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RESEARCH

Social Integration of Student Veterans: The Influence of Interactions with Faculty on Peer-Group Interactions

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Student veterans are distinct nontraditional students, inasmuch as their transition to campus is twofold. They are not only taking on the role of a student, but also their new lives as civilians. Their relationships with peers can then be strained, as the age, maturity level, and expectations may differ from the traditional-aged college student. Therefore, interactions with faculty members are imperative to help encourage student veterans' peer-group interactions. This quantitative analysis studied peer-group and faculty interactions of 87 veteran undergraduate students in the spring 2020 semester at a regional comprehensive university. Using a linear regression analysis, findings demonstrate that faculty interactions accounted for 23% of the variance in peer-group interactions. Further examination showed there was no statistically significant difference between peer-group and faculty interactions based on gender. Recommendations for practice to support faculty in recognizing the unique needs of student veterans and considerations for further study are offered.

Keywords: student veterans; higher education; faculty; college students; peer-groups

The enrollment of nontraditional students continues to rise as the typical post-high school student population experiences a decline (Hittepole, 2019). The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, n.d.) identifies seven possible characteristics of a nontraditional student which include "older than typical age, part-time attendance, being independent of parents, working full time while enrolled, having dependents, being a single parent, and being a recipient of a GED or high school completion certificate" (para. 23), and ranks students from minimally nontraditional to highly nontraditional, depending on the number of those characteristics present. Additional research adds to this list and includes individuals who have delayed their enrollment by one or more years or is a first-generation student (The Center for Law and Social Policy, 2015). Nontraditional students come to college with challenges like interrole or multi-role conflicts such as balancing employee, caregiver, and student responsibilities; feelings of isolation due to age, maturity level, and experience; inflexible classes and institutional offerings; or enrollment challenges such as part-time status (Hittepole, 2019).

Student veterans are a distinct population within the nontraditional student community. In addition to the typical nontraditional student challenges, student veterans are transitioning out of military life and acclimating to both a civilian and student life, creating new identities throughout the process (Jones, 2013). Griffin and Gilbert (2015) noted student veterans face obstacles when transitioning from military service to higher education, including interacting with higher education personnel who lack general knowledge of veterans' needs. Additionally, these students may experience mental or physical disabilities that hinder their educational aspirations (Osborne, 2014). Therefore, social, cultural, and professional support from faculty, staff, and peers is important to student veteran success (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015).

Tinto (1975) identified that college experiences are made up of academic and social systems, which together construct the fabric of the student experience. While both systems aid in student success, and ultimately degree completion, the social system, comprised of faculty interactions and peer-group interactions, lead to the social integration of a student. The more the student integrates on campus, whether academic or social, the greater the commitment to the institution and likelihood of completion for the student (Tinto, 1975).

Tinto's (1975) early research utilized the Longitudinal Model of Dropout with traditional students; however, the additional challenges of nontraditional students may make peer-group and faculty interactions more difficult. As a result, the stopout and dropout rate of nontraditional students is higher than the traditional student population (Hittepole, 2019). Tinto's Longitudinal Model of Dropout

can be applied to nontraditional students like veterans. His research showed the impact of faculty and peer-group interactions on social integration and the positive influence they have on student persistence and academic success.

The purpose of this study was to identify how much faculty interaction influenced peer-group interactions of student veterans. In addition, the study also sought to identify if the level of faculty and peer-group interactions scores differed based on student veteran gender. Using Tinto's theoretical model of departure as a framework and applying Pascarella and Terenzini's Institutional Integration Scales (1980), the focus of this study examined student veterans' perception of peer-group and faculty interactions. The research questions for this study were:

1. What level of peer-group interaction is reported by student veterans?
2. What level of faculty interaction is reported by student veterans?
3. Is there a difference in level of peer-group and faculty interactions based on gender?
4. How influential is faculty interaction on peer-group interaction?

Literature Review

Nontraditional Students

A nontraditional student is defined as someone who is traditionally 24 years and older in addition to any of the following: is a first-generation student, has dependents, delayed college entry by one or more years, is enrolled part-time, is employed full-time, or does not have a high school diploma (Hittepole, 2019). In addition, Ellis (2019) reviewed the research literature on nontraditional students and identified additional characteristics of this population: they tend to have more work responsibilities and less flexibility, availability, and family support. They are often commuter students, so social or faculty interactions are more limited. Nontraditional students, typically at a different place in their lives than traditional students, bring with them a more mature mindset. As a result, nontraditional students tend to seek deeper, more meaningful answers and discussions from their classes (Ellis, 2019). For this demographic, enrollment is a bridge between theory and practice, where they are applying subject matter to their professional lives (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011). Dwyer (2015) looked at the persistence of a nontraditional population, commuter students, and found a positive correlation between student-faculty interactions and student persistence, and even minimal connection before and after classes was beneficial. Unfortunately, nontraditional students historically have a high rate of attrition due to the complexities of their circumstances (Ellis, 2019). Due to schedules, age differences, and outside responsibilities, nontraditional students experience more difficulties and less opportunities to utilize university services, affecting their community and social integration (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011). Considering the high attrition rate, it is important to identify and provide resources to mitigate stopout or dropout before it happens. This is an especially important consideration for nontraditional students. As a demographic in higher education, they are expected to grow 14% from 2013 to 2024, enrolling an additional two million students (NCES, 2016).

Student Veterans in Higher Education

Student veterans are a distinctive population within the nontraditional student community with particular values and attitudes carried over from their military experience. Veterans in higher education are a "unique population on the college campus" (Olsen et al., 2014, p. 101) who "add to the diversity of campus culture" (Norman et al., 2015, p. 702), yet have different academic and social needs than traditional students. A student veteran is defined as "a person who served in the active military, naval, or air service and who was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable" (Pensions, Bonuses, and Veterans' Relief, 2012, p. 148). Student veterans must balance their identities as both veterans and students, addressing the needs and challenges of both simultaneously. While student veterans find the skills they have acquired in the military are an advantage in the classroom (Jones, 2013; Norman et al., 2015; Olsen et al., 2014; Pellegrino & Hoggan, 2015), they also find it difficult to adjust to an environment that does not include the camaraderie of which they are accustomed (Olsen et al., 2014). As one study mentioned, leaving the military is similar to leaving the priesthood—they are not only "leaving behind a job, but also who they are and what they believe" (Jones, 2013, p. 12). With backgrounds and experiences unlike most of the general student population, the needs of this subgroup are not always met (Olsen et al., 2014).

Student veterans offer higher education professionals an opportunity to learn and interact with a population with different needs than traditional students. It requires faculty and staff to understand and adapt to a population of complex individuals with "multidimensional coconstructed identities" (Vacchi et al., 2017, p. 29). Student veterans have multiple, intersecting identities that may be similar to or distinct from their nontraditional peers. Like most nontraditional students, this demographic is typically older with financial responsibilities (Elliot, 2014), has a family (Olsen et al., 2014), and has higher expectations in and out of the classroom. Veterans may have additional mental or physical health concerns (Elliott, 2014), experience trouble with connections to peers (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Olsen et al., 2014) due to maturity levels of their classmates (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011), suffer feelings of isolation and not fitting in (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015), and have trouble acclimating to a campus setting from a structured military environment (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). Many attribute their success in the classroom to the rigidity and accountability the military held them to (Pellegrino & Hoggan, 2015). Assisting veterans on a college campus can be difficult, however, as many choose to blend in (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011) or not self-identify (Griffin &

Gilbert, 2015), making it problematic for faculty and staff to reach out, and thus help them socially integrate.

Social Integration of Nontraditional Students and Student Veterans

Tinto's (1975) Longitudinal Model of Dropout identifies the parallel paths of academic and social integration that lead to a student's goal and institutional commitment, and ultimately, college completion. Tinto's research found that either a low commitment to the student's goal of completion, or a low commitment to their institution, could lead to drop out. Meaning, a student who may be unsuccessful in socially integrating could fail to perform academically.

The challenges of social integration for nontraditional students include fulfilling multiple roles (Markle, 2015), isolation between themselves and their peers, challenges with faculty (Hittepole, 2019), schedules (Markle, 2015), and culture (Hittepole, 2019). Filling multiple roles means meeting the needs of not only a student, but also a parent, employee, and caretaker. The challenges with interrole status, and lack of institutional commitment when the student-identity is one of many, can lead to considerations of withdrawal (Markle, 2015). Nontraditional students also report feelings of isolation due to age differences between themselves and their peers (Hittepole, 2019). In addition to challenges with peers, nontraditional students may also develop issues with faculty due to faculty's lack of understanding of their role as more than just a student (Markle, 2015). Other challenges that impede social integration are inflexible class times (Markle, 2015), feeling "different" (Barnett, 2014, p. 129), and an institutional culture that favors traditional students (Hittepole, 2019).

Student veterans experience additional challenges that may affect their social integration like faculty perceptions of military personnel, institutional policies, finances, and mental or physical disabilities (Osborne, 2014). One major issue affecting student veteran social integration is the perception of having little in common with their undergraduate peers (DiRamio et al., 2008; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015), and many would prefer to associate with other veterans (Vacchi et al., 2017). Not only do veterans feel isolated from their peers, but also struggle with not being supported by faculty and staff who do not understand military culture (Osborne, 2014). Research noted veterans wanting faculty members to acknowledge their veteran status (DiRamio et al., 2008; Olsen et al., 2014), yet not use them as representatives of the military (Elliott, 2014). At the institutional level, some student veterans may not feel supported due to lack of infrastructure, personnel, or resources to assist them (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015).

Navigating benefits and policies that lead to financial stress are two major barriers for social integration among student veterans (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). Delays in Veterans Affairs (VA) benefits can inhibit students from starting classes and can cause financial stress on top of new general expenses from starting a civilian life (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). Not only can a delay in funding result in students scrambling to find funding until their benefits come in (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015), but for many students, this is the first time they are solely responsible for their own finances (Olsen et al., 2014). In addition, credit transfers can be a source of contention for veterans when transitioning from the field to the classroom. Many veterans identify that receiving course credit from their military experience is a barrier on campus, as course credits are not the same across campuses (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). Additionally, research finds that for those who were given course credit for military experience, many lacked the foundations of the subject which left them unprepared for upper-level courses (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015).

Another major barrier for student veterans is the aftermath of military participation. Both mental and physical conditions may inhibit student veterans from fully integrating both socially and academically. Elliot (2014) found that mental health issues have a profound impact on student veterans successfully integrating into the college environment. In addition, physical disabilities can impede students' ability to participate in class or activities (Elliot, 2014). This study also showed anxiety disorders like PTSD can influence relationships, a sense of belonging (Elliot, 2014), or persistence (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011).

Peer Relationships with Student Veterans

Physical, emotional, or social traumas from deployment may make it difficult for some student veterans to transition to student life and connect with peers. Research shows peer interactions and high levels of social engagement lead to student persistence and a decrease in student dropout (Hu, 2010; Tinto, 1975), because a student's peer group is the most prominent influence on their growth during undergraduate years (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). This is even true for student veterans, despite the challenges they face coming to college. Blackwell-Starnes's (2018) research found that the impact of peer interaction influenced student veterans' sense of belonging, and, based on her study, intentionally increasing peer interaction prevented isolation in student veterans.

However, while finding a peer group may be easy for traditional students, student veterans may have a harder time rebuilding those relationships due to differences in age (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Osborne, 2014), maturity (Heineman, 2017), or experience (Olsen et al., 2014). Despite a lack of commonalities with classmates, veterans utilize peer groups as a "survival" tool to blend in (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011), tapping their peers as guides to help them gain information on navigating their campus (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015). Unfortunately, this act of blending in only serves as a temporary fix and does not enhance social integration. Vacchi et al. (2017) found that veterans felt more comfortable in the presence of other veterans, providing support and encouragement they were used to. Notwithstanding the differences in age, maturity level, and experience, the relationships with peers are crucial to earning a higher education

degree (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011). Relationships with faculty may be especially important for student veterans to strengthen their social integration, as faculty may be of their first and one of their most meaningful connections to the institution.

Faculty Relationships with Student Veterans

The other component of successful social integration lies within faculty interaction (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980). While some student veterans have reported trouble connecting with peers, many have found success building discipline- or subject-based relationships with faculty (Heineman, 2017; Wilson et al., 2013). Resources and services are available to faculty members to help them better serve student veterans. One such resource is Green Zone training, which is an initiative that provides locations recognized by veterans as a safe place to aid in their transition from military to university and civilian life. Faculty and staff members are encouraged to become Green Zone trained, as their location is then identified as a safe space for student veterans (Nichols-Casebolt, 2012). Fortney et al. (2016) found that student veterans may have difficulty accepting help of any form even when they realize they may need it. The results of the Fortney et al. study suggest that more direct intervention may be needed to reach those students who may be resistant to accepting help. Despite studies showing faculty interaction is beneficial for student veteran integration, miscommunications and social customs of military life can create a strain on faculty-student relations. Personal views on military actions from faculty can make student veterans feel silenced and not willing to share their experiences (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). One study found that fewer than half of all schools offer opportunities for faculty to acquire information about the needs of student veterans or learn about promising practices to help them (Cook & Kim, 2009). Hart and Thompson (2013) noted that faculty "who have taught student veterans tend to characterize them as mature, serious students who seek frank, direct guidance" (p. 4).

Gender Differences in Student Veterans

While there is recent research on the subpopulation of women veterans and their transition from combat to campus, little is known regarding the differences between gender on transition to civilian life (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). However, an Association for the Study of Higher Education 2011 survey showed that women veterans did not identify different transitional needs from their men colleagues. In general, men and women show disparity when asking for help, as women have a higher tendency to ask for assistance than men (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). However, military culture demands individualism and teamwork, and asking for help can be seen as a sign of weakness, and this experience may carry over into campus culture, prohibiting women from seeking the assistance they need both in and out of the classroom (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011). Heineman's (2017) study on women veterans in community college found that not only did past gendered military experience keep them from socializing with non-veteran peers (due to lack of military knowledge), but also the reluctance to socialize with men veterans on campus due to the feelings of rejection and alienation while previously deployed. As other research has examined differences based on the gender of veterans, this study also tested to see if levels of peer-group and faculty interaction differed for men and women.

A gap exists in the literature on the transitional differences for men and women veterans, and how their transitions unfold during their college careers. Previous research has looked at the transitional process of both traditional students (Tinto, 1975) and nontraditional students (Ellis, 2019; Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011; Markle, 2015). Additional studies have looked at the complex transition of student veterans (Blackwell-Starnes, 2018; DiRamio et al., 2008; Elliot, 2014; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Jones, 2013; Osborne, 2014; Vacchi et al., 2017; Wilson et al., 2013), while some research looked at women veterans and the transition to civilian and student (DiRamio & Jarvis, 2011; Heineman, 2017; Pellegrino & Hoggan, 2015), but no research has been done to concurrently trace the differences in men and women student veterans' transitions during their college careers.

As Tinto (1975) mentioned, a student's potential for dropout is derived from their long-term academic and social interactions on campus. Like traditional students, for social integration to happen, student veterans need to find support and a sense of belonging from both faculty and peer groups. Additionally, student veterans face challenges of isolation and misunderstanding during their time of transition. Research shows that intentional efforts towards student veterans can result in a sense of belonging and the successful integration of this distinct population of students (Blackwell-Starnes, 2018). This study examines social integration of student veterans. We contribute to the growing body of literature on student veterans in higher education by conducting a regression analysis to elucidate the influence of faculty interactions on peer-group interactions.

Method

This study employed a quantitative framework using Tinto's (1975) Longitudinal Model of Dropout. The instrument for this research includes the peer-group interaction and faculty interaction subscales of Pascarella and Terenzini's (1980) Institutional Integration Scales (IIS) along with demographic questions. The survey took place in the spring of 2020 when the Director of Military and Veteran Services sent the survey to all student veterans at a regional comprehensive university. Data collection occurred in February 2020, prior to the university moving to online instruction because of COVID-19.

Participants

This quantitative study used a purposive sample of current university students with prior active military experience.

For this research, student veterans who participated in this survey are Post 9/11 GI Bill (Chapter 33) benefitted students. The institution where the study was conducted is a multi-campus Carnegie Doctoral R2 university in the Southeast United States. Of the 26,400 students enrolled at the university, there were 786 student veterans using Chapter 33-GI Bill benefits as of Fall 2019. To be included in this study, participants were at least 18 years of age, full-time university students who have completed their first semester of college who also served in any military branch on an active-duty status for at least one year.

Instrument

The instrument for this research is Pascarella and Terenzini's (1980) Institutional Integration Scales (IIS). The scales were designed based on Tinto's (1975) Longitudinal Model of Dropout. This model has been replicated throughout the years with multiple student populations. The IIS is divided into five subscales: Peer-Group Interactions, Interactions with Faculty, Faculty Concern for Student Development and Teaching, Academic and Intellectual Development, and Institutional and Goal Commitments. The two subscales that define social integration are used in this research, Peer-Group Interactions and Interactions with Faculty. Each subscale consists of item stems and a five-point Likert scale was assigned to corresponding items of the subscale (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980). Participants responded to each item using the Likert scale measuring agreement to a statement: *strongly agree* (5), *agree* (4), *neither agree nor disagree* (3), *disagree* (2), and *strongly disagree* (1). Peer-Group Interactions includes seven items; three of these are reverse coded where lower values indicate higher agreement or more positive sentiments. Interactions with Faculty consists of five items with no reverse coding. A score was created for each subscale by summing responses to the items within the subscale with larger values representing higher degree of interaction. Participants also answered demographic questions including age, race, gender, ethnicity, and branch of military.

French and Oakes (2004) found the revised IIS subscale reliability coefficients to be the following: Peer-Group interactions = .84 and Interactions with Faculty = .89. Common guidelines for evaluating Cronbach's Alpha indicate .80 to .89 is considered good, meaning the internal consistency reliability of this instrument is acceptable.

Procedures

Prior to the study, appropriate approvals were obtained. The first was a letter of cooperation from the Director of the Office Military and Veteran Affairs at the university and the second was from the Institutional Review Board. As this was an anonymous survey, participants provided passive consent by survey completion and submission. The survey was housed and administered via Qualtrics. It was distributed to all student veterans at a regional comprehensive university in the Southeastern United States. Student veterans were contacted two times via email: an initial invitation to participate and one reminder a week later. The researcher crafted the email and the Director of Military and Veteran Affairs distributed it to students. In order to maintain anonymity, students did not include any identifying information other than demographic information (i.e., age, race, gender, ethnicity, branch of military, class year).

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, are reported for these scales. In addition, a reliability analysis was performed on each scale and Cronbach's alpha is reported. Next, independent t-tests were used to examine if there were gender differences in peer-group and faculty interactions. Also, a linear regression was used to determine the amount of variance in peer-group interaction explained by faculty interaction. We chose the direction of this relationship because university support of faculty who teach student veterans is a current topic in higher education that warrants empirical investigation.

Results

Sample Demographic Characteristics

This study's population consisted of all student veterans enrolled in undergraduate courses in the spring 2020 semester at a regional comprehensive university. Data were collected via a Qualtrics survey, and responses were received from 102 student veterans. After removing incomplete responses, there was a total of 87 usable records. The mean age of respondents was 28 (SD = 5.5). There were more men (n = 51, 59%) than women (n = 36, 41%) in the sample. More than half of the students (n = 59, 68%) were Army veterans, while the rest (n = 28, 32%) were from the Air Force, Coast Guard, Marine Corps, and Navy (see **Table 1**). One person chose not to identify their military branch of service.

The majority of the participants identified as Caucasian (n = 52, 59.8%). The composition of the rest of the population was 19.5% Black/African American (n = 17), 4.6% Multiracial (n = 4), 5.7% Hispanic/Latinx (n = 5), 2.3% Asian (n = 2), and 1.1% Native American (n = 1). A few respondents (n = 5, 5.7%) preferred not to answer the race/ethnicity item.

Class year was equally distributed. There were 13.8% first year students (n = 12), 25.3% second year students (n = 22), 26.4% third year students (n = 23), 14.9% fourth year students (n = 13), and 19.5% fifth year (or more) students (n = 17).

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Participant Military Branch.

Branch	Frequency	Percent
Army	59	67.8
Marine Corps	13	14.9
Air Force	8	9.2
Navy	4	4.6
Coast Guard	2	2.3

Results of Analysis

Two subscales from Pascarella and Terenzini's (1980) Institutional Integration Scales (IIS) were used to identify the levels of student veteran interaction with their faculty and peer-group interactions. The first subscale measured the level of interaction between student veterans and their peer-groups using seven items from the Peer-Group Interactions subscale. Students responded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly agree* (5) to *strongly disagree* (1). Questions five, six, and seven were reverse coded where lower values indicate higher agreement or more positive sentiments. Responses within each subscale were summed to create a subscale score with a potential score range of 7 to 35. **Table 2** presents the response frequencies and percentages for the peer-group interactions subscale items. Respondents indicated a higher level of agreement with items regarding personal satisfaction with friendships formed and the positive influence of these interactions.

The second subscale measured the level of interaction between student veterans and their faculty using five items from Pascarella and Terenzini's (1980) Institutional Integration Scales (IIS). Students responded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly agree* (5) to *strongly disagree* (1). Responses were summed to create a subscale score with a potential score range of five to 25. **Table 3** presents the response frequencies and percentages for the interactions with faculty subscale items. Respondents indicated a higher level of agreement with items regarding personal

Table 2: Peer-Group Interactions Subscale Items.

Subscale Item	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neither Agree nor Disagree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
The student friendships I have developed at the university have been personally satisfying.	21	24.1	38	43.7	5	5.7	19	21.8	4	4.6
My interpersonal relationships with other students have had a positive influence on my intellectual growth and interest in ideas.	19	21.8	50	57.5	6	6.9	10	11.5	2	2.3
My interpersonal relationships with other students have had a positive influence on my personal growth, attitudes, and values.	14	16.1	44	50.6	16	18.4	11	12.6	2	2.3
Since coming to this university, I have developed close personal relationships with other students.	16	18.4	47	54	13	14.9	9	10.3	2	2.3
It has been difficult for me to meet and make friends with other students.*	9	10.3	20	23	5	5.7	41	47.1	12	13.8
Few of the students I know would be willing to listen to me and help me if I had a personal problem.*	11	12.6	22	25.3	14	16.1	31	35.6	9	10.3
Most students at this university have values and attitudes different from my own.*	1	1.1	16	18.4	24	27.6	35	40.2	11	12.6

* Indicates reverse coded item.
n = 87.

Table 3: Interactions with Faculty Subscale Items.

Subscale Item	Strongly Agree		Agree		Neither Agree nor Disagree		Disagree		Strongly Disagree	
	n	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%	*n*	%
I am satisfied with the opportunities to meet and interact informally with faculty members.	19	21.8	38	43.7	21	24.1	8	9.2	1	1.1
My non-classroom interactions with faculty members have had a positive influence on my intellectual growth and interest in ideas.	21	24.1	37	42.5	23	26.4	5	5.7	1	1.1
My non-classroom interactions with faculty this year have had a positive influence on my personal growth, values, and attitudes.	20	23.0	38	43.7	19	21.8	9	10.3	1	1.1
My non-classroom interactions with faculty this year have had a positive influence on my career goals and aspirations.	14	16.1	24	27.6	13	14.9	26	29.9	10	11.5
Since coming to this university I have developed a close, personal relationship with at least one faculty member.	18	20.7	47	54.0	13	14.9	9	10.3	–	–

n = 87.

satisfaction of faculty interactions and the positive influence of these interactions.

A reliability analysis was performed by calculating Cronbach's alpha for each subscale (see **Table 4**). Cronbach's alpha for the peer-group interactions subscale was 0.75, and the interactions with faculty subscale had a reliability coefficient of 0.86. An acceptable level of the Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is .70 or higher, a level which both subscales exceeded, indicating the measures are reliable for this sample.

Independent-samples t-tests were conducted to compare the differences between men and women student veterans and their interactions with faculty and peer groups (see **Table 5**). The results of the t-tests demonstrate there were no statistically significant gender differences between 51 men ($M = 24.98$, $SD = 5.21$) and 36 women ($M = 24.28$, $SD = 4.29$) regarding peer-group interaction ($t(85) = 0.67$, $p = .51$). Also, there were no statistically significant gender differences between men ($M = 18.73$, $SD = 4.26$) and women ($M = 17.64$, $SD = 3.66$) with faculty interactions ($t(85) = 1.24$, $p = .22$).

A linear regression analysis was calculated to examine the amount of variance in peer-group interactions subscale score that can be accounted for by the interactions with faculty subscale score. The calculated relationship (R) between the variables was .493 ($p < .001$). The regression of peer-group interactions subscale score (Y) on interactions with faculty subscale score (X) resulted in prediction equation Ypred = 13.91X + .590. The coefficient of determination, R^2, of .243 was statistically significant ($F(1,85) = 27.233$, $p < .001$). The adjusted R^2 was .234, indicating that about 23% of the variability in peer-group interactions subscale score was explained by the interactions with faculty subscale score. The standard error of estimate was .113. The statistically significant slope value for interactions with faculty subscale score ($t = 5.219$, $p < .001$) indicates that interactions with faculty is a statistically significant predictor of peer-group interactions.

Discussion

The results of this study are three-fold. First, we measured a level of both peer-group and faculty interactions of student veterans. Next, we tested if there were differences in these scores based on gender. Finally, we analyzed the amount of variance faculty interactions explained regarding peer-group interactions. For peer-group interactions, with a possible maximum score of 35, the mean score was 24.69. This is above the median scale score of 21. For interactions with faculty, with a possible maximum score of 25, the mean score was 18.28. This was also above the median scale score of 15. Both scales indicate moderate levels of peer-group interactions and faculty interactions.

There is a great amount of research that identifies the challenges of veterans connecting to peers due to age, maturity, and life experience (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Olsen et al., 2014; Pellegrino & Hoggan, 2015). After-effects of deployment like physical health concerns (Elliott, 2014), feelings of isolation, and trouble acclimating to a campus (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015) can affect relationships on campus. Serious or unpleasant events during active duty may result in hardened personalities that do not mesh with the attitudes and values of peers (Jones, 2013; Vacchi et al., 2017). Support from faculty may help to mitigate some of the difficulties student veterans face with their undergraduate peers in higher education.

In this sample, faculty interactions accounted for 23% of the variance in peer-group interactions. Vacchi, Hammond, and Diamond (2017) found that current research does not focus enough on faculty influences despite evidence of impact on student veteran persistence. There has been evidence of success building discipline- or subject-based relationships between student veterans and faculty (Wilson et al., 2013), which are crucial to a stronger sense of social integration (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011). This indicates a connection between faculty members and student veterans may have a positive impact on their social integration.

Implications for Practice

Student veterans must navigate their new student and civilian roles as they join the college community. For social integration to happen, student veterans need to find support and a sense of belonging from both faculty and peers. As this research finds, faculty interactions influence peer-group interactions to some degree. Purposeful and intentional actions on the part of faculty could lead to better peer interactions, resulting in decreased student veteran stopout or

Table 4: Scale Means, Standard Deviations, Ranges and Reliabilities.

Variable	*M*	*SD*	Range	Cronbach's α
Peer-Group Interactions subscale (7 items)	24.69	4.83	10–33	0.75
Interactions with Faculty subscale (5 items)	18.28	4.04	8–25	0.86

Table 5: Results of Gender Differences in Social Integration Subscales.

	Men		Women		*df*	*t*	*p*
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*			
Peer-Group Interactions	24.98	5.21	24.28	4.29	85	.67	0.51
Interactions with Faculty	18.73	4.26	17.64	3.67	85	1.24	0.22

dropout. There are many ways this can happen that includes treating veterans the same, yet different. Policies should support student veterans and reflect the best policies of non-student veterans. Programming and resources to support inclusivity and student success should also be available to veterans. Faculty and administrators should recognize transitional issues for veterans as one would for any high- or at-risk student, identifying and referring student veterans to resources on campus, and early and proactive intervention. Other actions to help with the social integration and persistence of student veterans include offering Green Zone trainings, becoming familiar with VA benefits, and becoming part of the student veteran culture on campus.

Trainings for faculty about how to meet the needs of veterans should be offered on a regular basis, but not come from a deficit model or generalize that all veterans have experienced combat. Additionally, these trainings should explore the multidimensionality and complexities of what it means to be a veteran. In addition to specific pedagogical considerations, faculty training on how to engage with student veterans should promote positive attributes of these students. In one study, most faculty reported high achievement among student veterans as well as a high sense of initiative, professionalism, and leadership (Hart & Thompson, 2013). Faculty should be encouraged to attend these sessions to become more informed about challenges student veterans face in their transition. They should disclose to all of their students that they have participated in the training. This sends a message of care, welcome, and willingness to understand student veterans.

Universities should consider creating faculty facilitated veteran specific learning communities like Veterans in STEM or a first-year experience course. The first-year course specifically for veterans immediately provides them a group of peers with similar experiences. The opportunity to participate in a course dedicated to their success assists with the transition to campus life. Even if students are entering as sophomores and above, this course could benefit all veterans new to campus. Academic interest groups, like Veterans in STEM, can be an effective way of fostering both faculty and peer group interactions. Faculty advisors to academic interest groups for student veterans may be influential in integrating them within the campus and beyond. Additionally, faculty can support student veteran groups by attending a meeting or event coordinated by the group. Simply showing up to an event shows care for the students.

There are effective practices to assist in student veteran success at colleges and universities. This research focuses on the influence of faculty interaction on peer group interaction. These recommendations for practice are only a few ideas in how to support faculty in working with student veterans. Each college and university should tailor policies and services to meet students' needs. Individual faculty should be supported to deliver instruction and interact with students in ways that promote active and engaged learning with content and with peers.

Limitations

One limitation of this study was the non-random sample of participants, as all students contacted for this study were identified as student veterans at one university in the Southeastern United States. The results might differ for student veterans at private or two-year institutions. Another limitation is the small sample size of 87 participants. Thus, the results are not generalizable to all student veteran populations. While these findings did not find significant statistical differences between men and women on peer-group interactions and faculty interactions, the percentage of respondents favored men (59%). A delimitation of this research is that it does not compare student veterans with other students. This is a within group analysis of student veterans, not a comparison of this group and traditional undergraduates.

Future Research

Seeking to identify if there were gender differences in the subscales scores of peer-group and faculty interactions led to the need for further research on gender differences during the transition process for student veterans. As many of the women-focused studies showed, the gendered military experience had a lasting impact on their civilian life and the way they engage on campus both socially and academically. In addition, more identifying demographic information, such as full- or part-time status, commuter or resident status, and grade point average, may help to identify additional ways to increase relationships with student veterans and faculty to lead to better peer-group interactions. It stands to reason that interaction with faculty and peers may be influenced by personality traits like self-esteem or assertiveness. Future research could control for these variables to better ascertain the influence of interactions with faculty on peer-group interactions.

The results of the reliability analysis for the peer-group interaction scale indicated that the Cronbach's alpha would increase if the last item were deleted from the scale. The item "Most students at this university have values and attitudes different from my own" would have increased the alpha from 0.75 to 0.84. This also influenced the variance in the regression. A more reliable peer-group interaction scale would have accounted for more variance in faculty interaction. Future research may consider the psychometric properties of these scales and how they could be enhanced.

Since student veterans have different needs than other students, future research could compare peer-group and faculty interaction scores of student veterans to other nontraditional student populations to inform policy and practice for this growing population. Future research might also compare student veterans to traditional undergraduates. Understanding how student veterans differ from their peers will help to provide services to meet their unique needs. Research on teaching and learning with student veterans should be supported to more closely examine ways academic affairs can help them succeed. Also, future research should consider the intersectionality of veterans' identities and recognize the multidimensional nature of identity characteristics.

Conclusion

In addition to the typical challenges nontraditional students face such as families, work, and other responsibilities, student veterans transitioning out of military culture face additional barriers including feelings of isolation, transitioning to civilian life, and navigating the bureaucracy of Veterans Affairs. Tinto's (1975) Longitudinal Model of Dropout identifies two major sources of student persistence: peer-group and faculty interactions. As this research demonstrated, faculty interactions with student veterans accounted for 23% of the variance in peer-group interactions. Identifying ways to boost faculty interactions with student veterans both in and out of the classroom, on academic and non-academic subjects, is encouraged to promote student veteran engagement and to support academic persistence.

Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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