



6-28-2020

Exploring The Use Of Appreciative Inquiry With Women Veterans In Coaching Settings At The Women Veteran Command Center

Arona Smith-Benson
University of Pennsylvania

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.upenn.edu/od_theses_msod

Smith-Benson, Aronda, "Exploring The Use Of Appreciative Inquiry With Women Veterans In Coaching Settings At The Women Veteran Command Center" (2020). *Master of Science in Organizational Dynamics Theses*. 127.

https://repository.upenn.edu/od_theses_msod/127

Submitted to the Program of Organizational Dynamics, College of Liberal and Professional Studies in the School of Arts and Sciences in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in Organizational Dynamics at the University of Pennsylvania
Advisor: Amrita V. Subramanian, MSOD

This paper is posted at ScholarlyCommons. https://repository.upenn.edu/od_theses_msod/127
For more information, please contact repository@pobox.upenn.edu.

Exploring The Use Of Appreciative Inquiry With Women Veterans In Coaching Settings At The Women Veteran Command Center

Abstract

The study offers a nascent insight around appreciative inquiry (AI) for women veterans. Scarcely researched, the uniqueness of this retrospective study is due to the rare juxtaposition of two domains of women-centered studies with focus on posttraumatic growth in women veterans at Women Veteran Command Center (WVCC). The purpose is to examine AI, as an enduringly effective coaching technique, with its constructive impact on women veterans. The researcher examines eight distinct themes and makes a strong argument for greater use of AI with women veterans to help them create a more fulfilling, meaningful, and rich life and continue the trend of positive growth, personally and professionally, in coaching and therapy. The study advocates for future research in the field of AI and deeper scrutiny into the initial assumption of positive correlation between posttraumatic growth in women veterans and using AI as a coaching technique.

Keywords

Appreciative Inquiry (AI), women, veterans, coaching, personal growth

Comments

Submitted to the Program of Organizational Dynamics, College of Liberal and Professional Studies in the School of Arts and Sciences in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Science in Organizational Dynamics at the University of Pennsylvania

Advisor: Amrita V. Subramanian, MSOD

EXPLORING THE USE OF APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY WITH WOMEN VETERANS
IN COACHING SETTINGS AT THE WOMEN VETERAN COMMAND CENTER

by

Arona Smith-Benson

Submitted to the Program of Organizational Dynamics,
College of Liberal and Professional Studies
in the School of Arts and Sciences
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Science in Organizational Dynamics at the
University of Pennsylvania

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

2020

EXPLORING THE USE OF APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY WITH WOMEN VETERANS
IN COACHING SETTINGS AT THE WOMEN VETERAN COMMAND CENTER

Approved by:

Amrita V. Subramanian, MSOD, Advisor

Linda Pennington, Ph.D., Reader

ABSTRACT

The study offers a nascent insight around appreciative inquiry (AI) for women veterans. Scarcely researched, the uniqueness of this retrospective study is due to the rare juxtaposition of two domains of women-centered studies with focus on posttraumatic growth in women veterans at Women Veteran Command Center (WVCC). The purpose is to examine AI, as an enduringly effective coaching technique, with its constructive impact on women veterans. The researcher examines eight distinct themes and makes a strong argument for greater use of AI with women veterans to help them create a more fulfilling, meaningful, and rich life and continue the trend of positive growth, personally and professionally, in coaching and therapy. The study advocates for future research in the field of AI and deeper scrutiny into the initial assumption of positive correlation between posttraumatic growth in women veterans and using AI as a coaching technique.

Keywords: Appreciative Inquiry (AI), women, veterans, coaching, personal growth

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This capstone would not have been possible without the support of many people. I would like to thank my advisor, Amrita V. Subramanian of the School of Arts & Sciences Organizational Dynamics program at The University of Pennsylvania, for her encouragement and patience. I would also like to thank my reader, Linda Pennington of the School of Arts & Sciences Organizational Dynamics program at The University of Pennsylvania, for her availability on a whim. Thank you for stepping up!

I must also express my very profound gratitude to my wife, Paula Smith-Benson, for providing me with unfailing support and continuous encouragement throughout my years of study and through the process of researching and writing this thesis. This accomplishment would not have been possible without her. I would also like to thank my mother, Rosalie Smith and my brother Carl P. Smith. They made me believe that I could conquer the world, and I am. Mostly importantly, I would like to thank the women veterans that participated in the study. Without their passionate participation and input, the capstone could not have been successfully completed.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iv
CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION	1
A Troubling Context.....	1
A Shift in Frame.....	1
The Making of the Author and Researcher.....	4
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW	6
Problems-Based Literature on Women Veterans.....	7
Mental Health Problems Described in Women Veteran Literature.....	7
Problem of Misogyny in Military Culture.....	10
Economics Problems Described in Women Veteran Literature.....	13
Unemployment and Women Veterans.....	13
Homelessness and Women Veterans.....	14
Conclusion of Problem-Based Literature.....	16
Strength-Based Literature on Women Veterans.....	16
Conclusion of Strength-Based Literature.....	20
CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS	22
Methodology of the Study.....	22
Defining the Five Core Principles of AI.....	25
Limitations of Research Method.....	26
Conclusion of Research Methods.....	27
CHAPTER 4: RESULTS	29
AI-Related Themes.....	29
AI Theme: More Strength-Based Self-Talk.....	30
AI Theme: Feeling Cheered On.....	31
AI Theme: Positive Perception from Others.....	33
AI Theme: Recognition of Accomplishments.....	34
AI Theme: Introspection.....	34
AI Theme: Open-Ended Questions to Create a Space.....	36
for Self-Reflection	
AI Theme: Embracing a More Optimistic Lens after Coaching.....	37
AI Theme: Co-Creating Change through Empathy and.....	38
Inquiry, Not Advising	
Discussion.....	38
Conclusion.....	42

CHAPTER 5: FINAL THOUGHTS.....	44
REFERENCES.....	47
APPENDIX A.....	53
APPENDIX B.....	54

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

A troubling context

Currently, the Veterans Administration (VA) is the largest provider of medical care, behavioral health services, veteran benefits, and a plethora of resources for women veterans. However, the primary approach used at the VA is a problem-based approach. This approach is used to assess the two million women veterans currently living in the United States and Puerto Rico (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2019). The researcher and the author of this study is an Army veteran with several behavioral health diagnoses, such as combat-related posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, and depression. Realizing that focusing on challenges created a cycle of hopelessness, she decided to shift her mindset to focus on the strengths she possessed. When she took courses for her Master of Science in Organization Dynamics program, she realized she was practicing appreciative inquiry (AI). From this revelation, the researcher began to practice the AI approach at her non-profit organization, the Women Veteran Command Center (WVCC).

A shift in frame

Founded in August 2017, this Philadelphia-based non-profit serves approximately 130 women veterans per quarter providing them with strength-based coaching through the application of AI. The WVCC uses the appreciative coaching approach: a practice-based discipline that uses AI techniques to help women veterans achieve personal and professional goals by allowing them to identify and use their strengths. This contrasts with the problem-based approach used by many other veteran organizations. To the

researcher, the distinguishing factor between AI and problem-based approaches is AI *prioritizes strengths*, whereas problem-based approaches *prioritize weaknesses*.

Multiple terminologies exist to describe the problem-based approach:

- These include deficit approach, competency, and weakness-based approach. Deficit approaches “conceptualiz[e] the target individual or group primarily (or even solely) in terms of their perceived deficiencies, dysfunctions, problems, needs, and limitations” (Dunishak, 2016).
- A deficit approach would begin with a problem query (*What problems have you been experiencing?*), but AI begins with an asset-based question (*What is working right now?*), focusing instead on what the individual does well (Newhard, 2010; Watkins & Cooperrider, 2000).
- Similarly, competency “is denoted as an underlying characteristic of an individual that is causally related to.... superior performance in a job or situation” (Spencer & Spencer, 1993, p. 9).

By this reasoning, if one is not capable of reaching a goal, he or she lacks the capability to perform with the competency or do not have enough competency to achieve the goal (Rothwell et al., 2007). In addition, the weakness-based approach is defined as a linear method of identifying problems with individual in an effort to find a solution. These are all descriptions of the problem-based approach, which the WVCC does not implement into coaching practice.

Dissimilar to the problem-based approach to change management, which focuses mainly on weaknesses, AI focuses mainly on strengths. AI was first conceptualized by

Ph.D. student David Cooperrider and his advisor Suresh Srivastva (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987; Newhard, 2010). Scholars have described it in many ways:

- “[A] research perspective that is uniquely intended for discovering, understanding, and fostering innovations in social organizational arrangements and processes” (Cooperrider & Srivastva, 1987, p. 159).
- An approach “based on a variety of root philosophies, from social constructionism to the power of visualization,... [which] is an amalgam of many positive-oriented and strengths-based subjects” (Newhard, 2010, p. 10).
- A philosophy “based on the belief that human systems are made and imagined by those who live and work within them,... [which] leads systems to move toward the generative and creative images that reside in their most positive core—their values, visions, achievements, and best practices” (Watkins & Mohr, 2001, p. xxxi).

As there are many definitions, for the sake of consistency, AI will be defined and used in the same manner throughout this paper. The context of the definition will be one-on-one coaching with women veterans and the manner it is conducted at the WVCC. The definition the researcher believes most accurately describes this is the following: It is a process in which a AI facilitator, the WVCC coach, and the client, the woman veteran,

“choose the positive as the focus of inquiry, inquire into stories of life-giving forces, locate the themes that appear in the stories and select topics for further inquiry, create shared images for a preferred future, and find innovative ways to create that future” (Watkins & Mohr, 2001, p. 39).

In this retrospective study, the use of AI as a coaching approach at the WVCC is investigated through interviews with WVCC participants. By studying her organization, the researcher seeks the answer to the following two research questions: *What benefits does AI offer that the traditional, problem-based approach does not?* and *How effective is AI as a tool in coaching women veterans?* The following chapter will review the literature on women veterans as it pertains to the research questions.

The making of the author and researcher

As a result of my military service, I endured several challenges after separating from the Army such as maintaining stable employment, poor relationships with loved ones, combat-related trauma, and military sexual trauma. Subsequently, I made the decision to engage in psychotherapy, in which the therapist used a problem-based approach. However, adopting a strength-based mindset transformed my life by honoring my innate abilities. Sharing AI as an approach for women veteran is integral to provide another option to address challenges. Today, I stand proud as an honorably discharged United States Army combat medic. Later, I earned a bachelor's degree in business administration and am now completing my master's capstone in organizational dynamics at The University of Pennsylvania. Here are a few career highlights:

- First female and the youngest appointed (2013-2018) member of the City Council Veterans Advisory Commission of Philadelphia since its inception in 1957,
- Recipient of awards such as the Veteran of Influence Award from the Philadelphia Business Journal, Veteran Advocacy Award from the Point Breeze Association, and Community Gem Award from the Spectrum Health Services,

- And, finally, I had the distinguished honor to moderate a panel at the Women Veterans Employment Symposium in Washington, D.C., sponsored by Redbook Magazine and former First Lady Michelle Obama.

Ultimately, this experience has been made possible through the use of AI as an important modality for my personal story with post-traumatic growth. My hope is that this capstone can inspire other women veterans to embrace a strength-based approach despite their challenges.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Scholarly literature on the use of AI with women veterans is nonexistent. The existing literature in the three last decades primarily uses a problem-based approach. As mentioned before, a rather problem-focused frame of diagnosis persists. These publications describe weaknesses experienced by some women veterans and propose ways to “fix” these weaknesses. However, very few publications discuss what positive attributes women veterans possess and how they can use these strengths in their personal and professional lives.

In viewing this literature, the researcher sought to answer the following research questions:

- *What benefits does AI offer that the traditional, problem-based approach does not? and*
- *How effective is AI as a tool in coaching women veterans?*

This literature review will discuss the problems of women veterans in scholarship and share my position on the status of the current literature on women veterans. The following section details the problem-based studies and strength-based studies on women veterans.

Problem-based literature on women veterans

Most of the scholarly literature discusses a multitude of problems that negatively affect women veterans. Women veterans, as a study group, pose a unique clinical challenge as they frequently have multimorbidity from cumulative trauma exposure (Hamilton et al., 2019; Iverson et al., 2013). She may be faced with a) comorbid mental health conditions, b) misogyny in military culture, and c) economic hardship

simultaneously. To study these problems, researchers have adopted a holistic, problem-based approach from many backgrounds, such as psychology, gender studies, feminism, and economics. The problem-based approach seeks to define, identify, and treat problems faced by women veterans. The following sections detail mental health conditions, gender discrimination, and economic insecurity that affect some women veterans in the United States. Ultimately, it details the essence and discoveries of the problem-based approach and will help answer the first research question: *What benefits does AI offer that the traditional, problem-based approach does not?*

Mental health problems described in women veteran literature.

Scholarly literature suggests that women veterans at large experience both acute and prolonged mental health conditions during and following military service. Of many common mental health conditions, such as bipolar disorder, traumatic brain injury, generalized anxiety disorder, and depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is the most commonly cited and researched mental health diagnosis among women before the military as well as following discharge from the military (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; Mattocks et al., 2012). Past PTSD research has mainly focused on male combat veterans experiences in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) (Mattocks et al., 2012, p. 537). The prevalence of PTSD among women veterans is considered moderate (between 11% and 18%) (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009, p. 36). However, it is likely under-diagnosed or diagnosed as anxiety or depression (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009, p. 37), and it is important to note that although some women veterans may not have PTSD, they might experience symptoms of PTSD as they have seen their

peers severely injured, witnessed death, and experience grief (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009, pp. 36-37).

Even before entering the military, she may have experienced trauma. With trauma, PTSD symptoms may be present. Causes include trauma of the physical, emotional, sexual, and psychological form as well as negligence and threat of safety (Janoff-Bulman, 2010). Contrary to popular belief, women may join military service to escape trauma rather than just for pure patriotism in pursuit of a stable lifestyle away from abusive parents, poverty, drug abuse, or homelessness. However, these problems may return after the military when the structure disappears. It is also important to note that women veterans have observed a significant amount of violence during combat service. The most prevalent observation has been among medics, nurses, doctors and military police (Mattocks et al., 2012, p. 540). The symptomology examined in women veterans with PTSD include recurrent and intrusive dreams and recollections of the traumatic event, intense psychological distress at exposure to internal or external cues that symbolize or resemble the event, avoidance of anything associated with trauma, feeling of detachment from others, depression, difficulty falling asleep, irritability, anger, anxiety, and hypervigilance (Center for Substance Abuse Treatment, 2019).

The current body of research indicates many potential causes of PTSD. These include military sexual trauma, witnessing the carnage of war, caring for casualties, losing comrades, and navigating a male-dominated culture (Amir, Kaplan, Efroni, et al., 1997; Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; Kelly et al., 2011). She may attempt to cope with her PTSD by isolating herself, consuming alcohol excessively, and substance abuse. However, no other factor is linked more to PTSD than military sexual trauma among

women veterans (Yaeger, Himmelfarb, Cammack, & Mintz, 2006, p. S65). It is estimated that up to 60% of women who have experienced military sexual trauma have PTSD (Yaegar et al., 2006, p. S68). Military sexual trauma (MST) is a term used by the Department of Veterans Affairs to refer to sexual assault, attempted sexual assault, sexual coercion, or sexual harassment that occurred while a veteran was in the military (Mattocks et al., 2012, p. 544). Sexual assaults often occur in barracks, offices of superiors, restrooms, or any place in which a woman is alone, whereas harassment can happen anywhere. Women are especially susceptible in the military because they are in close quarters with men. Harassment may manifest itself from men discussing sexual acts around women, men touching a female comrade on the butt, and men calling a female by pet names and doing cat calls. Studies have reported upwards to 78% (Vogt, 2017, p. 341) of women veterans experience sexual harassment and upwards of 30% (Yaegar et al., 2006, p. S65) have experienced sexual assault. When a woman is assaulted or harassed by a superior or brother in arms in the military, she experiences moral injury, a violation of trust from someone who she should be able to trust (Drescher & Foy, 2008). When moral injury occurs, comrades become the enemy. Following a breach of trust, comrades are not seen as brothers in arms but as sexual harassers. However, when a woman submits a report of sexual misconduct to her superior, the perpetrator gets warned and will tell other comrades. It is important to note that underlying beliefs in this male dominated culture are “It should be expected” and “Men will be men.” This results many times in ostracization of the women, because the men will stick together and hold a grudge or make remarks against the women. Therefore, reporting a sexual assault can add additional suffering; so many women choose not to report it (Vogt, 2017).

After experiencing sexual trauma and the absolute vulnerability that comes after such violation of a human being, symptoms of PTSD, such as anxiety, depression, and anger, were all common reactions during readjustment to civilian life. Among those who reported military-related sexual assault, instances of depression were three times higher and incidents of alcohol abuse two times higher than among those who did not experience assault (Hankin et al., 1999).

Military sexual trauma for women veterans ends in many consequences such as morale inquiry (distrust for men and distrust for superiors), mental health ailments (depression, anxiety, PTSD), and negative coping habits (isolation, substance abuse, alcoholism, and hiding her military service). Further ahead, we explore how this is a predictor of future homelessness and insolvency of our women veterans. In addition, it may lead to her not going to veteran organizations where she may experience sexual harassment from male veterans. For instance, women veteran have shared that while walking into the lobby of the VA hospital, they have experienced sexual harassment (especially cat calling) from male veterans hanging out near the lobby area. What transpires at the VA medical center is not only a form of military sexual trauma but also a representation of the misogynistic culture in the military.

Problem of misogyny in military culture.

In addition to mental health problems, research indicates that women veterans experience gender-related problems associated with the misogynistic military culture. Although misogyny is a large problem for general civilian society, the military, in itself, has embraced hypermasculinity and made less progress than general civilian society towards ending aspects of masculinity that are harmful towards women. Gender study

scholars who have studied women in the military note that the “military is a gendered institution (Acker, 1990), whereby training is structured to develop masculine warriors (Tick, 2005), and females are left to determine what strategies to use to be accepted (Herbert, 2000) by their male comrades” (Demers, 2013, p. 505). From the time a person begins basic training, the process of “depersonalization and deindividuation [starts,] in which the military, in the form of drill sergeants, must strip the individual of all previous self-definition... [and redefine and manage femaleness]” (Herbert, 2000, p. 9)

Throughout the typical day, women are repeatedly exposed to misogynistic, sexist, and homophobic slurs from drill instructors during call-and-response rhymes that are chanted or sung in unison during marches and runs. As a result, women recruits feel pressure to act either more feminine, more masculine, or both (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009, p. 39). She constantly monitors her expression of stereotypical feminine characteristics (emotional, weak, shy, and submissive) and masculine characteristics (rugged, strong, confident, and dominant). She may tend to overly display her femininity (e.g., wearing makeup) or may suppress it by engaging in typical male behavior (e.g., swearing and drinking alcohol) (Herbert, 2000). If she chooses to be too feminine, she risks being viewed as weak, but if she is too masculine (e.g. acting overconfident and denying help from others in lifting heavy objects), she may be seen as competition or called a dyke from male comrades and risk harassment (Herbert, 2000). The problem of misogyny for women in the military does not end the day of discharge, as they may experience it as members of the American Legion and Veteran of Foreign Wars (VFW) which are male-dominated. This problem also persists in civilian culture.

Although civilian culture has progressed more in terms of gender norms than the military, the problem of misogyny continues to exist in civilian culture. As Mattocks et al. note,

“Women’s wartime experiences and the challenges they face when trying to reintegrate into their work, family, and social lives post-deployment have been overshadowed by the experiences of male... veterans facing similar challenges” (Mattocks et al., 2012, p. 537).

What is unique for women is that American culture at large does not recognize women as combatants (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009, p. 37) and, as a result, many women do not self-identify as a veteran (Herbert, 2000). The reason this civilian perception persists is that in movies, advertisements, and other media, the depiction of the veteran is predominantly a Caucasian male serving in wartime. The consumer of the media may be misled to believe the stereotype that only men serve in combat (Hamrick & Rumann, 2012). As a result of this stereotype, women veterans' voices are minimized and met with skepticism or disbelief during discussions with civilians and other male veterans about the traumatic nature of their deployment (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; Hamrick & Rumann 2012), although she may have deployed and served as a medic, which included her “treating casualties, experiencing the effects of [incendiary explosive devices (IEDs)], taking on live fire,... and occasionally becoming casualties” (U.S. Department of Defense, 2007, p. 58). The lack of empathy expressed by civilians and male veterans towards women post-military has led to many women internalizing this rhetoric and not self-identifying as veterans. In addition to misogyny, women veteran are also susceptible to economic problems. Research on these topics are covered in the following sections.

Economics problems described in women veteran literature.

Economic problems also afflict women veteran in the form of unemployment and underemployment. Although not all women veterans may face these problems, the problem is large enough to be a topic of concern. Some women even join the military as an economic decision for reliable income. For instance, a young, 18- to 25-year-old woman will not need to worry about the cost of housing, health insurance, and food when joining the military, so it is often an attractive route to individuals who may just work menial jobs where all of these benefits are not affordable. The following section will explore research on unemployment and its long-term consequence, homelessness, in the veteran population.

Unemployment and women veterans.

Research indicates that some women veterans struggle with unemployment after leaving the service. In 2015, the unemployment rate for women veterans was estimated to be 6.4%, which was higher than the unemployment rate (5.7%) for their male counterparts (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). Similarly, the unemployment rate for women veterans is higher than the unemployment rate for women non-veterans (5.0%) (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2016). In addition, Hamilton, Williams, and Washington (2015) note that “[u]nemployed women veterans were more likely than employed women veterans to be... living below the poverty line and to live in a household that had an annual income <\$20,000 per year” (p. S34). Factors that affect the woman veteran’s employability and ability to work are her mental health, age, prior profession and education, military vocation, geographic location, and socioeconomic status. Additional veteran-specific factors associated with unemployment are service during wartime and

being in the regular military, and these individuals were seven times more likely to be unemployed than those veterans who do not meet these criteria (Hamilton et al., 2015, p. S36). Women veterans, in particular, may have gained skills in their military careers that are non-transferable to the civilian job market. Many women veterans report this as a major stressor when seeking employment. This stressor may worsen existing mental health conditions. If she has mental health conditions, such as depression or PTSD, her work performance may be impacted, creating employment instability (Hamilton et al., 2015, p. S36). Once in a position at a civilian company, statistically, she may turnover quickly, as a study from Syracuse University found that “nearly half of all veterans leave their first post-military position within a year, and between 60% and 80% of veterans leave their first civilian jobs before their second work anniversary” (Syracuse University's Institute for Veterans and Military Families, 2014). Reasons for high levels of post-military financial insecurity among women include that “women experience longer wait times than men for [Veterans Administration Compensation and Pension (VACP)] claim decisions, have higher refusal rates for veterans appeal decisions, are more likely to be single or a single parent, and have a 30% lower earning potential in the civilian community upon leaving the military” (Taylor, 2019, para. 8). When a woman veteran is unemployed for longer than sustainable, she may face homelessness.

Homelessness and women veterans.

Women veterans are the fastest growing among the homeless veteran population. In 2016, the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) “identified 4338 women veterans who were experiencing homelessness, comprising 9.1% of the entire veteran homeless population. Further, it is estimated that 1-2% of all women

veterans and 13-15% of women veterans living in poverty experience homelessness over the course of a year” (National Center on Homelessness among Veterans, 2016, p. 5).

Literature on homelessness has looked to identify problems that veteran women face that contribute to homelessness. These factors include finding suitable employment, affordable housing for themselves and family, and daycare costs for their children. These factors are made worse by mental health challenges, alcoholism, substance abuse, military sexual trauma, ruined relationships, gender discrimination, interpersonal violence, and pregnancy (VA National Center on Homelessness among Veterans, 2016).

In performing research of homelessness in female veterans, researchers defined homelessness to include one or many of the following factors: “1) "unsheltered" or outside sleeping locations, 2) homeless or family violence "emergency shelters," 3) "provisionally" or precarious transient housing such as couch surfing and/or 4) being "at risk" for home eviction but not everyone uses this definition” (Taylor, 2019, para. 1.).

Once individuals are identified, they are asked about their housing stability and if they are a veteran. Homelessness in women veterans has been associated with a history of military sexual trauma, interpersonal violence, drug or alcohol addictions and childhood homelessness or abuse (National Center on Homelessness among Veterans, 2016; Taylor, 2019). Unlike men who tend to be found unsheltered on the street or in homeless shelters, women are likely to be in domestic violence shelters or provisional housing, because they often have children with them. Children are not allowed in most homeless shelters, and the mother might fear forceful removal of her children by government agencies if she entered a shelter system (Taylor, 2019). These unique challenges for women veterans

create a barrier to housing and a catalyst for homelessness. As research also indicates, the unique challenges can contribute to interpersonal problems.

Conclusion of problem-based literature

This section details literature on the problems experienced by women veterans. Many of these problems the researcher is familiar with in her own life, as discussed in Chapter 1. The researcher also notes that these problems are prevalent in some women veterans who visit the WVCC. However, the researcher has encouraged women veterans to instead focus on their strengths and innate abilities. From this literature review, the problems of the traditional approach were identified. This helps answer the research first question (*What benefits does AI offer that the traditional, problem-based approach does not?*) by identifying the findings of the researchers who embrace a problem-based approach. By identifying the problem-based findings, the findings of the strength-based inquiry and the outcome of this study can have a theoretical contrast. Some of these strengths are noted in the following section.

Strength-based literature on women veterans

As mentioned before, strength-based literature on women veterans is scarce. As highlighted in the problem-based literature section, most literature focuses on “fixing” or treating problems women veterans face such as PTSD, MST, unemployment, and homelessness. As the founder of the WVCC, the researcher was disappointed reading the literature that paints a picture mainly of the challenges faced by women veterans. In scholarly literature and in general, there has been little appreciation of the strengths of all veterans, especially women veterans. Their academic rigor, success stories, and accounts of achievements in the business world have mostly gone unstudied. From her experience

at WVCC, the researcher witnessed women veterans who have many strengths, and some of them even come to the WVCC to mentor, give donations, or solely for camaraderie. They do not always need help and do not fit the stereotypes associated with the challenges of women veterans. Throughout military service, women have developed their self-discipline, determination, leadership abilities, and a proven career track. For example, a mechanic in the military may have a complex understanding of different types of vehicles (tanks, airplanes, and amphibious vessels), which can carry over to becoming a civilian mechanic. Military leaders have management skills that can make them suitable candidates for leadership roles in corporations in the private sector. A military medic has training to work in a hospital or as an emergency medical technician. These are some examples of positives, but the literature has not reflected this side of the story adequately. My hope as a researcher and author is to heighten awareness for the readers and advocate to the future researchers for galvanized effort on this much-needed theme of study as a societal imbalance and bring more measure into the extant perspective.

After searching the body of literature, only a couple of studies highlighted some strengths of women veterans. As for formal literature, the main source of strength-based statistics of women veterans is the VA's *Profile of Veterans: 2017*. It stands out as the publication that paints a positive picture of women veterans (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2019). The *Profile of Veterans: 2017* is an ongoing, annual report composed of social and economic statistics for veterans (NCVAS, 2019). Gathered from the 2017 American Community Survey (ACS) Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS), the profile's statistics are calculated using a "weighted sample... to generate estimates and standard errors that represent the population" (U. S. Census

Bureau, 2020, p. 2). There were five primary strengths that correlate with women veterans more than non-women veterans, respectively:

1. Women veterans “were more likely to have some college [(42.4% versus 31.3%)], bachelor’s degree [(21.3% versus 18.9%)] and an advanced degree [(15.4% versus 10.9%)] than male veterans and female non-veterans” (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2019, p. 9).
2. More women veterans “are working in management positions [(50.5% versus 42.7%)] and local, state, and federal government [(33.8% versus 13.9%)] jobs than non-veterans women” (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2019, p. 10).
3. Women veterans “were more likely to live above 400% of poverty level [(46.5% versus 39.4%)] compared to non-Veterans, and fewer women veterans lived at or below poverty level [(6.5%)] than non-Veterans [(8.6%)] (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2019, p. 13).
4. In 2017, women veterans “who work full-time and year-round had higher median personal income per year [(\$31810)] than non-veteran women [(\$19193)]” (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2019, p. 18).
5. For both men and women veterans, they “were less likely to have no health insurance [(3.8% versus 8.6%)], less likely to be in poverty than non-Veterans [(9.4% versus 13.7%)], and less likely to receive food stamps than their non-Veteran counterparts [(11.3% versus 15.7%)]” (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2019, p. 22).

These five primary strengths suggest being a veteran and a woman increase the probability of having successful outcomes. These are also statistics that the researcher and her team embrace at the WVCC. In addition, the researcher and her team also embrace the strengths of women veterans detailed in informal publications.

Informal sources comprise most of the publications on the strengths of women veterans. These sources include veteran organization webpages, blogs, and magazines. As Baechtold and De Sawal (2009) note,

“The majority of literature related to understanding a woman’s experience in the military comes from the popular press and military reports. Most of these sources of information focus more on providing personal stories than on presenting empirical research findings” (p. 42).

Some of these informal publications highlight strengths of women veterans that can benefit multiple industries. According to a Military.com article, these strengths include teamwork, leadership, critical thinking, problem solving, endurance, strength, resiliency, and cross-functional and transparent communication (Citraoën, 2020). These military skills and values can lead to meeting organizational goals by exercising efficiency, improving operation, and coordinating tasks can all be used in these civilian career roles. In addition the core values of the Army—loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage (The Army Values, 2017)—parallel much of the mission statements and desired employee attributes of many Fortune 500 companies—integrity, teamwork, innovation, customer service, and respect (Schwantes, 2019).

Depending on their specific military job, a woman veteran will be able to bring a different set of technical skills to a civilian job. Military training that emphasized technological skills directly translates to jobs in the information technology field, military medical experience jobs to healthcare, and a background in mathematics and finance, along with personal knowledge of military life, can make a veteran particularly well-suited for jobs that involve helping military families protect their investments and savings (Mckay, 2019). Other publications suggest jobs that, with additional civilian training, women veterans are more likely to achieve success. A Forbes article says the skills of women veterans can help to advance the military veteran to high-paying positions, such as sales manager, operations manager, store manager, nurse practitioner, and software developer (Strauss, 2017). Another article suggests a military to paramilitary position, such as a security guard or police officer, can be a good fit for women veterans (Ramos, 2013). A third article, contrary to the stereotype that women are not good drivers, showed that truckers who are women veterans drive more miles, stay in the job longer, and get in fewer accidents than male counterparts (Strick, 2017, para. 3). Together, these articles, although not from a peer-reviewed journal, suggest that women veterans are more than problems, they can be successful in their personal and professional lives.

Conclusion of strength-based literature

This section details literature on the strengths of women veterans. In contrast to the section on problem-based literature, the literature featured in this section was not focused on identifying problems and recommending solutions. Instead, this literature focused on the positives of women veterans. Although women veterans are faced with many unique challenges, they may be more likely to have higher education, climb the

corporate ladder, and increase their income and socioeconomic status from their decision to join the military than if they would have never joined at all. The literature review helped to answer the first research question (*What benefits does AI offer that the traditional, problem-based approach does not?*) by highlighting missing information that was not recognized using the problem-based approach. As the founder of the WVCC, the researcher wants women to focus on their strengths despite their unique challenges.

The following chapter details the research methods used to examine the effect of the AI approach at the WVCC. The research methods will set a course to answer the research questions.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS

This chapter will discuss the methods used to assess the outcomes of using AI with women veterans during coaching sessions. The literature review detailed the negatives in the lives of women veterans. In contrast, this chapter provides a methodology to identify positives in the lives and experiences of women veterans. In essence, the literature review informed this methodology by providing background into the need for strength-based research, due to the vast void of research on the positives of women veterans. Ultimately, this research method will attempt to seek answers for the first research question (*What benefits does AI offer that the traditional, problem-based approach does not?*) by comparing the results from this methodology to the results in the problem-based research section in the literature review. Then, the second research question (*How effective is AI as a tool in coaching women veterans?*) can be understood by following this methodology and the insights derived. The researcher optimistically hopes that it will help to identify the effectiveness of AI by bringing deeper levels of meaning to coaching sessions with women veterans. The results along with the emergent themes from the research methods are discussed in Chapter 4.

Methodology of the study

At the WVCC, women veterans are introduced to AI after they go through an intake process as part of their orientation to WVCC. Since the women veterans were coached in the past, the type of study will be a retrospective study. A retrospective study looks backward to examine phenomenon that occurred in the past. In this retrospective study, the use of AI as a coaching approach at the WVCC is investigated through interviews with women veterans. Participants were recruited by phone and email (See

Appendix A: Recruitment Email.) from the WVCC database management system. The researcher selected women who have received coaching at the WVCC for at least three months and were willing to participate in the study. After a recruitment period of one month, five women veterans were selected who have received coaching from the WVCC.

The number of participants, however, was not as much as the researcher wanted in order to collect encompassing data. The researcher ideally wanted more than 10 participants to collect detailed data.

Due to unprecedented times, there were recruitment obstacles that limited the number of participants. Many potential participants had personal obligations that were more of a priority during the Covid-19 crisis. Everyone in the database has not received coaching, so this also limits the number of participants, along with the extraordinary period of the pandemic (Covid-19) crisis, which impeded more participants to complete the study. I am certain that this current limitation can be easily addressed in a more detailed research approach adopted by future researchers.

The interviewees had the following characteristics:

1. Army veteran, age 32, served 5 years in active duty
2. Navy veteran, age 48, served 8 years in active duty
3. Air Force veteran, age 52, served 20 years active duty
4. Marine veteran, age 44, served 11 years active duty
5. Army veteran, age 63, served 9 years active duty

The interview questions were carefully selected to investigate the outcomes of AI without explicitly discussing strength-based approaches. In selecting the questions for the interview, the researcher aimed to ask questions about their experience at the WVCC.

The researcher avoided asking leading questions or questions that directly asked about AI and a strength-based approach. This decreased the risk of the qualitative data being altered so as to not force the interviewee to name AI as the key factor leading to successful outcomes.

Twelve questions were asked to the members:

1. In your own words, can you describe your experience at the WVCC?
2. What have others noticed about your development after your coaching sessions with the WVCC?
3. Name a time you used what you learned in a coaching session? Please describe in detail.
4. How did your self-talk change after your coaching sessions?
5. How has your experience with WVCC changed your perspective of being a veteran?
6. What has changed in your life after your experience with the WVCC?
7. What was beneficial for you with the approach used during your coaching sessions?
8. How has your experience at the WVCC differed from other women veterans organizations?
9. What did the WVCC do well?
10. What are areas of improvements for the WVCC?
11. Explain your experiences with other veteran organizations?
12. What questions should I have asked?

Interviews were performed using the telephone for thirty minutes to an hour. Although in-person interviews are ideal, interviews were conducted remotely due to social distancing policies in the Covid-19 pandemic. The responses to each question were written down and anonymized by excluding information that could possibly identify the participant. Themes related to AI will be identified from the interview data. I have elucidated the five core principles of AI will be used to interpret the interview data.

Defining the five core principles of AI

The five core principles of AI are the constructionist principle, simultaneity principle, poetic principle, anticipatory principle, and positive principle (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Below are not only the definitions of the five core principles, but also the meaning rephrased in the context of women veterans and lens of appreciative coaching.

- The constructionist principle can be summarized in the statement, “Words create worlds” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). In other words, social reality is created through language and conversations with themselves and others.
- The simultaneity principle means inquiry creates change (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Asking questions similarly leads to an answer, and that answer simultaneously elicits a realization that she can act on that unnoticed potential.
- The poetic principle describes how one can choose what one studies (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Individuals have the ability to choose what subject matter (whether it is a person, place, thing, idea, or concept) to which they devote their attention and study.

- The anticipatory principle encapsulates the idea that images inspire action (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Visualizing an outcome helps inspire individuals to think deeper into how to bring that image to life. Visualizing positive images and heading in a direction that would bring them into reality, creates positive momentum towards the benefits of that goal.
- The positive principle highlights how positive questions lead to positive change (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). Positive change in an individual's life requires large amounts of positive affect to keep the momentum and intentionality to achieve his or her goal. Positive questions, which “uncover and bring out the best in a person, a situation or an organization” (Whitney et al., 2001, p. 89), help to enact positive change.

Together, these five principles embody the positive core and essence of AI. Each principle is used as a lens to view the interview data from this study. Before discussing the interview, data the limitations must be disclosed.

Limitations of research methods

This study is not without limitations. However, limitations can be viewed as room for growth for future research and can identify its unique strengths. For instance, AI is not a rigid model that can be consistently followed from study to study, as many problem-based approaches. This can lead to inconsistency and variability in methodology. However, this limitation can be viewed as part of its beauty, as AI allows strengths to surface organically at any phase due to the fluidity of the model. The researcher has identified two primary limitations of the research methods.

The first limitation is that the study had a sample size. Five women veterans may have been too small of a sample size, as mentioned before. The sample size may have not been large enough to represent all women veterans who have been receiving coaching at the WVCC for at least three months, and it is possible that outcomes can be different with a larger sample size. Interviews were conducted in the midst of the Covid-19 crisis. The crisis was also a barrier for recruiting efforts for the study, as many women veterans did not respond to emails and phone calls during the recruiting phase expeditiously.

Second, during the vetting process, the researcher did not include a stringent set of rules for the coaches to follow. The vetting process was conducted in person, just to get to know the coach while having coffee or going to events. The coach may have spoken about AI as being their own personal coaching methodology, but without careful, deliberate, and conscious implementation of AI, she may not practice what she espouses during coaching sessions. Although WVCC coaches were vetted and advised to use AI as the primary approach, it is possible that coaches' past training in other non-AI methodologies, such as those taught at the International Coaching Federation, were inadvertently practiced during coaching sessions. Use of another technique risks positively and negatively altering the reported effectiveness of AI alone. Lastly, because the sessions were not recorded, it is not possible to evaluate the use of other methodologies during coaching sessions. There is also no way to tell the nature of AI and consistency of AI use in every coaching session. Since its origination, the WVCC has relied on surveys completed by the woman veteran after her coaching session to provide feedback. As long as these surveys came back with positive feedback, as they almost always did, no further inquiry into the one-on-one coaching sessions was required.

Conclusion of research methods

This section outlined the research methods to examine the effectiveness of AI in coaching sessions at the WVCC. In essence, this helps answer the first research question: *How effective is AI as a tool in coaching women veterans?* The second research question (*What benefits does AI offer that the traditional, problem-based approach does not?*) is also aided by comparing the outcomes of this methodology with the problem-based methodologies in the literature review. For a balanced approach, the limitations of this section were also emphasized so they can be compared to limitations of the problem-based methodologies in the following section. The findings that came about as a result of this methodology are discussed next.

The researcher and the author feels that personal experience combined with insight from these research methods will be an instrument for change for the way the women veterans are served by coaches, therapists, and veteran organizations. She hopes this study will serve as a stepping stone for a greater movement towards the use of a strength-based approach with women veterans.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

The current chapter presents the results of the study. Using the research methods, five participants were interviewed regarding their coaching sessions at the WVCC. The five interviewees answered all twelve questions during the interviews. The researcher summarized and anonymized the answers to the interview questions. The interview questions followed by their respective answers are provided in Appendix B. This section will help answer the research questions by showing what the reported effectiveness of AI is. It will also provide information that AI provides that traditional, problem-based approaches do not. The following section details the eight AI-themes that were found in the interview data.

AI-related themes

There were several AI-related themes identified in the qualitative interview data. The AI-related themes were (1) more strength-based self-talk, (2) feeling cheered on, (3) positive perception from others, (4) recognition of accomplishments, (5) introspection, (6) open-ended questions to create a space for self-reflection, (7) embracing a more optimistic lens after coaching, and (8) co-creating change through empathy and inquiry, not advising. As mentioned in the earlier chapter, each of these themes is viewed through the lens of one or more AI principles: the constructionist principle, the simultaneity principle, the poetic principle, the anticipatory principle, and the positive principle (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). It explores the interpretations of the AI themes from the interview data. Each theme is described in terms of AI, compared to the problem-based approach used by other researchers in the literature review, and supported by interview data. New understandings from this interview data are described in the context of the AI

framework and contrasted with the AI approach. The discussion subsection detail what these findings mean in light of the research questions: *What benefits does AI offer that the traditional, problem-based approach does not?* and *How effective is AI as a tool in coaching women veterans?*

AI theme: More strength-based self-talk.

Participants noticed they had more strength-based self-talk following AI coaching sessions at the WVCC. One participant noticed her self-talk changed from “pessimism to optimism” (Question 1, Interview 4). The origin of strength-based self-talk is from responding to positive, open-ended questions. The positive principle is relevant here, since positive, strength-based questions lead to positive change. Before coaching sessions, one women veteran “saw the glass as half empty” (Question 1, Interview 4), but, after positive inquiry during coaching sessions, she saw herself “as a compilation of [her] strength” (Interview 1, Question 4) and her self-talk changed positively with her change in self-reflection.

A second participant noted that “writing down three affirming facts from the previous day” (Interview 4, Question 3) helped to increase her strength-based self-talk and led her to “value [her] life and positive contributions from [her] family” (Interview 4, Question 3). The participant began to perceive themselves as a summation of their challenges, but as someone with “many accomplishments to be proud of” (Interview 1, Question 7). This participant is experiencing the constructionist principle in action. The affirmation she wrote daily is positive language for change and thereby changed her life positively.

Another participant noticed a dichotomy in her self-talk following problem-based therapy sessions and strength-based coaching sessions. The participant noted that “in contrast to therapy sessions” (Interview 4, Question 7), which focused on “areas of deficit and challenges” (Interview 4, Question 7), the coaching sessions “focused on [her] strengths” (Interview 4, Question 7). She left the “therapy sessions feeling worse” (Interview 4, Question 7), whereas “during coaching sessions, [she was] able to create manageable goals” (Interview 4, Question 7). Instead of viewing herself as someone with many of the cumulative traumas, she reported having increased confidence in herself after recognizing her accomplishments.

As discussed in the literature review in the second chapter, much of the information available to women veterans is to fix their problems, which can perpetuate negative self-talk and even exacerbate conditions such as depression. From the perspective of the constructionist principle, the language used during the therapy sessions contrasted with the language used in the coaching sessions, as the former used a deficit language while the latter used strength-based language when asking questions. Therefore, the deficit language of the therapist can cause more negative internal language, while the coach’s strength-based language can cause a more positive internal language, which is conducive to momentum toward her goals.

AI theme: Feeling cheered on.

Many of the participants expressed feeling cheered on through the AI coaching process. One participant mentioned that she felt “cheered on” (Interview 2, Question 7) and “always left a session inspired[,] [e]ven is [she] didn’t meet [her] goal of the week” (Interview 2, Question 7). A second participant noted how the coach cheered her on by

recognizing her efforts to make “three affirming facts from the previous days” (Interview 4, Question 3). With this participant, the coaching process allowed the person to feel cheered on by focusing on their strengths. This created a positive energy for change in comparison to traditional deficit approaches which neutralized energy for change and “left [her] feeling worse” (Interview 4, Question 7). In the lives of these two participants, the overarching AI principle associated with being cheered on is the constructionist principle. Being cheered on brings about positive language from others, and this positive language motivates the recipient towards positive change.

Another key part of feeling cheered on was the open-ended questions. In Interview 3, the participant, the open-ended questions allowed the coachee to feel cheered on and created a space that it was all about her and her meeting her goals. She expressed this when she said how “[t]he coaching relation was all about me and was her “space to solely address her goals and aspirations” (Interview 3, Question 7) and the “good open-ended question... propelled [her] to think about what [she] really wanted” (Interview 3, Question 7). When she expressed what she really wanted to the coach, that provided the coach the opportunity to cheer her on and encourage her to pursue her goal. From simultaneity and principle viewpoints, the positive, open-ended questions validated through inquiry that ideas the woman veterans discussed were beneficial for their personal and professional growth. The positive, open-ended questions left them feeling cheered on through this validation process. Ultimately, this language can evoke the anticipatory principle by leading the recipient of praise to imagine herself accomplishing a goal. It is this imagery that helps her to visualize her goal, anticipate the steps to get there, plan a course of action, and then follow through on the plan.

AI theme: Positive perception from others.

Participants noticed being more positively perceived by others after experiencing AI inside coaching sessions and living AI outside coaching sessions. One participant said she read her “personnel performance documents from the Air Force” (Interview 3, Question 4) and noted “accomplishments to build on” (Interview 3, Question 4) although reading “a few areas.... [was] challenging” (Interview 3, Question 4). Personnel performance records are created by a manager or supervisors, so the positive feedback in this report represents a positive perception from others. Through the lens of the constructionist principle, the words of the personnel performance documents changed her current state, but it was not changed negatively as the coaching process helped her to prioritize the strength-based comments over the problem-based ones.

Another participant also noticed positive perception from others. She explained that “her husband... said that after a couple of sessions, [she] came into the bedroom and struck up a conversation about [her] childhood and [her] belief that [her] poor relationship with [her] father created barriers in [their] marriage” (Interview 2, Question 2). The husband was commending her for the work she did in coaching sessions, because it was in the coaching sessions that she realized something about herself. This led to the husband viewing her positively. Through the lens of the constructionist principle, the husband’s words of affirmation about her increased self-awareness added additional positive energy for change. This additional positive energy from her husband can help keep her on track towards her goals.

AI theme: Recognition of accomplishments.

Another theme that re-occurred in the interviews was that AI helped them recognize their accomplishments. One participant mentioned how the focus on strengths helped them focus on accomplishments and “create manageable goals” (Interview 4, Question 7). Another participant mentioned that AI helped her “recognize that [she has] a firm foundation of accomplishments to build on” (Interview 3, Question 4). Although this performance record was from a previous employer, the coaching allowed her to see it for her strength, whereas, without the coaching, she might have seen it for mostly her weaknesses. A third participant noticed that the AI process helped her with the “perception of [herself] by helping her recognize her accomplishments, “no matter [her] challenges” (Interview 1, Question 7). These three examples are telling as to how inquiry creates change (the simultaneity principle) and how ideas inspire action (the anticipatory principle). Inquiry in the coaching sessions helped the women veterans to realize their accomplishments. After recognizing their accomplishments, they can identify the strengths they used to achieve them. Visualizing herself at peak moments like this can inspire her to achieve another goal that is relevant to the image. If it were not for the recognition of the accomplishments, the positive imagery would not have a sketch to completely illustrate.

AI theme: Introspection.

Participants reported a sense of introspection following coaching sessions at the WVCC. The sense of introspection was felt when interviewees were asked to look within themselves and recognize something about themselves. For instance, one discovered she had “a firm foundation of accomplishments” (Interview 3, Question 4), another

recognized that her self-talk “changed from pessimism to optimism (Interview 1, Question 4). From this introspection, she developed a more positive self-image. She said, “in hindsight, [she]...I realized that [her] sessions always started with [her] successes (Interview 1, Question 7). This introspection helped her realize more about herself and strengths. A third participant noticed she performed introspection after her husband pointed out that she has been more aware of how her “poor relationship with my father created barriers in our marriage” (Interview 2, Question 2). Introspection needed to occur for her to delve into the memories of the past and connect them to the current barriers in her marriage.

Many AI principles are important to inspire the client to perform a deep introspection. In the case of interviews one and three, positive inquiry allowed them to review their past and discover past “pessimism” (Interview 3, Question 4) and “a firm foundation of accomplishment” (Interview 3, Question 4). The coach brought about introspection by using the positive principle and simultaneity principle together. By asking positive questions that allowed the client to look within, the client exercises the poetic principle by selecting areas of the past to review further. In the case of participant three, she looked within herself to find how her “poor relationship with my father created barriers in our marriage” (Interview 2, Question 2). This level of introspection allowed her to connect past events with her current situation. She was finally about to exercise the anticipatory principle when she “came into the bedroom and struck up a conversation” (Interview 2, Question 2). with her husband. When she took this action, she was exercising the anticipatory principle of AI: images that an idea or question inspires creates action.

AI theme: Open-ended questions to create a space for self-reflection.

In practice, a coach is only as effective as the questions he or she asks. At the WVCC, questions are positive and open-ended to create a space for self-reflection. WVCC coaches practice the constructionist, simultaneity, poetic principles simultaneously when they ask positive, open-ended questions that are formed with positive language. Participants noted how these open-ended questions created a space for self-reflection. One participant noted how the open-ended questions allowed her to give some thought to her response, because she could not just respond with yes or no. The “open-ended questions... propelled [her] to think about what [she] really wanted” (Interview 3, Question 7) in her life. Another participant (Interview 4, Question 7) noted that the open-ended questions at the WVCC were strength-based, while the open-ended questions probed towards a weakness in past therapy sessions. In contrast to her therapy sessions, in which a traditional therapist would probe to identify disorder and dysfunction, the coach asked positive, open-ended questions to stimulate a strength-based reflection of her experiences. A third participant noted that her husband noticed the results of the open-ended questions. He noticed how the coaching sessions allowed her to think deeper into her past and “struck up conversations about [her] childhood” (Interview 2, Question 2). This was a result of open-ended questions in the past. Although she did think of a problem in the past, further inquiry with the help of the coach and the AI processes viewed the weakness as a positive, because of its relevance to her marriage. This can be viewed as the poetic principle of AI at play, because she chose to study in an inquisitive way how her relationship with her father, and this turned into an exploration of how this impacts her marriage. Her choosing to study these two topics and connect

them allowed her to create the positive discussion around marriage with her husband. A simple, yes-and-no questionnaire would fail to make this important connection.

AI theme: Embracing a more optimistic lens after coaching.

A popular theme in the interview data was that the participants embraced a more optimistic lens after coaching. The theme was expressed in many ways, such as a change “from pessimism to optimism” (Interview 1, Question 4), a glass half-full (Interview 1, Question 4), and a positive “perception of [her]self” (Interview 1, Question 7). Other participants, such as in Interview 3, noted that she looked at feedback from “personnel performance documents from the Air Force” (Interview 3, Question 4) through an optimistic lens by focusing on her “firm foundation of accomplishments” (Interview 3, Question 4). Another participant reported similarly, saying that indemnifying “three affirming facts from the previous days” (Interview 4, Question 3) has changed her worldview from negative to positive. The coaching process, combined with AI, helped to create this lens through helping these individuals to recognize the positive aspect of their lives. Recognizing, embracing, mediating on one’s accomplishments can lead to a more optimistic lens in life. Through inquiry (simultaneity principle) and positive (positive principle), open-ended question the positive ideas became at the forefront of the client’s mind. From the lens of the constructionist principle, the positive lexicon used during coaching sessions carried over into their everyday vocabulary that he or she uses to describe themselves and the world around them. As a result, the woman veteran exercises the anticipatory principle: They are set to change in positive directions by taking the steps to achieve each milestone of their goal.

AI theme: Co-creating change through empathy and inquiry, not advising.

The final AI-related theme found in the interview data was the woman veteran and coach co-created change through empathy and inquiry, but not through advising. A participant noted that the “coach expressed empathy when [she] expressed [her] challenges” (Interview 5, Question 7), and she inquired in such a manner that she “didn’t come across as an expert in fact she never gave me advice” (Interview 5, Question 7). At the WVCC, the coach plays the role of the interviewer, asking questions about the coachee who is assumed to be the expert on her own life. The coach is there to support the client in finding her destiny, rather than to provide advice. From a constructionist principle, body language and vocabulary that parallels the woman veteran allows the coach to more effectively create positive change. By not advising and forming questions using empathy, the client is set up to think deeply about herself without the defense mechanisms that can be triggered by negative, problem-based questions. By using the simultaneity principle and positive principle together through open-ended questions, the woman veteran can start to think positive thoughts, which can lead to positive imagery. In the end, the anticipatory principle can come into fruition. The woman veteran can now move in the direction of the answers that were brought about through empathy and inquiry, not advising.

Discussion

This section of the study sought to examine the use of AI with women veterans at the WVCC. The participants expressed the following AI-related themes AI-related themes were (1) more strength-based self-talk, (2) feeling cheered on, (3) positive perception from others, (4) recognition of accomplishments, (5) introspection, (6) open-

ended questions to create a space for self-reflection, (7) embracing a more optimistic lens after coaching, and (8) co-creating change through empathy and inquiry, not advising.

The five core principles of AI brought a new layer of meaning to the interview data.

During the interviews, the participants brought up useful information to answer the research questions: *What benefits does AI offer that the traditional, problem-based approach does not?* and *How effective is AI as a tool in coaching women veterans?*

For the first research question (*What benefits does AI offer that the traditional, problem-based approach does not?*), the benefits of AI are encompassed by the feedback by some participants that it was more encouraging than the traditional, problem-based approach. Some participants noticed a difference in their energy after experiencing AI during coaching sessions and comparing it to problem-based approaches in her past. A good example is one participant who noted that “in contrast to therapy sessions” (Interview 4, Question 7), which focused on “areas of deficit and challenges” (Interview 4, Question 7), the coaching sessions “focused on [her] strengths” (Interview 4, Question 7). This created a positive energy for change in comparison to traditional deficit approaches which neutralized energy for change and “left [her] feeling worse” (Interview 4, Question 7). This unintended effect of the problem-based approach is described by Ludema et al. (2003) as “suck[ing] the energy for change out” (p. 6). The act of simply questioning a person about what is wrong invites an undertone of negativity to the dialogue (Watkins & Cooperrider, 2000; Watkins & Mohr, 2001). To inspire one to achieve peak performance, Spencer and Spencer (1993) advise against asking interviewees to recount failures in their pasts, and instead, recommend having them recall successes they had experienced. For women veterans who may have experienced

cumulative, lifelong trauma, it is especially important to help her see through the lingering negativity of trauma into brighter future possibilities.

From the perspective of the five core principles of AI (constructionist principle, simultaneity principle, poetic principle, anticipatory principle, and positive principle), the difference between the problem-based approach in “therapy” (Interview 4, Question) and AI coaching can be brought to surface. The constructionist principle allows insight into the difference in the use of language between therapy and coaching. A therapist might use words of deficit, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, relationship difficulties, and low self-esteem, whereas a coach that uses AI might use words related to strengths, like “thought-provoking,” “skilled at communicating,” and “motivated.” When language is used to construct questions, the questions can create change towards the subject matter of the question (simultaneity principle). Thus, asking open-ended, positive questions (positivity principle) assists the women veteran in changing toward the strength-based subject matter, whereas a therapy session might involve asking questions related to deficits, which make the client “fee[l] worse” (Interview 4, Question 7). After the client hears about her deficits, she leaves the office, concentrates on them, and may choose to learn about her deficits (poetic principle) until she identifies with them. By setting her on this course of thought, the therapist can do more harm than good. Instead, if the therapist would have integrated an AI approach adapted from coaching, the outcome could be improved. Rather than the client seeing herself only for her weaknesses, which creates dreary images of herself and her future, with AI, the client can recognize past accomplishments and visualize herself at peak moments (anticipatory principle). From these visualizations, the client can take action toward her goal coach, because the

anticipatory principle indicates that images that an idea or question inspires creates action. The answer to the first research question is, then, that AI has an advantage over the problem-based approach, because the AI has the power to encourage, while the problem-based approach typically discourages.

For the second research question (*How effective is AI as a tool in coaching women veterans?*), the effectiveness of AI was expressed by the positive feedback in the themes. The AI-related themes were (1) more strength-based self-talk, (2) feeling cheered on, (3) positive perception from others, (4) recognition of accomplishments, (5) introspection, (6) open-ended questions to create a space for self-reflection, (7) embracing a more optimistic lens after coaching, and (8) co-creating change through empathy and inquiry, not advising. All of these themes show that AI can be an effective tool for motivating women veterans to create more fulfilling personal and professional lives. The participants noted that AI can be an effective tool for encouraging them for positive change. For instance, they noted that AI has helped led them to “value [her] life and positive contributions from [her] family” (Interview 4, Question 3), change from “pessimism to optimism” (Interview 1, Question 4), and see feedback as “accomplishments to build on” (Interview 3, Question 4). AI, therefore, can be an effective tool for increasing the client’s positivity and encourage women veterans to change. In fact, AI can not only be an effective tool to use during sessions with discouraged women veterans who feel hopeless because of her challenges, but also excelling women veterans who want to dream bigger dreams and further her growth.

The five core principles of AI can increase the effectiveness of AI by creating a deeper level of perspective for the coach and a deeper understanding of AI for the client.

Key concepts of AI, such as words create worlds (constructionist principle), inquiry creates change (simultaneity principle), one can choose the topic of study (poetic principle), images inspire action (anticipatory principle), and positive questions lead to positive change (positive principle) (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005), can help the client discover past successes, dream of future possibilities, deliver on those plans, and reach her destiny (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005). For women veterans who may not be used to embracing optimism due to focusing on her challenges, the five core principles can provide a framework for her to start to reshape words she uses, the positive questions she asks herself, the topics she chooses to study, and the visuals she uses to see her future possibilities. The tool of AI, then, can be aided by both the client and coach understanding and embracing the five core principles.

Conclusion

In this retrospective study, the use of AI as a coaching approach at the WVCC was investigated through interviews with WVCC participants. The participants expressed the aforementioned eight AI-related themes. The two research questions were answered through the research in the literature review and this results section. For the first research question (*What benefits does AI offer that the traditional, problem-based approach does not?*), the literature review showed that a few positive studies shine light on missing information that was not included in literature that used a problem-based approach. Without a balance between strength-based and problem-based literature, the strengths of women veterans are overshadowed by their challenges.

From this study, the answer offered for the first research question is that AI has an advantage over the problem-based approach, because the AI has the power to encourage,

while the problem-based approach typically discourages. For the second research question (*How effective is AI as a tool in coaching women veterans?*), the literature review showed that there are no studies on the effectiveness of AI in coaching women veterans. There were only studies of the challenges of women veterans and a few publications of the strengths of women veterans. This brief study, albeit limited in its scope, clearly reveals the possibility that it can be an effective tool for encouraging and inspiring women veterans to make changes for personal and professional growth. I strongly recommend more comprehensive research into the optimistic assertion my capstone has offered. The answers of these two research questions mean that AI does offer some benefits that the traditional, problem-based approach does not, and AI can be an effective tool for encouraging women veterans to live a more fulfilling life.

CHAPTER 5: FINAL THOUGHTS

After completing this study, the researcher and the author has learned more about AI and its implications. When reviewing the literature of women veterans, the researcher learned how scarce strength-based research on women veteran really is. As an Army veteran diagnosed with combat-related PTSD, anxiety, and depression, the researcher related to many of the problems discussed in the literature review but was surprised that not much research exists on the strengths of women veterans. At the same time, the researcher was disheartened reading all the literature on the problems of her and her comrades. The researcher knows that the literature does not paint a complete picture of the women veteran, and this study was a first attempt to shine some light on the strengths of women veterans.

From performing this study, the researcher also learned through the interviews that AI can be a good framework for coaching women veterans to discover their innate strengths and abilities. The researcher now knows how much strength-based coaching is conducive to changing mindsets from deficit-based mindsets to optimistic mindsets. She witnessed just how powerful AI is when she asked them to identify their strengths and they lit up. The change is almost immediate in their confidence. Lastly, from answering the research questions (*What benefits does AI offer that the traditional, problem-based approach does not?* and *How effective is AI as a tool in coaching women veterans?*), the researcher found that this study supported her belief that AI is an appropriate tool for not only coaching but also the therapists working for veteran organizations. The researcher also confirmed her belief about the traditional, problem-based approaches. She sees how they can be discouraging, while AI can be encouraging. In the end, the researcher showed

that AI does offer some benefits that the traditional, problem-based approach does not, and AI can be an effective tool for encouraging women veterans to live a more fulfilling life.

However, before concluding this study, the researcher has a few recommendations for organizations and researchers serving women veterans. These recommendations are derived from the literature review, this study, and the researcher's experience with coaching women veterans.

First, the primary implication is that AI should be used alongside traditional, problem-based approaches. Using problem-based approaches and AI together will yield more holistic and balanced outcomes. The woman veteran will not only learn what weaknesses she has and the treatments available for them, but also learn to value and leverage her strengths for personal and professional growth. Thus, it is recommended that women veterans organizations, such as the VA, add AI to their approach in communicating with women veterans. In particular, the VA should consider adding AI within their behavioral health system, particularly in therapy and the compensated work therapy (CWT) program. This will provide the VA with another option to serve the diverse population of women veterans. Second, future researchers who study women veterans should consider AI as part of their methodology. They should have larger sample size and include as much diversity in the interview data as possible.

Focus groups should also be considered, such as women with certain characteristics and who also have been coached using AI. These characteristics can be problem-based (PTSD or unemployed), strength-based (leadership position), or solely descriptive (age, ethnicity, and number of years served in the military). Finally,

throughout the year, the WVCC receives calls and emails from various media outlets looking to highlight women veterans. Unfortunately, the requests are associated with providing supportive services rather than highlighting the positive attributes and accomplishments of women veterans. Instead of viewing them for their challenges, there should be more attempts to capture images and stories of successful women veterans as business leaders, entrepreneurs, and academics. These images and stories should then be publicized, so the collective view of women veterans can also change. By implementing these recommendations, together researchers, veteran's organizations, coaches, and therapists can better serve women veterans.

In conclusion, as a researcher, author, veteran and founder of the WVCC, the researcher is eager to continue the momentum by providing a strength-based approach in coaching settings at the WVCC. The researcher is proud to have contributed to the body of literature on women veterans. Without the MSOD program, this study would not be possible, so the researcher is grateful that the course work allowed her to connect AI to her shifting her mindset to a strength-based approach before the program. The researcher is excited about continuing to use AI as the primary coaching methodology. For these reasons, AI will remain the primary coaching approach at the WVCC.

References

- Acker, J. (1990). Hierarchies, jobs, bodies: A theory of gendered organizations. *Gender & Society*, 4(2), 139-158. doi: 10.1177/089124390004002002
- Amir, M., Kaplan, Z., Efroni, R., Levine, Y., Benjamin, J., & Kotler, M. (1997). Coping styles in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) patients. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 23(3), 399-405. doi:10.1016/s0191-8869(97)80005-0
- Baechtold, M., & De Sawal, D. M. (2009). Meeting the needs of women veterans. *New Directions for Student Services*, 2009 (126), 35-43. doi:10.1002/ss.314
- Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2016). Economic news release: Employment situation of veterans summary. *Bls.gov*. Retrieved from <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/vet.nr0.htm>
- Center for Substance Abuse Treatment. (2019). Appendix E: DSM-IV-TR Criteria for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder. In Center for Substance Abuse Treatment (Eds.), *Addressing the Specific Needs of Women*. (pp. 311-312). Retrieved from <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK83241/>
- Citroën, L. (2020). Veterans bring exceptional skills, including soft skills. *Military.com*. Retrieved from <https://www.military.com/hiring-veterans/resources/veterans-bring-exceptional-skills-including-soft-skills.html>
- Cooperrider, D. L., & Whitney, D. (2005). *Appreciative inquiry: A positive revolution in change*. San Francisco, California: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.
- Demers, A. (2013). From death to life: Female veterans, identity negotiation, and reintegration into society. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 53(4), 1-27. doi:10.1177/0022167812472395.

- Doran, G. T. (1981). There's a S.M.A.R.T. Way to write management's goals and objectives. *Management Review*, 70, 35-36. Retrieved from <https://community.mis.temple.edu/mis0855002fall2015/files/2015/10/S.M.A.R.T-Way-Management-Review.pdf>
- Drescher, K. D., & Foy, D. W. (2008). When they come home: Posttraumatic stress, moral injury, and spiritual consequences for veterans. *Reflective Practice: Formation and Supervision in Ministry*, 28, 85-102
- Dunishak, J. (2016). The deficit view and its critics. *Disability Studies Quarterly*. 36(4), 657-662. doi: 10.18061/dsq.v36i4.5236
- Hamilton, A. B., Williams, L., & Washington, D. L. (2015). Military and mental health correlates of unemployment in a national sample of women veterans. *Medical Care*, 53, S32-S38. doi: 10.1097/mlr.0000000000000297
- Hamilton, A. B., Wiltsey-Stirman, S., Finley, E. P., Klap, R., Mittman, B. S., Yano, E. M., & Oishi, S. (2019). Usual care among providers treating women veterans: Managing complexity and multimorbidity in the era of evidence-based practice. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research*, 47(2), 244–253. doi: 10.1007/s10488-019-00961-y
- Hamrick, F. A., & Rumann, C. B. (2012). Addressing the needs of women servicemembers and veterans in higher education. *On Campus with Women*, 40(3). Retrieved from <https://go.gale.com/ps/anonymous?id=GALE%7CA284222062&sid=googleScholar&v=2.1&it=r&linkaccess=abs&issn=07340141&p=AONE&sw=w>

- Hankin, C. S., Skinner, K. M., Sullivan, L. M., Miller, D. R., Frayne, S., & Tripp, T. J. (1999). Prevalence of depressive and alcohol abuse symptoms among women VA outpatients who report experiencing sexual assault while in the military. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 12*(4), 601-612. doi:10.1023/a:1024760900213
- Herbert, M. S. (2000). *Camouflage isn't only for combat: Gender, sexuality, and women in the military*. New York City, New York: NYU Press.
- Iverson, K. M., Wells, S. Y., Wiltsey-Stirman, S., Vaughn, R., & Gerber, M. R. (2013). VHA primary care providers' perspectives on screening female veterans for intimate partner violence: A preliminary assessment. *Journal of Family Violence, 28*(8), 823-831. doi:10.1007/s10896-013-9544-7
- Janoff-Bulman, R. (2010). *Shattered assumptions*. New York City, New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Kelly, U. A., Skelton, K., Patel, M., & Bradley, B. (2011). More than military sexual trauma: Interpersonal violence, PTSD, and mental health in women veterans. *Research in Nursing & Health, 34*(6), 457-467. doi:10.1002/nur.20453
- Mattocks, K. M., Haskell, S. G., Krebs, E. E., Justice, A. C., Yano, E. M., & Brandt, C. (2012). Women at war: Understanding how women veterans cope with combat and military sexual trauma. *Social Science & Medicine, 74*(4), 537-545. doi:10.1016/j.socscimed.2011.10.039
- Mckay, D. (2019, April 14). Best careers for women veterans. How to transition to a civilian job after a military career. *Thebalancecareers.com*. Retrieved from <https://www.thebalancecareers.com/women-veterans-how-to-transition-to-a-civilian-career-4177849>

- National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics (2019). *Profile of veterans: 2017*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs.
- Newhard, M. L. (2010). *An exploratory study of competencies of appreciative inquiry practitioners: Discovery* (Doctoral dissertation, The Pennsylvania State University). Retrieved from https://etda.libraries.psu.edu/files/final_submissions/4223
- Ramos, J. (2013, April 1). 10 ways military veterans are ideal for physical security sector. *Secutitymagazine.com*. Retrieved from <https://www.securitymagazine.com/articles/84184-ways-military-veterans-are-ideal-for-physical-security-sector>
- Schlossberg, N. K. (1981). A model for analyzing human adaptation to transition. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 9, 2-18. doi:10.1177/001100008100900202
- Schwantes, M. (2019, December 11). Research has revealed 5 top behaviors that fortune 500 companies like Apple, Amazon, and Microsoft live by. *Inc.com*. Retrieved from <https://www.inc.com/marcel-schwantes/research-has-revealed-5-top-behaviors-that-fortune-500-companies-like-apple-amazon-microsoft-live-by>.
- Spencer, L. M., & Spencer, S. M. (1993). *Competence at work: Models for superior performance*. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons.
- Strauss, K., (2017, April 8). Great jobs for veterans in 2017 and what they pay. *Forbes.com*. Retrieved from <https://www.forbes.com/sites/karstenstrauss/2017/04/05/8-great-jobs-for-veterans-in-2017-and-what-they-pay/#598922ab38e5>

- Strick, A., (2017, November 10). Study: Women veterans make excellent truckers. *Fleet Owner*. Retrieved from <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/A514270565/GPS?u=brun84057&sid=GPS&xid=8a63bc9b>
- Syracuse University's Institute for Veterans and Military Families. (2014). Understanding why veterans leave their initial post-military job. *Syracuse University*. Retrieved from http://myvetadvisor.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Job_Retention-infographic.pdf
- Taylor, S. (2019). Let's talk about women in the military: Military women. *S. R. Taylor Publishing*. Retrieved from <https://go.gale.com/ps/i.do?p=GPS&u=brun84057&id=GALE|A601028249&v=2.1&it=r&sid=GPS&asid=e12582f3>
- The army values. (2017). *Army.mil*. Retrieved from <https://www.army.mil/values/>
- Tick, E. (2005). *War and the soul: Healing our nation's veterans from post-traumatic stress disorder*. Wheaton, Illinois: The Theosophical Publishing House.
- U. S. Census Bureau. (2020). ACS PUMS files: The basics. *Census.gov*. Retrieved from https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/publications/2020/acs/acs_pums_handbook_2020_ch01.pdf
- VA National Center on Homelessness among Veterans. (2016). Women Veterans and Homelessness. *VA National Center*. Retrieved from <https://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/nchav/docs/HERS-Womens-Proceedings.pdf>
- Vogt, D., Smith, B. N., Fox, A. B., Amoroso, T., Taverna, E., & Schnurr, P. P. (2017). Consequences of PTSD for the work and family quality of life of female and male

- U.S. Afghanistan and Iraq War veterans. *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 52, 341-352. doi: 10.1007/s00127-016-1321-5
- Watkins, J. M., & Cooperrider, D. L. (2000). Appreciative inquiry: A transformative paradigm. *OD Practitioner: Journal of the Organization Development Network*, 32(1), 6-10.
- Watkins, J. M., & Mohr, B. J. (2001). *Appreciative inquiry: Change at the speed of imagination*. San Francisco, California: Jossey-Bass.
- Whitney, D. K., Cooperrider, D. L., Kaplin, B. S., & Trosten-Bloom, A. (2001). *Encyclopedia of positive questions: Using appreciative inquiry to bring out the best in your organization* (Vol. 1.). Euclid, Ohio: Lakeshore Publications.
- Yaeger, D., Himmelfarb, N., Cammack, A., & Mintz, J. (2006). DSM-IV diagnosed posttraumatic stress disorder in women veterans with and without military sexual trauma. *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, 21(3), S65-S69.
doi:10.1111/j.1525-1497.2006.00377.x

APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT EMAIL

Good afternoon,

The Women Veteran Command Center is seeking women veteran who received at least 3 months of coaching at the WVCC to participate in an interview for a Master's capstone project. If you are interested, please contact the center via phone 267-455-0831 or by email aronda@womenveterancc.com.

If you have any questions or concerns, call the center and ask for Aronda.

Founder, Aronda Smith-Benson, B. S.

Masters Candidate, University of Pennsylvania Organizational Dynamics

United States Army Veteran-Operation Desert Shield & Storm Veteran

Philadelphia Business Journal-Veteran of Influence recipient

3900 Ford Road Suite 14A

Philadelphia, Pa. 19131

Office: 267-455-0831

Email: aronda@womenveterancc.com

Website: www.womenveterancc.com

APPENDIX B: RESPONSES

Interview 1: Army Veteran, Age 32, Served 5 Years Active Duty

1. In your own words, can you describe your experience at the WVCC?

I absolutely enjoy hanging out at the WVCC! I am able to connect with other women veterans from all branches of the military and all eras. We have a space just for us to connect and participate in activities.

2. What have others noticed about your development after your coaching sessions with the WVCC?

The first time that I recall receiving feedback was from my supervisor. He came into my office and stated that I've been a lot more engaged in weekly team meetings and taking the lead on team projects.

3. Name a time you used what you learned in a coaching session? Please describe in detail.

One of the things I worked on in my coaching sessions was time management. At work I felt myself getting overwhelmed with personal and professional obligations. So, I reverted back to a session we did on SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Timely) goal framework (Doran, 1998, pp. 35-36). I was able to use the sequential steps to help me prioritize my day to day routine.

4. How did your self-talk change after your coaching sessions?

My self-talk changed from pessimism to optimism. Prior to the coaching sessions, I saw the glass as half empty. Now, I view myself as a compilation of my strengths. My confidence has risen exponentially.

5. How has your experience with WVCC changed your perspective of being a veteran?

Hanging out at the WVCC with other women veteran has reignited pride in my service. I enjoy the camaraderie at the center especially listening to stories of other women that serviced. Women have made significant contributions to the Armed Forces and that makes me Proud!

6. What has changed in your life after your experience with the WVCC?

As my schedule allows, I still attend the WVCC. Overall what has changed is my confidence and the belief that I can succeed.

7. What was beneficial for you in terms of the approach used during your coaching sessions?

I didn't realize it so much at the time but in hindsight I realized that my sessions always started with my successes and/ or strengths. I appreciated that approach because it helped with the perception of myself. No matter my challenges, I had many accomplishments to be proud of.

8. How has your experience at the WVCC differed from other women veterans organizations?

The leadership is different. Aronda is transparent and share her story to motivate and inspire other women veterans. She's very hands on and knowledgeable.

Aronda takes the time to conduct many of the workshops.

9. What did the WVCC do well?

Provided a safe space for women veteran to congregate and support each other.

10. What are areas of improvements for the WVCC?

Funding for overnight retreats.

11. Explain your experiences with other veteran organizations?

I have not attended another veteran's organization. I receive my health care from a community provider. I'm also not a member of any military service organizations such as the American Legion.

12. What questions should I have asked?

Ummm can't think of anything.

Interview 2: Navy Veteran, Age 48, Served 8 Years Active Duty

1. In your own words, can you describe your experience at the WVCC?

The WVCC is a place of contemplation for me. It's my place to exhale and be among other women veterans.

2. What have others noticed about your development after your coaching sessions with the WVCC?

Let's see, let me think about this for a moment. My dear husband "giggles" said that I've become more self-aware. I asked him to explain. He said that after a couple of sessions, I came into the bedroom and struck up a conversation about my childhood and my belief that my poor relationship with my father created barriers in our marriage.

3. Name a time you used what you learned in a coaching session? Please describe in detail.

So, I have a 22-year old daughter that recently graduated from college, I just love love love to give her unsolicited advice. However, since I've received coaching,

I've learned that it is more appropriate to frame my concerns by asking, "*How can I support you?*" Help versus Support—support is more affirming. I also learned to accept feedback as a gift.

4. How did your self-talk change after your coaching sessions?

Not sure if this answers your questions but what I would like to share is I've learned to do the opposite of what I'm feeling. For example, if I do not want to get out of bed, I get up. I learned that feelings are just that. Don't allow my feelings to affect my motivation to complete tasks.

5. How has your experience with WVCC changed your perspective of being a veteran?

Before attending the WVCC, I didn't self-identify as a veteran. After serving in the Navy, I kind of put that behind me. Didn't see my service as anything significant. I didn't deploy so I didn't see myself as a veteran. I attended a workshop at the WVCC frequently as a result. As a result of a presentation on veteran benefits, I learned the VA definition of a veteran. Guess what? I checked all the boxes.

6. What has changed in your life after your experience with the WVCC?

I would have to say connectivity. I was pretty much a homebody. Now, I meet once a month with three other women veterans at different coffee shops each month. This year we plan to spend Thanksgiving together at my home. I'm really excited.

7. What was beneficial for you in terms of the approach used during your coaching sessions?

I enjoyed the flexibility of meeting locations for our sessions. Most importantly, I always left a session inspired. Even if I didn't meet my goal for the week, I was cheered on.

8. How has your experience at the WVCC differed from other women veteran organizations?

First of all, the WVCC is founded by a female veteran that's pretty neat. I like the fact that the WVCC has a woman veteran council. The WVCC council is a group of women veterans assembled to provide feedback and inform decision making at the center. That is almost unheard of in my opinion.

9. What did the WVCC do well?

The short and sweet answer is: a safe space for us.

10. What are areas of improvements for the WVCC?

Maybe satellite locations throughout the city and South Jersey.

11. Explain your experiences with other veteran organizations?

I am a member of the American Legion. The culture reflects my time on active duty predominantly male. I am one of three women in my legion out of approximately 225 members.

12. What questions should I have asked?

Maybe ask, "What would I do differently as a leader at the WVCC?"

Interview 3: Air Force Veteran, Age 52, Served 20 Years Active Duty**1. In your own words, can you describe your experience at the WVCC?**

After retiring from the Air Force in 2009, I missed the camaraderie, so I was elated when the WVCC opened. One of the things I appreciate is the quarterly surveys. Every quarter we receive a survey to get our input on scheduled activities. My favorite activity is the book club; I'm an avid reader. The survey made us feel like we are part of the center, not just participants.

2. What have others noticed about your development after your coaching sessions with the WVCC?

Not certain what other people have noticed. I can't recall any specific comments or feedback.

3. Name a time you used what you learned in a coaching session? Please describe in detail.

Funny that you ask that. One take away for me is, "Measure success by my own standards." Prior to receiving coaching, I had lived my whole life according to my parents and societal standards. I did the safe thing. I graduated high school, attended college for nursing and retired from the Air Force. At 52, I'm finally living life on my terms. I am enrolled in culinary school fulfilling my dream.

4. How did your self-talk change after your coaching sessions?

Due to Covid-19, I am taking the opportunity to do some purging. Last week, I ran across some of my personnel performance documents from the Air Force. Reading through them I noticed a few areas that were challenging however my

new self-talk allowed me to recognize that I have a firm foundation of accomplishments to build on as well.

5. How has your experience with WVCC changed your perspective of being a veteran?

Having the opportunity to mingle with other women veteran has instilled pride in my service. I truly enjoy listening to the stories of other women that served. I realized “Women veterans are badass!” especially the pilots.

6. What has changed in your life after your experience with the WVCC?

As a result of my experiences, I am now a volunteer at the center. I help to organize events, send out email updates and make follow up calls to the ladies that were provided services.

7. What was beneficial for you in terms of the approach used during your coaching sessions?

The coaching relationship was all about me. My space to solely address my goals and aspirations. My coach always listened and asked really good open-ended questions that propelled me to think about what I really wanted.

8. How has your experience at the WVCC differed from other women veteran organizations?

The WVCC is the only women veterans organization I’ve attended.

9. What did the WVCC do well?

Broke barriers by raising awareness around women veterans.

10. What are areas of improvements for the WVCC?

I am a proponent of grassroots organizations. However, they are usually underfunded. I would like to see the center receive funding.

11. Explain your experiences with other veteran organizations?

I decided not to join any veterans organizations. Many of the organizations are male-dominated so I didn't have an interest.

12. What questions should I have asked?

Nothing comes to mind.

Interview 4: Marine Veteran, Age 44, Served 11 Years Active Duty**1. In your own words, can you describe your experience at the WVCC?**

Unfortunately, I haven't attended events at the WVCC, but I've heard great things from other veterans. I went to the center for coaching sessions. Overall, I love the vibe.

2. What have others noticed about your development after your coaching sessions with the WVCC?

On my performance evaluation, my supervisor stated that I can now clearly define what I hope to accomplish which has helped me to stay on track and avoid any distractions.

3. Name a time you used what you learned in a coaching session? Please describe in detail.

I discovered after attending several coaching sessions that I tend to view most situations through a pessimistic lens, not quite sure if that's the results of my depression and anxiety diagnosis. Anyway, my coach asked me to start every

morning by writing down three affirming facts from the previous day. I have been using this technique ever since. It has changed how I look at life tremendously. I can now see the value of my life and positive contributions from my friends and family.

4. How did your self-talk change after your coaching sessions?

Honestly, I am still doing some work in this area. At the suggestion of my coach, I have restarted my therapy sessions.

5. How has your experience with WVCC changed your perspective of being a veteran?

I realized that I'm not alone. I experienced Military Sexual Trauma while serving. I was raped by a drill sergeant. After sharing my experience with a group of women veterans at the center, I learned that other women had experienced similar violations. The center now has a monthly support group for MST survivors.

6. What has changed in your life after your experience with the WVCC?

What has changed significantly is feeling understood and supported.

7. What was beneficial for you in terms of the approach used during your coaching sessions?

In contrast to therapy sessions, the coaching sessions focused on my strengths whereas, therapy mainly focused on areas of deficit and challenges. I have left therapy sessions feeling worse. Also, during coaching sessions I am able to create manageable goals.

8. How has your experience at the WVCC differed from other women veteran organizations?

Haven't been to other women veteran specific centers.

9. What did the WVCC do well?

Starting the support group for Military Sexual Trauma. Most of us love the support group because it is not attached to the VA. We appreciate the safety and privacy provided by the center.

10. What are areas of improvements for the WVCC?

Open centers throughout the U.S.

11. Explain your experiences with other veteran organizations?

Other veteran spaces such as the American Legion and VFW are majority males so I decided not to join.

12. What questions should I have asked?

Would I recommend the WVCC to others? Of course, the answer is hell yea (laughter).

Interview 5: Army Veteran, Age 63, Served 9 Years Active Duty

1. In your own words, can you describe your experience at the WVCC?

The first time I went to the center I was a little nervous not knowing what to expect. The moment I opened the door, I was greeted by a friendly and energetic young lady wearing a t-shirt printed "I served." Her enthusiasm made me feel welcome and comfortable.

2. What have others noticed about your development after your coaching sessions with the WVCC?

I am a retired widow with no children. I'm pretty socially awkward so I spend a considerable time alone. So absolutely no feedback.

3. Name a time you used what you learned in a coaching session? Please describe in detail.

My deal is prioritizing! Since my retirement I have multiple projects going on at any given time which has led to becoming overwhelmed and stressed due to the clutter and disorder. My coach introduced me to the Action Priority Matrix. The matrix is a four-quadrant square broken down into Quick Wins, Big Projects, Filler Tasks and Hard Slogs. The matrix has helped me to prioritize, minimize clutter and create some order.

4. How did your self-talk change after your coaching sessions?

Be okay with asking for support.

5. How has your experience with WVCC changed your perspective of being a veteran?

Although I'm one of the oldest veterans that attend the center frequently, we share a common bond of military service. Quite a bit of the younger veterans has asked me about women serving during my era.

6. What has changed in your life after your experience with the WVCC?

Attending events and activities for the camaraderie.

7. What was beneficial for you in terms of the approach used during your coaching sessions?

My coach expressed empathy when I expressed my challenges. She didn't come across as an expert in fact she never gave me advice.

8. How has your experience at the WVCC differed from other women veteran organizations?

I visited a women's veteran center but I didn't like the fact that the center was run by a non-veteran. Just didn't feel right!

9. What did the WVCC do well?

Unified women veterans of all ages, branches and service eras for engagement and support.

10. What are areas of improvements for the WVCC?

Open centers in other states.

11. Explain your experiences with other veteran organizations?

The only experience I have is receiving care at the VA Medical Center. Haven't had the best experiences. I hate walking through the lobby. There are always men sitting around undressing you with their eyes. I wish I didn't have to go there for medical care.

12. What questions should I have asked?

I have nothing else to add.