-010855.

Van Manen, Max. (2016). *Phenomenology of Practice: Meaning-Giving Methods in*

    Phenomenological Research and Writing, Routledge.

Wallas, G. (2014). *The Art of Thought*, United Kingdom: Tunbridge.

Walter, N., Cohen, J., Holbert, R. L., & Morag, Y. (2020). Fact-checking: A meta-analysis of

    what works and for whom. *Political Communication, 37*(3), 350-375.

    https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.2019.1668894.

Webber, Douglas. (2018) "Is College Worth It? Going Beyond the Averages." *Third Way*.

    https://www.thirdway.org/report/is-college-worth- it-going-beyond-averages.

Whistle, W. (2019). Ripple effect: The cost of the college dropout rate. *The Third Way*

    Published. https://www.luminafoundation.org/wp-

    content/uploads/2019/02/rippleeffect.pdf.

Williams, S. L., & French, D. P. (2011). What are the most effective intervention techniques for changing physical activity self-efficacy and physical activity behavior—and are they the same? *Health education research*, *26*(2), 308-322.

Winter, L. A. (2018). Relational equality in education: What, how, and why? *Oxford Review of Education, 44*(3), 338–352. https://doi.org/10.1080/03054985.2017.1391761.

Woolley, K., & Fishbach, A. (2022). Motivating personal growth by seeking discomfort. *Psychological science, 33*(4), 510-523.

Yeager, D. S., Carroll, J. M., Buontempo, J., Cimpian, A., Woody, S., Crosnoe, R., Muller, C., Murray, J., Mhatre, P., Kersting, N., Hulleman, C., Kudym, M., Murphy, M., Duckworth, A. L., Walton, G. M., & Dweck, C. S. (2022). Teacher mindsets help explain where a growth mindset intervention does and does not work. *Psychological Science, 33*(1), 18–32. https://doi.org/10.1177/09567976211028984.

Yoon, S., Kim, S., & Kang, M. (2020). The predictive power of grit, professor support for autonomy and learning engagement on perceived achievement within a flipped classroom context. *Active Learning in Higher Education, 21*(3), 233-247. https://doi.org/10.1177/1469787418762463.

Yousuf, H., Ehlers, V. L., Sehgal, M., Song, C., & Moyer, J. R. (2020). Modulating intrinsic excitability as a function of learning within the fear conditioning circuit. *Neurobiology of Learning and Memory, 167*, 107132-107132. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nlm.2019.107132.

Yusuf, M. (2011). The impact of self-efficacy, achievement motivation, and self-regulated learning strategies on students' academic achievement. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *15*, 2623-2626.

Zerquera, D., McGowan, B. L., Ferguson, T. L., & Torres, V. (2017). The burden of debt:

Undergraduate students' experiences with paying for their education. *The College Student Affairs Journal, 35*(2), 140–152. https://doi.org/10.1353/csj.2017.0019.

Zheng, B., & Zhang, Y. (2020). Self-regulated learning: The effect on medical student learning

outcomes in a flipped classroom environment. *BMC Medical Education, 20*(1), 100–100. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12909-020-02023-6.

Zhou, Q., Mao, J., & Tang, F. (2020). Do not be afraid to fail because you can learn from it!

Intrinsic motivation leads to enhanced self-development and benevolent leadership as a boundary condition. *Frontiers in Psychology, pp. 11*, 699–699. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.00699.

Appendices

Appendix A

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY.
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

April 17, 2023

Justin Shannon
David Vacchi

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY22-23-1202 HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY OF THE AHA MOMENT, WHEN A COLLEGE GRADUATE REALIZED THEY COULD FINISH THEIR DEGREE

Dear Justin Shannon, David Vacchi,

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 46:104(d):

Category 2.(ii). 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).
Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation.

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 irb@liberty.edu.

Sincerely,
G. Michele Baker, PhD, CIP
Administrative Chair
Research Ethics Office

Appendix B

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

1 May 2023

Dear Justin M. Shannon:

After carefully reviewing your research proposal entitled "Hermeneutic Phenomenology of the AHA Moment: When a College Graduate Realized They Could Finish Their Degree" I have decided to endorse your study at ██████████████.

I give Justin M. Shannon permission to conduct qualitative research in ███ and contact junior officer registered nurses to invite them to participate in his study.

Sincerely,

██████████

David T Vacchi, PhD
Dissertation Chair
Liberty University, School of Education

Appendix C

Consent

Title of the Project: Hermeneutic Phenomenology of the AHA Moment, When A College Graduate Realized They Could Finish Their Degree.
Principal Investigator: Justin Martin Shannon, Doctoral Candidate, School of Education, Liberty University

Invitation to be part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be a junior officer in the military, have completed a four-year Registered Nurse (RN) degree as a nontraditional student, and a registered nurse. Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to participate in this research.

What is the study about, and why is it being done?

This study aims to understand the lived aha experience of nontraditional college students who, while working to become Registered Nurses (RN), realized the needed passion and perseverance to overcome roadblocks that could have kept them from graduating.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

1. The first task is a letter to the participant's former self. To be completed before the in-person interview, the letter should be at least one page long and take about 30-60 minutes to an hour to compose.
2. The second task is to participate in an in-person, interview that will take about 45 minutes to 1 hour.
3. The final task is to participate in an in-person, focus group and will take about 1 hour to complete.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

The direct benefits subjects should expect from participating in this study include an insight into how they are motivated. Additionally, the tasks of this study are extremely therapeutic; therefore, the process will take a deep dive into a specific memory and possibly tackle an emotional blocker by revisiting struggles from the past.

Benefits to society include insight into what motivates and sustains the growing nontraditional college student population. This, in turn, informs individuals and institutions who would not otherwise attempt a higher degree by assisting in preparing this new student population.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means these risks are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life. The issues might include stirring up bad

memories and talking through difficult situations. To reduce this risk, I will monitor participants, discontinue the interview if needed, and provide referral information for counseling services.

I am considered a mandatory reporter. During this study, if I receive information about child abuse, neglect, elder abuse, or intent to harm oneself or others, I must report it to the appropriate authorities.

How will personal information be protected?

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.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with identifying numbers (codes).
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other focus group members could share what was discussed with people outside the group.
- Data collected from you may be shared with other researchers. If data collected from you is reused or shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed beforehand.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer, and paper records will be stored in a locked file cabinet. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted, and all hardcopy records will be shredded.

Is study participation voluntary?

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

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please get in touch with the researcher at the email address/phone number in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, 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.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Justin Shannon. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact him at ██████████ or ██████████████████. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. David Vacchi, at ██████████████.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and want to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA, 24515; our phone number is 434-592-5530, and our email address is irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you agree to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy and shred the contract after completing the study. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

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

_____
Printed Subject Name

_____
Signature & Date

Appendix D

Dear Potential Participant,

As a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am researching the "aha" moment. It is an in-depth study of a lived experience during their 4-years of college when a nontraditional student realizes the passion and perseverance to work through the difficulties and finish their degree. As part of the research requirements for a Doctorate in Philosophy, the study aims to understand this phenomenon better. I'm writing to invite you to join my study.

Participants must be junior officers in the United States military and have completed a four-year degree certifying them as Registered Nurses. If willing, participants will be asked to write a letter to their former selves, participate in a one-on-one, in-person interview, and finally, participate in an in-person focus group. It should take approximately three hours to complete all the procedures listed. Participants will be assigned a code number for this study to maintain confidentiality.

To participate, please contact me at ███████████████ for more information.

You will be given a consent document to demonstrate if you meet the study criteria and ask if you would be willing to participate. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate, you must sign and return the consent form to me before you write the letter to your former self and before any interviews or focus groups are scheduled.

Sincerely,

Justin M. Shannon
Doctoral Candidate
██████████████

Appendix E

Prompt

Letter to Former Self

If only we could travel back in time and warn our former selves of the trials, problems, and how to make it through these trials to success. In this letter to the former self, the intent is for you to give advice, but it is advice given to yourself, the younger you: the you that was a student in college, the you that was seeking a better life, an opportunity, but didn't fully understand how to overcome the odds, to see the trial through with the goal maintained in focus. The letter to self needs to be at least 1 page long with no maximum length.

Appendix F

Individual Interview - Questions

1. Please tell me about your college experience. Did you have any problems that caused you to want to quit, and what influenced your decision to finish?

2. Describe the family values you held when you started your education.

3. Considering your family history, why did you decide to pursue a degree in higher education?

4. Describe your goals from when you started college, compare them to your college experience, and then compare your current goals.

5. Considering your faith/belief system, what were your original motives for attending college?

6. What programs did your school offer to help with future goals?

7. Assuming you wanted to be an officer, describe the challenges you foresaw. Did you consider these challenges before you began your educational experience?

8. What school community support did you have as a student? What about community support now that you have entered the active-duty Army?

9. What was challenging for you in transitioning into higher education?

10. What purposeful inner drive or amount of grit did you find useful in your journey?

11. What relationships and support systems with family, peers, and colleagues help push your motives or grit to complete the task?

12. What soft skills did you use in your education, and in what way did grit help you with these skills through the difficulties of college?

13. What else would you like to add to the discussion? What questions or facts have I missed in the interview process?

Appendix G

Focus Group - Questions

1. Please share a troubling college experience with the group that made you want to quit.

2. Talk about the values your family held during your education. Did these values change?

3. Give one reason why you pursued a degree in higher education.

4. Share your main goal from college. Did that goal come true? Why or why not?

5. Did you always want to be an officer? What brought you this decision?

6. Name a beneficial school program that helped with your goal.

7. Talk about the problems you thought would come with commissioning. Did you consider these issues before your college experience?

8. Give an example of any support in college. Contrast that support with your current community.

9. As you understand grit, in what way did it help with college?

10. Did anyone help your success academically? Describe an instance.

11. In your estimation, what helped you most through the difficulties of college?

12. Any final thoughts or questions we missed in this process?