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# Examining Access to Decent Work Among Women Veterans: A Psychology of Working Theory Perspective

## Abstract

The present study investigated predictors of decent work among a sample of women Veterans ( $N = 354$ ), grounded in the Psychology of Working Theory (PWT). A structural equation model demonstrated that women Veterans' experiences of marginalization, economic constraints, work volition, and career adaptability all directly predicted their ability to secure decent work, and economic constraints and marginalization experiences indirectly predicted decent work via work volition. Proactive personality was additionally examined as a moderator variable and did not significantly moderate any model paths; however, it was found to be a unique predictor of decent work and work volition, as well as decent work and career adaptability. The results contribute to the PWT literature through supporting many of the original hypotheses, particularly highlighting the important role of work volition. The results also add to the growing evidence that career adaptability and proactive personality may not be adequate fits for the PWT model. Moreover, the study highlights the importance of examining women Veterans and their career development as a unique cohort. Practical implications for policy, clinical practice, and research are discussed.

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Examining Access to Decent Work Among Women Veterans:

A Psychology of Working Theory Perspective

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A Dissertation

Presented to

the Faculty of the Morgridge College of Education

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In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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by

Rebecca C. Gaines, M.A.

August 2023

Advisor: Patton O. Garriott, Ph.D.

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Title: Examining Access to Decent Work Among Women Veterans: A Psychology of Working Theory Perspective

Advisor: Patton O. Garriott, Ph.D.

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### **Abstract**

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## **Chapter One: Introduction and Literature Review**

The transition from military to civilian life includes many unique challenges and needs. Finding gainful employment after military service has shown to be a complicated process, even though Veterans have a lower unemployment rate than civilians overall (Thomas & Hunter, 2019). Servicemembers who identify as women have a distinct set of circumstances that could make their job-seeking process more difficult, such as being more likely to be homeless, single parents, younger, and identify as racial/ethnic minorities (e.g., Black and Latina) than male servicemembers (Thom & Bassuk, 2012; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). Women in the military are also more likely to have experienced trauma both before they enlisted and while in the military (Greer, 2017). Moreover, as they transition out of a masculine military environment, women Veterans also need to negotiate the intersection of their gender and military identities. These qualities and factors are likely to make their experience in the military, and thus their transition out of the military into civilian employment, markedly different from their male counterparts.

Women are the fastest growing group of Veterans: approximately 10% of the Veteran population are women, and that percentage is projected to rise by 1-2% every five years (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2015; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). Women are well represented in the post-9/11 Veteran population,

comprising 33% of that cohort. Meanwhile, the overall Veteran population is expected to decrease by 1.5% per year, suggesting that women's increased enlistment and service should be a major consideration for the military (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2015). With their growing numbers and specialized considerations within the military, there is an urgent need to place explicit focus on their career transition and career development needs.

Given the barriers that many women Veterans face while seeking post-military employment, the Psychology of Working Theory (PWT) is a useful framework for exploring how individuals who have experienced marginalization secure decent and meaningful work (Duffy, Blustein, Diemer, & Autin, 2016). Specifically, women Veterans experience unique forms of marginalization due to their gender in an institution which highly advantages men and masculinity. Women in the military are more likely to hold intersecting identities that could lead to further oppression, which might constrict their ability to consistently secure decent work as they transition to civilian careers.

### **Military Culture**

The military is a distinct cultural group, with their own traditions, norms, and expectations separate from the civilian American population (Coll & Weiss, 2016; Reger, Etherage, Reger, & Gahm, 2008). Servicemembers are taught to put their collective mission first and to respect the chain of command above all else – tenets that may be contradictory to typical American civilian culture (Denke & Barnes, 2013). This “mission-first” mentality creates expectations of peak performance at all times to enable the survival of the group, regardless of the needs of individuals.

**Military identity development.** During boot camp or basic training, there is a process of socialization in which new recruits are stripped of their civilian identity, which is replaced with their military identity (Demers, 2013). Even though recruits may come from different cultural backgrounds, they are expected to assimilate into military culture. Paulson (2005) outlined three stages of military identity development: separation, initiation, and return (Demers, 2013). Separation includes removing an individual from their former cultural life and society, taking away those cultural markers, imposing new customs, and thus eliminating a sense of individuality and personal identity. During the second stage, initiation, the individual stratifies two social identities – neither belonging to their former culture, nor military culture. At this point, the individual is in a transition phase as they begin to adapt new social norms, such as equality and comradeship. During the return stage, also known as “incorporation” in an earlier military identity model (Van Genep, 1960 via Demers, 2013), the individual begins to identify with their new military culture after socialization. Thus, they are prepared to enter combat with military cultural norms supportive of their actions.

This indoctrination process allows servicemembers to be able to conduct themselves in ways that may not align with their previous lifestyles or beliefs (Demers, 2013; McGurk, Cotting, Britt, & Adler, 2006). The main goals are threefold. First, indoctrination instills in recruits that their personal interests and needs are less important than those of the group’s, especially when it comes to survival. They need to be willing to follow orders to fulfill their duty. Next, it teaches recruits to kill another person to accomplish a mission. Finally, it supports recruits to see themselves as a collective group,

rather than as individual units. The training instills into recruits that they should never abandon a fellow servicemember and never display signs of weakness.

**Masculinity and military culture.** While military culture has grown to be more inclusive of women, it remains rooted in a predominantly masculine ideal (Culver, 2013; Demers, 2013; Steidl & Brookshire, 2019). The U.S. military has long maintained strong beliefs about traditional gender roles, including the historical belief that women did not have a place in the military. There is an institutional resistance to the presence of women and feminism (Reppert, Buzzetta, & Rose, 2014). This view was especially pervasive and toxic for women who enlisted before 9/11 in the 1970s and 80s (Thom & Bassuk, 2012). Conventional masculine qualities, such as aggression, strength, toughness, and dominance, are privileged within the military, whereas traditional feminine qualities (i.e., empathy, warmth, cooperation) are not (Greer, 2020; Steidl & Brookshire, 2019). Demonstrating hypermasculine traits conveys the image of a highly competent servicemember, thus, success in the military workplace requires a strict adherence to extreme masculinity.

As women have traditionally been excluded from front line roles, they were not able to perform what was considered the most “masculine” (and therefore, the most respected) of roles within the military context: being in direct combat (Crowley & Sandhoff, 2017). Even with the ban against women serving in the military lifted, questions remain around the cultural image of a woman in combat. Persistent attitudinal differences within the military may contribute to women being viewed as “less than” or “not belonging” within the hyper-masculine culture (Mankowski, Tower, Brandt, &

Mattocks, 2015). This view may exclude many women from receiving appropriate services and support from the military as they transition to civilian status.

### **Women's Inclusion in the Military**

**History of inclusion.** Women were officially permitted into the armed forces with the establishment of the Army Nurses Corps in 1901 (Coll & Weiss, 2016). Until that point, women were only allowed to serve in supportive roles such as cooks, launderers, tailors – or the occasional spy, as they could remain conspicuous given public knowledge that women were barred entry. The Women's Army Corps was created in 1943, which meant women could formally enlist for service (Trobough, 2018). Their presence was not a welcome one; slander campaigns decrying their aptitude led to low levels of enlistment during the first few years of eligibility. Women who served in the latter half of the twentieth century were able to be in a wide variety of occupational specialties, but pervasive systematic and institutional gender bias maintained policies prohibiting them from combat (Barry, 2013; Trobough, 2018). This ban effectively barred women from positions that were considered to be necessary opportunities for career advancement within the military (Barry, 2013).

The Gulf War, beginning in 1990, and the War on Terror, beginning in 2001, brought a new kind of warfare (Barry, 2013). Frontlines were obviated and every member of a squad needed to be equipped to fight. Even though women were still technically banned from combat roles, they were in just as much, if not greater danger. By serving in positions such as guard duty and support attachments to ground combat units, they were on the front lines without the same training or protection as the men. Essentially, women

were doing combat work without the professional recognition, thus perpetuating their inability to receive career-enhancing opportunities. As the changing nature of war demonstrated that women servicemembers could perform combat tasks, the Department of Defense decided to officially integrate women into combat positions in 2015 (Trobough, 2018). However, women servicemembers tend to remain employed in medical, clerical, and administrative positions – still preventing them from achieving the career accolades that come from combat roles (Eichler, 2017).

**Recruiting marginalized servicemembers.** It is well documented that the military heavily recruits young adults from marginalized backgrounds, especially those from low-income and rural areas (Hagopian & Barker, 2017). These recruitment tactics, colloquially known as the “Poverty Draft,” specifically target young African-American and Latinx men and women from lower socioeconomic backgrounds to join the military (McGlynn & Lavariega Monforti, 2010). While policies exist to limit the presence of military recruiters in high schools, recruiters have developed ways to skirt around these regulations in areas that have “high primary targets”: students who would have difficulty affording college (Hagopian & Barker, 2017). In particular, young women of color have been increasingly targeted for recruitment since 9/11 (Wilmoth, London, & Parker, 2011; Thom & Bassuk, 2012). This has led to a dramatic increase of both gender and racial minorities in the military, thus changing the traditional image of who is actively serving.

**Women of color in the military.** There is more racial diversity among active-duty women than active-duty men, with approximately one-third of active-duty women identifying as Black or African-American compared to only 16% of men (Patten &

Parker, 2010). Studies have suggested that women of color may join the military for different reasons than white women, such as perceiving that the military may offer more equal opportunities for them that may not be found in civilian jobs (Foynes, Shipherd, & Harrington, 2013; Mankowski, Tower, Brandt, & Mattocks, 2015). There is a belief that the strict structure and norms set by the military may create an environment less dominated by racial and cultural biases (Mankowski, Tower, Brandt, & Mattocks, 2015).

However, when examining the intersection of experiencing both racial- and gender-based discrimination for women Marines of color, it has been demonstrated that these women consistently experience higher levels of harassment in the military than their white female counterparts (Foynes, Shipherd, & Harrington, 2013). Additionally, servicemembers who identify as racial minorities and women are less likely to qualify for highly technical specialty positions, otherwise known as their military occupational specialty (MOS) (Herbert, 1994, via Thom & Bassuk, 2012). Thus, they have fewer highly specialized skills to transfer into their civilian employment. With the increase in recruitment of low-income women of color, this population is also less likely than their white peers to have social capital or generational wealth to bolster them if they struggle to find sufficient employment as they transition out of the military (Hagopian & Barker, 2017).

### **Negotiating Gender Roles**

**Gender Identity Development of Women in the Military theory.** The presence of women in a traditionally hypermasculine environments has challenged patriarchal structures. Therefore, women must find ways to succeed in a setting in which they may



not have previously been socialized (Culver, 2013). Culver (2013) developed the Gender Identity Development of Women in the Military theory, a four-phase matrix that explores how women in the military employ compensation strategies within their male-dominated environments. This happens either through embracing the “warrior” side (e.g., embodying a masculine ideal) or the “femininity” side. It was adapted from Edwards & Jones’ (2009) Grounded Theory of College Men’s Gender Identity Development.

The first phase, *Feeling the need to put on a mask*, describes how women in the military learn to identify their own insecurities. Women can feel “warrior insecurity,” where the insecurity focuses on a possible inability to embrace the masculine military ideal, or they might feel “femininity insecurity,” where the insecurity centers around an inability to maintain their identity as a “real woman” within a military environment. The second phase, *Wearing a mask*, refers to how women utilize coping strategies related to the insecurities. They might don the “warrior mask,” in which their compensation strategies involve meeting societal and cultural expectations of what a service member must be. Alternatively, they can don the “femininity mask,” where strategies align with meeting societal and cultural expectations for what a woman must be. In the third phase, *Recognizing and experiencing the consequences of wearing a mask*, women in the military start to see that they are losing parts of their true identities by wearing a mask and using strategies that restructure their gender identity to meet a societal expectation, rather than an individual sense of self. Lastly, the fourth stage, *Struggling to take off the mask*, explores how women come to terms with their internal expectations of identity, rather than conforming to external demands.

**Performative gender expectations.** It has been argued that women servicemembers need to balance both their feminine and masculine sides, with both sides having opposing demands and expectations (Crowley & Sandhoff, 2017; Demers, 2013). One qualitative study with women Veterans found that many participants had identified as tomboys as they were growing up, and they believed this quality would help them to be accepted in the military (Crowley & Sandhoff, 2017). Researchers also found that the women participants expressed a disdain towards stereotypical feminine traits (Crowley & Sandhoff, 2017).

It has been suggested women servicemembers tend to suppress what they perceive as their feminine traits to conform to the masculine notion of the “ideal soldier” (Demers, 2013; Greer, 2020). Women servicemembers have to negotiate the ambiguous space between masculinity and femininity, with the knowledge that performing a more masculine gender role may enhance the perception that they are a more competent servicemember. Therefore, women in the military are constantly being asked to perform gendered traits regardless of their internal sense of gender expression while on active duty. This identity negotiation, among the overall sense of marginalization experienced due to their gender, has been shown to compound the difficulty experienced when women servicemembers choose to leave the military and transition to civilian life (Greer, 2020).

### **Transition to Civilian Workforce**

Many women Veterans successfully find employment upon separating or retiring from the military. However, a significant number of other women face barriers which can lead to long-lasting consequences. Nobody cannot make this journey alone, especially

those who have faced additional hurdles to achievement under military culture. Women Veterans need structural support to successfully facilitate the transition, particularly into finding meaningful civilian employment (Mankowski, Tower, Brandt, & Mattocks, 2015).

**Psychological challenges during transition.** Veterans have reported feeling a “culture shock” upon returning to their civilian life, as their experiences on deployment were unlike anything their civilian peers could understand (Ahern, Worthen, Masters, Lippman, Ozer, & Moos, 2015; Johnson et al., 2018). One qualitative study found three main themes to explain these servicemembers’ disconnection from civilian life (Ahern et al., 2015). *Military as family* explained how Veterans see their comrades as “family” who take care of each other through difficult times. *Normal is alien* explored how Veterans experience disconnection from civilian life and do not feel supported by standard civilian institutions or norms. *Searching for a new normal* captures strategies that Veterans used to rejoin civilian society. Veterans have reported a sense of grief upon returning, mourning leaving their military life behind them (Demers, 2013). Some Veterans have expressed a desire to “undo” the indoctrination they underwent in basic training or bootcamp, seeking to find their authentic self while integrating their military experience into their identity.

**Misaligned expectations of civilian employment.** Mankowski, Tower, Brandt, & Mattocks (2015) found that the majority of participants in a qualitative study – all women Veterans – felt their expectations of military experience translating to fulfilling civilian employment did not materialize. Transferring their military skills to civilian work was

not simple for these women. While having the military on their resume may have opened the door to interviews, they felt that their military skills did not match what was required for civilian jobs. For example, Veterans with years of combat medical training may not have licenses required to practice in the civilian healthcare industry. This was especially true for women who enlisted right out of high school and did not have more professional experience, either in the civilian or military workplace. Additionally, several participants in the Mankowski et al. (2015) study cited physical and mental health concerns that made it difficult to keep employment once discharged. Upon leaving the military, several of the participants faced unemployment as well as underemployment.

***Gender and military identity management.*** Women Veterans transitioning to the workforce may feel a desire to conceal their military identity, possibly seeing the intersection of their gender and military status as a potential source for harassment (Thomas & Hunter, 2019). This tension underscores how women are asked to behave differently in the gendered environments of both military and civilian culture, with military culture privileging traditional masculine traits and civilian culture expecting traditional feminine traits (Greer, 2020). Women Veterans may fear that acting either too feminine (i.e., not competent) or too masculine (i.e., being seen as a threat to the men's employment) may jeopardize their employment opportunities and make them targets for discrimination (Thomas & Hunter, 2019). This fear leads to a lack of trust between women Veterans and their male colleagues, and they often report needing to "prove" themselves and their capabilities to complete job tasks and belong (Thomas, Haring,

McDaniel, Fletcher, & Albright, 2017). Thus, women Veterans may feel marginalized in both their military and civilian identities, leading to identity confusion (Greer, 2020).

Concealing a stigmatized identity has been described as an “identity management strategy” in which members choose to conceal to increase acceptance and belonging (Newheiser & Barreto, 2014). Despite their intentions of trying to fit in, engaging in concealment has been shown to lead to women reporting a reduced sense of belongingness and fewer positive evaluations by others, as those women are perceived as less willing to self-disclose and engage in intimacy-building behaviors with colleagues (Newheiser & Barreto, 2014; Thomas & Hunter, 2019). Women Veterans may need to learn new ways to negotiate their gender identity in a new world where the hypermasculine is not necessarily the idealized image and where they can feel trust and egalitarianism with their male and non-Veteran colleagues. When support services do not adequately support gender-specific transition needs, women Veterans’ ability to get hired and be successful in their careers is negatively impacted (Greer, 2020).

**Employment obstacles for women Veterans.** In the years following the 2008 recession, unemployment rates for Veterans, and particularly for women, were at all-time highs (Gross, 2019). In 2011, it was reported that the average unemployment rate for women Veterans was 9.1%, with the unemployment rate for 18-24-year-old women Veterans at 36.1% (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012). The incomes of women Veterans were lower, and their unemployment rates were nearly twice as high, than those of their male counterparts, as well as compared to their civilian peers (Duggan & Jurgens, 2007; Thom & Bassuk, 2012). Given these dire employment circumstances,

governments, Veterans organizations, and private companies banded together to pass policies and create task forces to create more opportunities for Veterans (Gross, 2019). By 2019, the unemployment rate had hit a historic low – only 3.7% of women Veterans and 3% of male Veterans were unemployed (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020).

***COVID-19 economic impacts.*** While the numbers of low unemployment are promising, they must be interpreted with caution. The COVID-19 pandemic brought on an economic recession in 2020, producing the highest levels of unemployment nationally since the Great Depression (Kochhar, 2020). Veterans thus far have been hit particularly hard – in May 2020, approximately 1 million Veterans were unemployed, which translates to roughly a 12% unemployment rate for Veterans (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020). By comparison, the highest level of unemployment during the 2008 recession was 10.6%. Women Veterans have been impacted worse than male Veterans in the 2020 recession, with about 14% of women Veterans filing for unemployment benefits compared to 11.4% of men Veterans (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020).

***Mental health.*** Numerous studies have shown that women Veterans have worse mental health outcomes than both non-Veteran women and male Veterans (Greer, 2017; Thom & Bassuk, 2012; Tsai, Rosenheck, & McGuire, 2012). Unemployed women Veterans are more likely to screen positive for PTSD and depression than employed women Veterans (Greer, 2017). Furthermore, PTSD and depression have been shown to be related to poorer work-related quality of life outcomes for women Veterans (Schnurr & Lunney, 2011). Suffering from poorer mental health may make it more difficult for this population to develop coping strategies, thus decreasing the psychological resources

needed to find and maintain fulfilling civilian employment (Harvey et al., 2011; Schnurr & Lunney, 2011).

***Military sexual trauma.*** Women servicemembers experience significantly higher levels of gender-based violence and harassment than male servicemembers – about one-third of women Veterans (throughout all generations of women Veterans) report being sexually assaulted in the military (Reppert, Buzzetta, & Rose, 2014). While military sexual trauma (MST) is not an experience that exclusively affects women, women Veterans disproportionately face this phenomenon and therefore disproportionately cope with the repercussions (Thom & Bassuk, 2012). Experiencing MST has been strongly linked to PTSD, depression, anxiety, eating disorders, personality disorders, chronic illnesses, substance use disorders (Tamez & Hazler, 2014; Thom & Bassuk, 2012). These ramifications of MST have been associated with increased difficulty and securing employment (Thom & Bassuk, 2012).

Moreover, the choice to report MST is often a fraught decision, given the potential negative effects that a woman may experience for reporting. The consequences for reporting, such as being involuntarily discharged before the survivor feels ready to leave the military, could further complicate their transition to civilian employment (Dichter & True, 2014; Tamez & Hazler, 2014). Experiencing harassment and MST has been cited as one of the main reasons why women separate prematurely from the military, leaving them seeking civilian employment before they were prepared to do so (Dichter & True, 2014).

***Disability.*** Veterans are more likely than civilians to have a disability, and women Veterans are more likely than male Veterans to be disabled (Prokos & Cabbage, 2017). Nearly one-third of women Veterans have a disability, and women Veterans' odds of having a disability was 23% higher than non-Veterans (Wilmoth, London, & Parker, 2011). This pronounced difference is not as high between male Veterans and male civilians. Incurring a service-related disability has been shown to be associated with lost earnings, more economic difficulties, and lower participation in the labor force (Prokos & Cabbage, 2017). The types of jobs available to people with disabilities may be limited and not as lucrative as those available to individuals without a disability. Reduced work due to an injury can also decrease women's future occupational opportunities, which may impact their family and community (Heaton et al., 2012).

***Homelessness.*** Women Veterans are more likely to be homeless than male Veterans, with approximately 9% of women Veterans reporting experiencing homelessness in 2019 (Henry et al., 2019). This rate is about four times more than civilian women (Tamez & Hazler, 2014). Additionally, while the rate of homelessness for male Veterans is going down, the rate for women Veterans is rapidly growing (Henry et al., 2019). This has been attributed to the increased number of risk factors for homelessness that tend to affect women in the military more, such as physical/sexual trauma, being caregivers of children, and being younger (Eichler & Smith-Evans, 2017). Experiencing homelessness makes it more difficult for individuals to find and maintain stable employment and supports, especially when they have co-occurring risk factors or hold marginalized identities (Thom & Bassuk, 2012).



***Parenting.*** It has been reported that over 40% of women serving in Iraq and Afghanistan were parents (Tamez & Hazler, 2014). Women Veterans are more likely than men to be single parents, which places added burdens on them to support their family unit (Reppert, Buzzetta, & Rose, 2014). Several studies have found that women Veterans reported challenges reintegrating into family life, particularly as they are re-adjusting to being parents (Maiocco & Smith, 2016; Tamez & Hazler, 2014). If a Veteran deployed when her children were very young, her children might not recognize her. Older children might display resentment or anger at her absence. Given our stereotypical societal expectations of how mothers should be with their children, women may be more likely to experience guilt over their absence from their children's lives (Greer, 2017). Combined with their greater chance of being single parents, women Veterans are also more likely to be divorced, leaving them with handling the stressors of reintegration, parenting, financial concerns without support from a partner (Tamez & Hazler, 2014).

***Barriers to accessing VA healthcare.*** It is well documented that women have a more difficult time accessing VA healthcare (Braun, Kennedy, Sadler, & Dixon, 2015). Fewer women use the VA for their healthcare needs than men do, although the numbers of women coming to the VA has been increasing steadily in recent years as more women who served in Iraq and Afghanistan are returning to the United States (Tamez & Hazler, 2014). It has been reported that women Veterans experience gender-related bias at the VA, lack of gender-specific care, and less sensitivity towards women-specific needs (Thom & Bassuk, 2012). Additionally, in rural or remote areas, health care providers may not have gender-specific training (Braun, Kennedy, Sadler, & Dixon, 2015). If women

feel uncomfortable getting their healthcare through the VA, they may be required to pay for other health services not covered by VA insurance. Furthermore, Veterans must be assessed at the VA to receive documented service-related disabilities. If women are not able to access those service connections as easily, it has negative implications for receiving financial employment benefits from the military.

***Underemployment.*** Underemployment, which is defined as engaging in work that does not make full use of one's skills or abilities, or working below a reasonably expected standard of employment, has been found to be a significant problem with Veteran populations (Boatright & Roberts, 2019; Kim & Allan, 2020). Approximately 33% of Veterans are underemployed, and they are 15.6% more likely to be underemployed than civilians (Boatright & Roberts, 2019). Underemployment particularly affects women Veterans who live in rural areas, who have less access to skilled jobs that could be found in urban areas (Szelwach, Steinkolger, Badger, & Muttukumaro, 2011). As women Veterans are more likely to be single parents, the lack of childcare options in rural communities additionally contributes to their struggles with finding full-time employment. Amongst all Veterans, underemployment has been explored with the "military-experience hypothesis," which describes how the rate of Veteran unemployment has decreased, yet the rate of underemployment has remained high (Boatright & Roberts, 2019). The hypothesis posits that this occurs because there is a perception in the civilian corporate world that military skills are not always translatable or relevant.

These factors demonstrate how unemployment statistics do not tell the full story – just because a Veteran is able to find a job does not mean they derive satisfaction (or even a decent paycheck) from it (Kim & Allan, 2020). When Veterans are underemployed, they are still counted as part of the employed in Bureau of Labor Statistics. Kim & Allan (2020) found that underemployment is negatively correlated with autonomy, which is in turn positively correlated with meaningful work. Thus, the results suggest that underemployment may hurt workers’ autonomy, leading to engaging in less meaningful work. When workers feel like they do not have control over their work-related tasks, they are less likely to derive meaning from those tasks and have less intrinsic motivation to succeed.

**Programmatic support.** In an internal report, the VA stated that “there is insufficient integration and collaboration within VA and among external resources in the area of employment and career development/workforce training for women Veterans” (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012, p. 18). While there are several job transition programs available, Veterans of all genders often report challenges fully utilizing them (Fauer, Rogers-Brodersen, & Baile, 2014). Additionally, the VA has created intervention programs to work on remedying specific health problems such as PTSD and chronic illnesses as a way to mediate some of the difficulties associated with job-seeking, as well as case management for Veterans experiencing homelessness (Burkhart & Hogan, 2015). However, these multi-disciplinary interventions have only demonstrated limited success (Burkhart & Hogan, 2015; Fauer, Rogers-Brodersen, & Baile, 2014).

***Transition Assistance Program.*** As Veterans prepare to transition out of the military, they are required to enroll in the Department of Defense's Transition Assistance Program (TAP), which was established by Congress in 1990 (Department of Defense, 2020; Fauer, Rogers-Broderson, & Baile, 2014). TAP is an outcome-based program that provides training for successfully transitioning into civilian careers. The Department of Defense (DoD) and the VA re-designed TAP in 2011 in hopes of better serving Veterans' individualized needs (Fauer, Rogers-Broderson, & Baile, 2014). This included mandatory pre-separation individual counseling and separate tracks based on Veterans' post-military employment goals, such as going to college or starting a business. The TAP curriculum also includes resources for job applications, financial planning, and job search assistance. New requirements for TAP were created in 2019, which stipulated that servicemembers need to begin individual counseling at least one year before their separation date and attend specialized TAP workshops (Department of Defense, 2020). During the individual counseling sessions, servicemembers complete a needs assessment to help identify their personalized transition needs and goals.

However, it has been reported that less than half of TAP participants found it to be effective for helping them transition successfully out of the military (Prudential, 2012). Studies exploring Veterans' experiences transitioning have shown that finding work is one of the most difficult transition tasks, even with TAP assistance (Fauer, Rogers-Broderson, & Baile, 2014; Keeling, Kintzle, & Castro, 2018; Prudential, 2012). Veterans have reported misaligned expectations of finding a job immediately upon leaving the military with the reality of what is required to successfully acquire fulfilling

employment (Castro, Kintzle, & Hassan, 2015). Often, more time than expected is needed to acclimate to civilian life before being able to continue the job search process.

***DAV Recommendations.*** With the additional employment challenges faced by women Veterans, it remains of interest how the VA and DoD can tailor TAP to accommodate those needs. A comprehensive report by Disabled American Veterans (DAV), commissioned by the DoD, offered several recommendations for how to improve TAP access specifically for women Veterans (DAV, 2015). The report found that there are not any thorough empirical research studies that analyze the success of the TAP program. It suggested that while TAP training is primarily aimed at pre-separation servicemembers, it might be beneficial to increase accessibility to Veterans 6-12 months after separation when they may be more likely to be seeking employment assistance.

The report stated that TAP partners should formally assess the specific needs of women Veterans and incorporate specific trainings during the employment workshop (or even create a separate track) that speak to those needs. Next, DAV recommended that the DoD should give the contact information of all TAP participants to the VA and Department of Labor, who can then follow up with gender-sensitive options for additional support 6-12 months after their separation. Lastly, it is suggested that there should be a formal data collection process for TAP participation, success, and outcomes. The data can then be analyzed by gender and other key demographic variables, and returned promptly to military leaders who can implement changes based on the results. It is also recommended that employment and educational outcomes be tracked continually for all Veterans to judge the success of the program overall.

***Career counseling.*** It can be particularly challenging when civilian career expectations are not realized, and women Veterans may require gender-sensitive career training to best handle these situations during their transition. Greer (2020) outlined six learning and development goals for adult educators and career counselors who work with recently discharged women Veterans. These goals can be applied to career professionals working either in formal transition programs (such as TAP), in the Veterans' workplaces, or through higher education institutes. The aim of these goals is to help women navigate the complex culture shock of transitioning to civilian life, underlining the significance of identity formation regarding both their military and gender identities. The goals broadly discuss recognizing the gendered differences between military and civilian culture, acknowledging elements of both cultures that may register as either losses or gains, establishing a new identity that reconciles their experiences in both cultures, and developing interpersonal relational strategies to engage with family members and new colleagues alike. By explicitly considering gender-specific needs of women Veterans, career professionals can help them become more comfortable and secure in developing their new identities and strategies to handle transition challenges as they arise, despite external constraints.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Work is at the core for many of our lives, as it has been throughout human history. Career development theories have been traditionally rooted in the notion that one has choice and options over what path to pursue (Blustein, 2006; Blustein et al., 2019). Most career development theories (e.g., person-environment fit theories) were built on

finding a career based on the best fit for one's situation, personality traits, skills, or knowledge (e.g., Holland, 1958; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002; Parsons, 1909; Super, 1957). This supposition led to decades of scholarly research demonstrating that people who can find a match for their interests and personal qualities will be more satisfied and invested workers – that is, workers who are intrinsically motivated to move forward in their career (Blustein, 2006). Therefore, it becomes implied that people who do not work in fields that are good matches work purely for extrinsic reasons: their motivation is to survive, rather than thrive.

However, the assumption that one has full volition over their career path has been demonstrated to be fundamentally biased (Blustein, 2006; Blustein et al., 2019). These theories fail to account for the processes that motivate workers who have not been able to secure a career with its promises of advancement, security, responsibility, and satisfaction. Many people globally do not have the choice to choose a career; rather, circumstances dictate what they are able to do. Workers who do not have the option to fit neatly into a career trajectory are thus excluded from most career development narratives.

**Psychology of Working Framework.** Blustein (2006) introduced the Psychology of Working Framework (PWF) to complement traditional career development theories which typically focus on those who have full freedom and volition in career decision making (Blustein, Kenna, Gill, & DeVoy, 2008). By choosing to highlight sociocultural factors such as social class, privilege, and freedom of choice, PWF explores how individuals with traditionally marginalized backgrounds explore employment and make decisions regarding work (Blustein, 2006; Duffy et al., 2015). Blustein states that PWF is

“inherently inclusive” (p. 26) as it creates space for all individuals as they seek to understand how constraints and barriers due to discrimination shape their working world.

PWF is an apt theoretical framework from which to work within the realm of counseling psychology, as it aligns with counseling psychology’s core values of being socially just and inclusive of diverse populations in research and practice (Blustein, 2006). PWF operates from understanding the devastating impact that systemic oppression can have on individuals, especially those with marginalized identities. Rather than placing blame on the individual for not being able to achieve a desired career, it examines how oppressive systems can create barriers that prevent from moving forward in their development.

The PWF posits that engaging in work serves as a means for fulfilling three essential human needs: (a) survival and power; (b) social connections; and (c) self-determination (Blustein, 2006). Exploring how oppressed groups seek those three survival needs are at the crux of understanding career development for a more diverse population. While work has traditionally been linked to economic survival, PWF brings power into the analysis by investigating how work can serve a liberational function. Placing an explicit focus on the importance of work as a conduit to power emphasizes the many obstacles that keep people from attaining work. The need for social and relational connections has two components. First, work is often a way for us to create interpersonal connections and develop significant bonds. Second, working creates connections between individuals and a broader social context. The last need, working as a means for self-



determination, examines how extrinsically motivated activities (seen in previous theories as negative) can become internalized and lead to a wider set of goals.

**Psychology of Working Theory.** Building off the assumptions of PWF, the Psychology of Working Theory (PWT) proposes a model for understanding how individuals with marginalized backgrounds attain decent work (Blustein, 2006; Duffy et al., 2016). Duffy et al. (2016) developed an empirically testable theoretical model to capture the elements of the framework, thus integrating relationships that had been previously researched independently (See Figure 1).

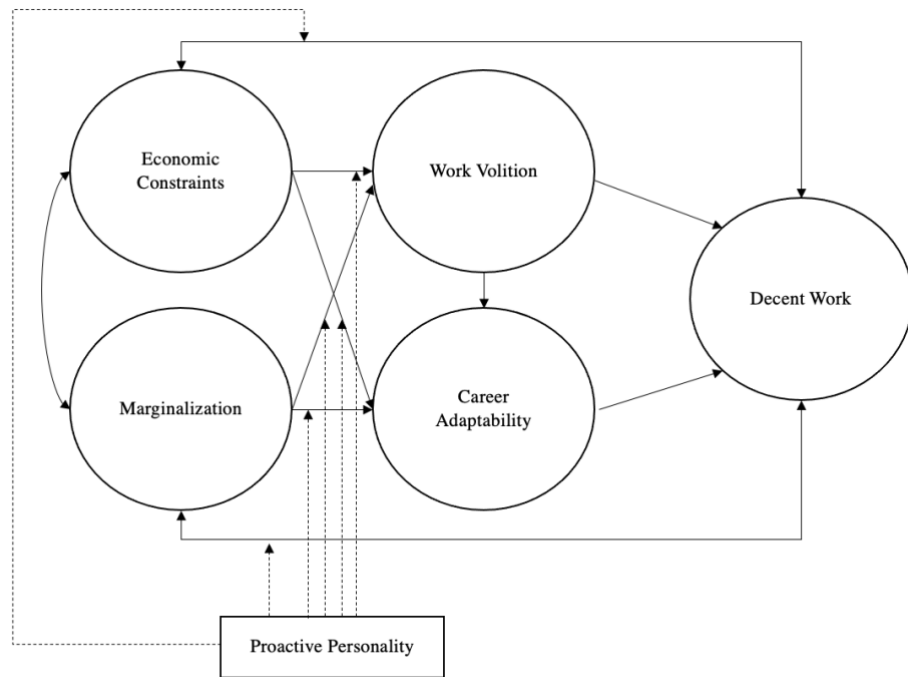


Figure 1. The psychology of working theory structural model.

The model aims to explain the components that comprise the process of attaining decent work, and how decent work leads to need satisfaction, work fulfillment, and well-being. It aims to primarily capture how populations who have experienced oppression are

impacted by the intersection of salient psychological constructs (Allan, Tebbe, Bouchard, & Duffy, 2019). The model offers 32 proposed pathways to illuminate relationships between predictor, moderator, and outcome variables of securing decent work, which is the theory's central construct. Given the complexity of the model, the original PWT authors (Duffy et al., 2016) suggested customizing the model and choosing constructs to best fit the primary research questions and appropriate populations. The present study focused on the propositions and constructs most relevant to women Veterans as established by prior research and theory.

The structural variables of economic constraints and marginalization are proposed to predict levels of securing decent work via the mediators of work volition and career adaptability. These pathways are hypothesized to be moderated by proactive personality, critical consciousness, social support, and economic conditions. Previous studies have sought to test the PWT hypotheses with various samples of adults. Support for PWT has been with individuals who identify as women (England et al., 2020), women of color (Kim et al., 2022), racial/ethnic minorities (Autin et al., 2022; Duffy et al., 2018), sexual minorities (Allan, Tebbe, Bouchard, & Duffy, 2019), transgender and nonconforming adults (Tebbe, Allan, & Bell, 2019), middle-aged adults (Kim, Fouad, Maeda, Xie, & Nazan, 2018), and workers with chronic illnesses (Tokar & Kaut, 2018).

Together, work volition, career adaptability, and proactive personality are considered by PWT scholars to fall under the construct of proactive engagement; that is, tapping into "individuals' internal resources to manage and change aspects of the environment" (Blustein et al., 2019, p. 242). Proactive engagement is a form of agentic

action, which are ways in which individuals can take action to change both themselves and systems. Research literature has supported that these three variables are all related to individuals' internal ability to make change (Blustein, 2006; Blustein et al., 2019; Duffy et al., 2016). This internally fueled engagement provides direction for people to develop and maintain personal and vocational tasks. Ideally, greater proactive engagement would give individuals a sense of fulfilment and push to take action for themselves and their surrounding environments. As women Veterans have continually demonstrated the need to advocate for themselves within a system that has traditionally oppressed them, the present study has chosen to include proactive personality to better understand the role of proactive engagement in post-military career decision making. The variables selected for the present study will be explored further below.

*Decent work* is the central variable of the PWT model. The concept of decent work was initially conceptualized by the International Labor Organization (ILO), an UN agency focused on promoting workers' rights (Burchell, Sehnbruch, Piasna, & Agloni, 2014; ILO, 2018). The ILO defines decent work as "minimum standards necessary for adequate functioning at work" (Blustein, Kenny, Autin, & Duffy, 2019, p. 239). The PWT framework adapted the ILO's definition of decent work and proposes that decent work exists when five main conditions are met: (a) safe physical and psychological working conditions; (b) adequate time for rest and free time; (c) matching values between the organization's values and an individual's social/family values; (d) adequate compensation; and (e) access to suitable health care (Duffy et al., 2016). The two main contextual variables, marginalization and economic constraints, are hypothesized to

predict access to decent work via mediating factors of work volition and career adaptability. Higher levels of marginalization and economic constraints are proposed to lead to lower levels of access to decent work. Marginalization and economic constraints are distinct yet overlapping constructs – their intersection can result in various levels of oppression or privilege depending on the extent to which each variable is experienced (Douglass, Velez, Conlin, Duffy, & England, 2017; Duffy et al., 2016).

Given the circumstances that often accompany or lead to economic constraints, PWT scholars emphasize the connection between experiencing financial barriers and marginalization (Duffy et al., 2018; Douglass et al., 2020). As each individual holds multiple identities, those identities can intersect in ways that may compound levels of oppression or privilege (Cole, 2009). Experiencing intersectional oppression has been linked to negative physical and mental health outcomes (Simons et al., 2020). For example, women in a lower socioeconomic status bracket have been shown to be at higher risk for depression, obesity, diabetes, and other chronic health conditions (Simons et al., 2020). Moreover, women with marginalized racial/ethnic identities tend to be the ones who work low-paying jobs – thus reinforcing a system that perpetuates discrimination (Stamarski & Son Hing, 2015). Previous PWT studies specifically testing the connection between economic constraints and marginalization have found strong support for their empirical connection in diverse samples (Douglass et al., 2020; Duffy et al., 2017; England et al., 2020). Following this wide breadth of research supporting the intersection of these constructs, the present study hypothesizes that women Veterans’

experiences of marginalization and economic constraints will be positively correlated (Hypothesis 1).

*Marginalization* refers to the process of relegating a group or class of people to a disadvantaged or less powerful position (Duffy et al., 2016). A large body of research has demonstrated how oppression and marginalization decreases equality in ability to access decent work (Blustein, Olle, Connors-Kellgren, & Diamonti, 2016; Cole, 2009). The benefits conferred by race, ethnicity, class, gender, and other identities contribute to disparities in accessing decent work. Experiencing marginalization can create constraints and barriers to career development such as being excluded on the basis of an identity, lacking connections to exclusive employment institutions, or lack of accommodations within the workplace that facilitate upwards mobility. These common occurrences have been linked to poorer workplace outcomes, with marginalized individuals showing worse job satisfaction, longer work hours, lower pay, and fewer protections against employers than individuals with more privileged identities (Binggeli, Dietz, & Krings, 2013; Duffy et al., 2016). Within the PWT model, marginalization is proposed to predict a decreased ability to secure decent work.

Marginalization has been assessed frequently within the PWT literature among diverse samples, and the literature tends to support the PWT proposition. In a study with a sample of 528 employed women, England et al. (2020) found negative experiences of marginalization negatively predicted ability to secure decent work. This prediction was empirically supported by previous PWT studies among sexual minorities (Douglass et al., 2017) and employed adults who hold racial/ethnic minority identities (Duffy et al., 2017),

all of which demonstrated the same results. All of the studies yielded strong support for work volition mediating the relationship between marginalization and decent work. These results suggest that working women may feel they have less choice in deciding their career paths due to their marginalized identities (England et al., 2020). Building from these findings, it is hypothesized that marginalization based on one's gender identity as a woman will be negatively associated with decent work (Hypothesis 2), work volition (Hypothesis 3), and career adaptability (Hypothesis 4).

*Economic constraints* reflect the limited financial resources (such as family wealth or annual income) that create obstacles to obtaining decent work (Duffy et al., 2016). Limited financial resources impact an individual's or family's ability to access or invest in the resources that would allow them to pursue opportunities that could facilitate career development. For example, schools, extracurricular experiences, and internships are factors that could facilitate achievement, but typically only if higher quality options are available (Huston & Bently, 2010). Individuals with more constrained economic resources tend to have limited access to those experiences which often serve as steppingstones to career advancement (Diemer & Rasheed Ali, 2009). Increased economic constraints are posited to be more likely to engage with decent work. It should be noted that the ability to get decent work may be dependent upon accessing a certain level of economic resources, indicating a plateau effect rather than a direct linear relationship (Duffy et al., 2016). That is, after a specific level of income is achieved, increasing income after that may not have an effect on quality of life. Thus, it is hypothesized that the economic constraints experienced by women Veterans will have

negative associations with decent work (Hypothesis 5), work volition (Hypothesis 6), and career adaptability (Hypothesis 7).

*Work volition* represents an individual's sense of control over their career development (Duffy, Diemer, Perry, Laurenzi, & Torrey, 2012). While work volition is subjective, it is hypothesized to develop from real structural limitations (Duffy et al., 2012). Given that it is perceived, it also has the potential to be changed. Greater work volition has been found to be associated with positive work outcomes, such as positive affect, life satisfaction, career maturity, person-environment fit, work meaning, and job satisfaction (Duffy, Autin, & Bot, 2015; Duffy, Bott, Allan, & Torrey, 2013; Jadadian & Duffy, 2012). In the PWT model, work volition is a mediator variable between marginalization/economic constraints and decent work.

Work volition has been examined previously with Veterans; however, the lone study with Veterans had a sample that was 70.5% male (Duffy, Jadadian, Douglass, & Allan, 2015). When tested in a sample consisting of all women (N = 528), results show additional support for work volition as a mediator between the contextual variables and endorsing higher levels of decent work, as well as mediating the relationship between career adaptability and decent work (England et al., 2020). The findings suggested that more education, higher income, being married, and holding full-time employment significantly predicted higher work volition (Duffy, Jadadian, Douglass, & Allan, 2015). That is, holding more socioeconomic privilege was associated with having more control and flexibility in career decision making. Notably, the results indicate that having a general sense of control over one's life was a strong predictor of work volition.

Therefore, it is hypothesized in this study that work volition will be positively associated with securing decent work (Hypothesis 8).

*Career adaptability* is an individual's ability to psychologically cope with current and anticipated work-related tasks (Blustein et al., 2019; Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Similar to work volition, it is also a subjective variable that is affected by situational constraints but is malleable. Career adaptability is comprised of four components: concern, control, curiosity, and confidence (Savickas & Porfeli, 2012). Each component relates to a different aspect of adaptability regarding one's current vocational tasks and future vocational goals: concern over preparing for one's vocational future, control over degree of responsibility felt for one's life and future career, curiosity about the self-exploration process regarding future opportunities, and confidence in one's ability to overcome vocational obstacles. Engaging in these four self-regulatory strengths has been linked to better work outcomes, with hope and optimism seen as key variables that explain why greater career adaptability is associated with positive work experiences (Duffy et al., 2016). PWT scholars posit that individuals (regardless of gender) who have fewer economic constraints have more access to external resources and thus, better perceptions of their own career adaptability (Blustein, 2006). Career adaptability in PWT is a mediator between marginalization/economic constraints and decent work, suggesting that greater career adaptability may lead to a higher likelihood of securing decent work. Given the past research on career adaptability as well as vocational barriers that women Veterans have experienced, it is hypothesized that higher levels of career adaptability will be positively correlated to attaining decent work (Hypothesis 9).



*Proactive personality* refers to a personality trait in which individuals take initiative to control their own environment (Li, Lang, & Crant, 2010). Higher levels of proactive personality would indicate that individuals are more likely to have an influence over their current circumstances and change them when necessary, rather than passively accept the constraints thrust upon them (Tolentino, Garcia, Lu, Restubog, Bordia, & Plewa, 2014). Therefore, it would be expected that proactive individuals will be more active in shaping their vocational life and initiating their career adaptability strategies. It is pertinent to note that the development of a proactive personality, while seen as an individualistic characteristic, happens within a social and systemic context (Duffy et al., 2016). Individuals who display lower levels of proactive personality or display difficulty achieving that agency are not to be blamed; rather, it should be noted that the environmental conditions that could impact the development of such personality traits. The ability to have personal agency, especially in a career development context, is a privilege.

Having a proactive personality has been linked with higher work engagement, increased career success, active job-seeking behaviors when unemployed, job performance, and overall well-being (Duffy et al., 2016; Fuller & Marler, 2009; Li, Lang, & Crant, 2010). Additionally, the research literature suggests that having a proactive personality is a trait that accounts for unique personality variance beyond what the Big Five personality traits capture (Bakker, Tims, & Derks, 2012). As this personality trait pushes someone forward to initiate change in their environment, it has been suggested to be particularly important when one's environment does not provide as many vocational

opportunities (Duffy et al., 2016). Moreover, it has been suggested that having a proactive personality may compensate for some societal disadvantages, especially education level and socioeconomic status (Ayoub et al., 2018; Douglass et al., 2020). Therefore, the PWT model proposes that having a proactive personality will act as a buffer between the impact of marginalization and economic constraints on work volition, career adaptability, and ability to attain decent work.

Moderators in the PWT model (proactive personality, critical consciousness, social support, and economic conditions) have been hypothesized to lead to decent work, but few studies have examined their empirical support. Proactive personality has thus far only been explored as a theorized moderator in two studies, with mixed results (Douglass et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2019). Wang et al. (2019) examined a sample of 377 Chinese urban workers and found that proactive personality and social support were moderators between work volition and subjective social status. However, the direction of the estimated paths was the opposite of the PWT propositions. Results demonstrated that participants with higher subjective social status benefitted more from proactive personality and social support, whereas PWT proposed those with lower subjective social status would benefit more greatly from having a proactive personality.

Among a sample of 238 adults who identify as racial/ethnic minorities, Douglass et al. (2020) found no support for proactive personality as a moderating mechanism between marginalization, work volition, and career adaptability with decent work. The authors noted that there were significant positive correlations between proactive personality and the aforementioned vocational constructs. There was a large overlap

between proactive personality and career adaptability ( $r = .75$ ), suggesting both constructs measure actions that an individual may plan to take but not actual behavior that has already happened. Given the differences between goals, behavior, and personality, Chan (2006) note that proactive personality itself may not be a strong enough factor to influence decent work without proactive goals or behaviors (Douglass et al., 2020). Thus, the role of proactive personality as a moderator between the predictor variables and decent work should continue to be researched to understand if the theorized role holds truth in real world samples. Therefore, given the qualities needed to succeed in the military (aggression, dominance, and self-discipline), it is hypothesized that proactive personality will serve as a moderator, with higher levels of proactive personality reducing the negative relationships that marginalization and economic constraints have with work volition (Hypothesis 10), career adaptability (Hypothesis 11), and decent work (Hypothesis 12) for women Veterans.

Mediation effects between the structural variables and decent work will also be tested. Previous PWT model tests have supported work volition and career adaptability as mediators with relevant factors, such as women (consisting of 51.7% to 100% of participants) and related to vocational outcomes (Allan, Sterling, & Duffy, 2019; Autin et al., 2017; England et al., 2020; Tebbe et al., 2019). It is expected that those psychological constructs will partially explain why marginalization and economic constraints are associated with decent work. Especially for women Veterans who endorse more experiences of economic constraints and marginalization, it is expected that they will feel as though they have less freedom in career decision making and are less adaptable at

work. Thus, those perceptions of having less choice and flexibility may account for feeling like they have more difficult accessing decent work. With the previous support for these relationships, it is hypothesized that work volition will mediate the relationship between marginalization and decent work (Hypothesis 13) and the relationship between economic constraints and decent work (Hypothesis 14). Additionally, it is hypothesized that career adaptability will mediate the relationship between marginalization and decent work (Hypothesis 15) and the relationship between economic constraints and decent work (Hypothesis 16).

### **Present Study**

The purpose of the present study is to explore associations between marginalization, economic constraints, work volition, career adaptability, proactive personality, and decent work among women Veterans. As more women are joining the military each year, the number of women Veterans continue to steadily rise. Given the different reasons why women enlist for the military, the distinct experiences they have while on active duty, as well as the factors complicating their post-military employment, it is clear that they should be studied as an independent population. Women Veterans experience various forms of marginalization and economic constraints that are distinct from those of their male peers. To date, only one study where Veterans were examined through a PWT lens, and that study's population consisted of majority male Veterans (Duffy et al., 2015). Additionally, our understanding of women Veterans' career development has been primarily restricted to qualitative studies, thus limiting the

generalizability of the results to a broader population (e.g., Ahern et al., 2015; Crowley & Sandhoff, 2017; Demers, 2013; Denke & Barnes, 2013; Greer, 2017; Maiocco & Smith, 2016; Mankowski, Tower, Brandt, & Mattocks, 2015).

In a male-dominated system where women may face more oppression and discrimination, along with programmatic failures to successfully support their transitions, it remains of interest how capable these women feel they are of advocating for themselves and their career needs. During their transition out of the military, women Veterans move from a military environment that asks them to conform to male standards of success, to a civilian environment, which expects them to perform more traditional female roles. Negotiating their fluctuating gender identity expectations may make it unclear how women should assert themselves in civilian career settings. Therefore, including the proactive personality moderator to fully test to proactive engagement construct will be essential for understanding the internal dynamics faced by women Veterans within their potentially confining external environment. Thus, an explicit focus on predicting their psychological ability to attain meaningful work despite systematic constraints from a quantitative perspective is crucial. Given the previous tests of PWT, the present study seeks to further explore how oppression of women Veterans in the United States constrains access to decent work.

## Chapter Two: Methodology

### Participants

Participants were 354 United States women Veterans with an average age of 33.4 years old ( $SD = 9.1$ ). The majority of the sample identified as cisgender women at the time of active duty (99.7%), with 1 participant identifying as non-binary. The sample identified as White/Caucasian (33.9%), African-American/Black (24%), Native American (19.2%), multiracial (9.9%), Asian (9.6%), Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander (6.8%), Alaskan Native (6.2%), Latinx/Hispanic (5.6%), Middle Eastern or North African (4.2%), with 0.2% choosing to self-identify. Of note, the sample's racial breakdown matched the national demographics for women Veterans, paralleling higher representation of Black women Veterans and lower representation of Latina women Veterans than the general population (Department of Labor, 2016). For military branch status, just over half of participants identified as belonging to the Army (55.6%), followed by Navy (17.2%), Marines (11.6%), Air Force (10.7%), and the Coast Guard (4.8%). Approximately a third of the sample indicated that they had indicated combat (31.4%). Years reported on active duty ranged from 1-34, with the most frequent amount of time being three years of active duty (39.8%,  $N = 141$ ). As the data were collected during the COVID-19 pandemic in Spring 2020, participants were additionally asked the degree to which COVID-19 impacted their ability to find or maintain employment. Of the

respondents, 63.9% agreed, 23.7% disagreed, and 12.4% indicated they neither agreed nor disagreed that COVID had an impact on their employment. The demographic statistics are presented below in Tables 1 and 2.

*Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of the Sample (N = 354)*

<b>Variable</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	354	
White/Caucasian	97	27.4%
African-American/Black	77	21.8%
Native American	61	17.2%
Multiracial	35	9.9%
Asian	25	7.1%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	18	5.1%
Latinx/Hispanic	12	3.7%
Middle Eastern or North African	9	2.5%
Alaskan Native	19	5.4%
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	353	
Straight/heterosexual	315	89%
Gay or lesbian	11	3.1%
Bisexual	17	4.8%
Pansexual	3	0.8%
Asexual	6	1.7%
Prefer to self-identify	1	0.3%
<b>Dependent Children</b>	354	
0	180	50.8%
1	106	29.9%
2	47	13.3%
3	15	4.2%
4+	6	1.7%
<b>Highest level of education</b>	350	
High school with no college	42	11.9%
Some college	112	31.6%
Trade/vocational school	38	10.7%
College degree	123	34.7%
Professional/graduate degree	35	9.9%
<b>Employment</b>	353	
Full time	251	70.9%
Part time	50	14.1%
Multiple part-time jobs	6	1.7%

Students	3	0.8%
Unemployed	21	5.9%
Service-connected	15	4.2%
Self-identified	7	2.0%
<b>Annual Income</b>	<b>354</b>	
Less than \$25,000	36	10.2%
\$25,000-\$50,000	120	33.9%
\$51,000-\$75,000	91	25.7%
\$76,000-\$100,000	54	15.3%
\$101,000-\$125,000	26	7.3%
\$126,000-\$150,000	17	4.8%
\$151,000-\$200,000	10	2.8%
\$201,000+	0	0%
<b>Military Branch</b>	<b>354</b>	
Army	197	55.6%
Navy	61	17.2%
Marines	41	11.6%
Air Force	38	10.7%
Coast Guard	17	4.8%
<b>Active Combat</b>	<b>328</b>	
Yes	111	31.4%
No	217	92.7%

	<b>N</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>Min</b>	<b>Max</b>
<b>Age</b>	346	33.4	9.1	20	71
<b>Years of Active Duty</b>	141	1.66	.48	1	34

### Procedure

An anonymous online survey was distributed through Qualtrics. The survey included a brief description of the study, the study measures, a demographic questionnaire, and a consent form. All data were collected online, anonymously, and voluntarily to ensure the trustworthiness of the responses and the safety of data. Validity check items were included to detect random or careless responses. A total of 2645 respondents completed the online survey.



**Recruitment.** Participants were recruited through Mechanical Turk (MTurk), social media websites, and national and local Veteran organizations. MTurk is a crowdsourced data collection website where individuals can be compensated for participating in research studies. A link to the survey was posted on the website and only individuals who identified as women and as U.S. Veterans were permitted to participate. If respondents met eligibility, they were paid 50 cents for their participation.

A dedicated public Twitter account was created to publicize the study and connect with prominent women Veteran leaders, organizations, and government officials. Relevant Twitter accounts were sent the recruitment flyer through private direct messages or public-facing tweets and asked to share with their audiences. Additionally, the recruitment flyer was posted on public and private Facebook pages dedicated to women Veterans. The flyer was posted alongside a short message explaining the purpose of the study and intended research goals.

National and collegiate Veteran organizations were identified as recruitment sites, such as Women's Veterans Alliance, the American Legion, Center for Women Veterans, and United Women Veterans, as well as University of Denver's and Colorado State University's Veteran Services offices. Individuals listed as leaders or contacts on these organizations' websites were emailed with the recruitment flyer and explain the purpose of the study. The individuals contacted were asked to share the flyer with their members through their organization's email listservs or social media pages.

The recruitment flyer contained information about eligibility for the study, researcher contact information, IRB approval number, and several forms of access. A QR

code that could be scanned by smartphone cameras, as well as a direct URL link, was placed on the flyer for interested women Veterans to be directed to the online questionnaire through Qualtrics.com. Data collection lasted for approximately two months (March to May 2021). The final sample size contained 354 participants.

**Design.** On Qualtrics, participants first saw the informed consent page, which consisted of a consent form and options to continue or discontinue the study. Participants were asked to read the consent form and authorize consent for the study by clicking “Accept and Continue.” If participants did not consent, they had the option to click “I do not consent. Discontinue.” If participants chose to opt out, they were re-directed to an exit page. Participants were able to request for their consent form to be emailed to them.

After consenting, participants were directed to a demographic questionnaire. Demographic information that was requested included: gender identity (current and while on active duty), racial/ethnic identity, sexual orientation, age, military branch (Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, Coast Guard), education level (high school with no college, some college, trade/vocational school, college degree, professional degree), combat experience, relationship status, annual income (<25K, 25K-50K, 51K-75K, 76K-100K, 101K-125K, 125K-150K, 151K-200K, 201K or more), employment status (full-time employment, part-time employment, multiple part-time jobs, student, unemployed, service connected), number of dependent children, and the years in which they began and ended their active duty service. Following the demographic questionnaire, participants were asked to complete the surveys (as described in the “Measures” section).

While MTurk has been shown to be appropriate to use for organizational research among understudied samples (Michel, O’Neil, Hartman, & Lorys, 2018), two attention checks were inserted throughout the survey. The attention checks read, “Please select [Slightly Agree / Disagree] for this question.” If participants click any answer other than what was instructed, their responses were removed from the data set.

## **Measures**

Participants completed the following instruments: the Decent Work Scale (DWS), the Economic Constraints Scale (ECS), the Organizational Sexism Scale (OSS), the Work Volition Scale, (WVS), the Career Futures Inventory (CFI), and the Proactive Personality Scale (PPS).

**Decent Work Scale (DWS; Duffy et al., 2017; See Appendix B)** is a 15-item scale designed to evaluate the five psychological components of decent work: adequate compensation, access to healthcare, safe working spaces, adequate free time and rest, and organizational values that match those of the individual and their society. Participants responded to items on a 7-point Likert-style scale that indicate level agreement, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Each subscale corresponded to a different component of decent work, with three items per subscale. Example items include, “I am not properly paid for my work,” “I feel physically safe interacting with people at work,” “I have free time during the work week,” and “I have a good healthcare plan at work.” Duffy et al. (2017) found strong internal consistency reliability for the total scale, with Cronbach’s alpha estimates ranging from of .86-.91. Estimated internal consistency scores for each scale were: safe working conditions ( $\alpha = .79$ ), access to health care ( $\alpha =$

.97), adequate compensation ( $\alpha = .87$ ), free time and rest ( $\alpha = .87$ ), and commentary family and organizational values ( $\alpha = .95$ ). Factor analysis indicated that the five decent work subscales were five distinct constructs. Construct validity was evidenced through correlations between the subscales and related instruments; however, none of the correlations were big enough to indicate overlaps with previously existing scales. The five subscales were also found to significantly correlate with the total scale. Decent work was scored as five subscales loading onto a general factor, following in line with recent PWT research, where each of the subscales can serve as indicators of the overall latent variable (Douglass et al., 2020). With the current sample, the DWS produced a Cronbach's alpha of .91.

**Economic Constraints Scale (ECS; Duffy et al., 2019; See Appendix C)** is a 5-item scale intended to measure how limited economic resources create constraints that influence an individual's ability to secure decent work. Participants were asked to respond along a 7-point scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Example items include, "Throughout most of my life I have struggled financially," "For as long as I can remember I have had difficulties making ends meet," and "I have considered myself poor or very close to poor for most of my life." Multiple studies have demonstrated strong internal consistency estimates for participants with both below and above average U.S. levels of income ( $\alpha = .94-.95$ ) (Duffy et al., 2019; England et al., 2020). For example, one study focused exclusively on participants reporting a household income of less than \$50,000 per year (Duffy et al., 2019). The ECS has been validated with racial/ethnicity minority participants as well. In a factor analysis, the five ECS items

accounted for 81% of the variance for the construct. Convergence validity was seen through significant moderate correlations with scales measuring social status (.40), yearly income (.37), subjective social class (.43), and decent work (-.029). None of the correlations suggested that the scale is measuring the same construct. In a regression analysis, economic constraints significantly predicted decent work. With the current sample, the ECS produced a Cronbach's alpha of .94.

**Organizational Sexism Scale (OSS; Rubin et al., 2019; See Appendix D)**

measures gender-based inequality through structural aspects of an organization, such as job stability and pay. Organizational sexism is 4-item subscale derived from the broader construct of workplace sexism, which also includes interpersonal sexism and sense of belonging. Participants were asked to respond along a 7-point Likert-style scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Given the focus on women Veterans, the items were modified slightly to focus on their gendered experiences within the military. Examples include, "I have received fewer opportunities for promotion and career progression than men while in the military," "I have been treated unfairly by my employer, boss, or supervisors because I am a woman," and "I have had less job stability and security than men." Initial reliability estimates for the scale are strong ( $\alpha = .86$ ). There was a moderate correlation between the subscales of organization and interpersonal sexism ( $r = .49$ ), providing evidence of convergent validity (Rubin et al., 2019). With the current sample, the OSS produced a Cronbach's alpha of .95.

**Work Volition Scale (WVS; Duffy, Diemer, Perry, Laurenzi, & Torrey, 2012; See Appendix E)** assesses one's perceived freedom over making work-related decisions,

even when faced with barriers. While the WVS has three subscales, the present study will utilize the 4-item general volition subscale, as suggested by Duffy et al. (2019) to best capture the perception of decision-making component of work volition. Items have a 7-point Likert-style scale that indicate level agreement, from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Example items include, “I’ve been able to choose the jobs I wanted” and “I can do the kind of work I want, despite external barriers.” Criterion validity was observed among a sample with both employed and unemployed adults, demonstrating significant correlations with core self-evaluations, work locus of control, and related personality traits (agreeableness, neuroticism, and conscientiousness) (Duffy et al., 2012). Several studies have demonstrated reliability for the WVS, with Cronbach’s alpha ranging from .86 to .93 (Duffy et al., 2012; Duffy et al., 2015). Internal consistency estimates of the subscale were strong, with Cronbach’s alpha ranging from .78-.90 (Duffy et al., 2012; Duffy et al., 2015; England et al., 2020). With the current sample, the WVS produced a Cronbach’s alpha of .83.

**Career Futures Inventory (CFI; Rottinghaus, Day, & Borgen, 2005; See Appendix F)** measures participants’ judgements and views of their future career development, and was used in the present study to examine career adaptability. The career adaptability subscale of the CFI will be used, as recommended by PWT scholars, who have modified the original 11-item subscale to contain nine items (Duffy et al., 2019). Example items include, “I can overcome potential barriers that may exist in my career,” “My career success will be determined by my efforts,” and “I will easily adjust to shifting demands at work.” Participants were asked to respond on a 7-point Likert-style

scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Duffy et al. (2019) removed two reverse coded items from the original 11-item subscale as those items loaded poorly in a validation study and better aligned to the work volition construct, rather than career adaptability (“I am rarely in control of my career success” and “I am not in control of my career success”). The career adaptability subscale demonstrated good internal consistency reliability, with studies showing Cronbach’s alpha ranges from .85-.90 (Duffy et al., 2019; Rottinghaus, Day, & Borgen, 2005). Convergent validity was seen with the career adaptability subscale strongly and significantly correlated in the hypothesized directions with career confidence, problem-solving confidence, and dispositional optimism. With the current sample, the CFI produced a Cronbach’s alpha of .88.

**Proactive Personality Scale (PPS; Seibert, Crant, & Kraimer, 1999; See Appendix G)** measures individuals’ inclination to take action and change their environment. It is a shortened version of Bateman & Crant’s (1993) 17-item scale, containing 10 items, with one item reverse scored on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 7 (strongly disagree). Example items include, “I am constantly on the lookout for new ways to improve my life” and “I love being a champion for my ideas, even against others’ opposition.” The 10-item scale was created by selecting the 10 items with the highest factor loadings of the original 17 items. Reliability of the original study was found to be good with ranges of Cronbach’s alpha from .87-.89, and deleting seven items maintained a similar reliability for the updated scale ( $\alpha = .86$ ). Additionally, they found a correlation between the 17-item and 10-item PPS of .96, further confirming little difference between the two scales. It had adequate test-retest reliability with a coefficient of

.72 over a three-month period, suggesting stability over time (as is expected with a personality measure).

The past twenty years of literature on the PPS has found generally good support for criterion, convergent and discriminant validity (Crant, Hu, & Jiang, 2016). Criterion validity evidence has been found through analyzing the variance of PPS compared to the Big Five factors. Researchers have found that the PPS accounts for an additional 8% of the variance beyond what the Big Five can explain (Crant, Hu, & Jiang, 2016). Regarding convergent validity, it tends to be correlated positively with behaviors and attitudes associated with proactive behavior such as work engagement (Christian, Garza, & Slaughter, 2011), innovation (Arbeits, van der Velde, & Maurer, 2010), and self-efficacy (Brown, Cober, Kane, Levy, & Shalhoop, 2006). Evidence for discriminant validity has been more mixed, with meta-analyses often not showing any patterns between age or gender and proactive personality (Crant, Hu, & Jiang, 2016). For the few studies that have significant results, it has been found that both younger workers and men tend to show themselves as more proactive compared to older workers and women. With the current sample, the PPS produced a Cronbach's alpha of .88.

### **Data Analysis**

**Preliminary analyses.** Before creating the structural model, the presence of both univariate and multivariate outliers in the data were examined. While some extreme scores may be expected when using a random sample, outliers that were still present at  $p < .001$  were removed from further analyses (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). The data were also examined for skewness and kurtosis. Correlation analyses were performed to



examine the strength and direction of the relationships between the variables. Patterns of missing data in participants' responses were analyzed to understand the nature of the missing data; that is, how random the pattern appears to be. The pattern was assessed through Little's MCAR test in SPSS-26 (IBM Corp., 2018). Missing data were handled in accordance with best practices on working with patterns of missing data (Schlomer, Bauman, & Card, 2010).

**Model testing.** AMOS 26.0 was used to test the measurement and structural models. Kline's (2016) best practices for SEM were followed to evaluate the models with these fit indices:  $\chi^2$ , comparative fit index (CFI), root mean square of approximation (RMSEA), and standardized root mean residual (SRMR). Goodness of fit for the models was based on typical cutoffs for these indices, following Weston & Gore's (2006) recommendations for cutoffs to be less conservative: CFI >.90, RMSEA <.10, and SRMR <.10. Additionally, following in line with past PWT studies (Duffy et al., 2019) that utilize the DWS, decent work was modeled by using the five subscales as markers of a decent work latent variable. Individual items were used to form latent variables for those scales that do not have subscales.

**Indirect associations.** Indirect associations between marginalization and economic constraints with decent work via work volition and career adaptability were tested. Bootstrapping methods are recommended by Shrout and Bolger (2002) to get more accurate probability estimates for indirect associations. Therefore, indirect association estimates were examined with 1,000 bootstrapped samples and bias-corrected confidence

intervals in AMOS. Confidence intervals that did not include zero were interpreted as statistically significant.

**Moderation analyses.** Moderation was tested through multiple regressions in SPSS PROCESS Macro. PROCESS allowed for testing the statistical significance of interaction terms as well as plotting simple slopes for significant interaction effects. While not in the original model, proactive personality was also tested as a moderator between career adaptability and marginalization to decent work.

## Chapter Three: Results

### Preliminary Results

**Data screening.** A total of 2645 respondents completed the online survey. Criteria items and validity items were used to remove invalid responses. Of those responses, 60 respondents identified as “I am still active duty,” 91 respondents denied being U.S. Veterans, and 366 respondents identified their gender identity as a man while on active duty, eliminating 517 respondents. Responses were considered invalid for participants who did not pass the validity check (e.g., selecting other answers when asked to check “Strongly Agree”), which eliminated 1218 respondents. Respondents who indicated that they accessed the survey through Amazon MTurk but did not correctly request payment through MTurk (e.g., entering the wrong code or not entering the code at all) were also considered invalid and were excluded from future analysis. Of the 1722 respondents who indicated they accessed the survey through Amazon MTurk, only 91 respondents entered a code to request payment. From the 91 respondents who requested payment, 29 were rejected for not meeting either criteria or validity items. Moreover, as the survey was estimated to take 10-15 minutes, respondents who completed the survey in under three minutes ( $N = 513$ ) were removed from the dataset. Following the removal of these cases, 354 participants were retained for the final sample.

**Preliminary analyses.** Little's Missing Completely at Random (MCAR) test in SPSS 26.0 was used to inspect for levels and patterns of missing data. There were no variables that had five percent or more missing values. Results of Little's MCAR test were not significant ( $\chi^2 = 1043.340, p = .314$ ), indicating data were missing completely at random. The data were examined for multivariate normality assumptions required for SEM analyses. Mardia's coefficient was 58.63, suggesting the data were not multivariate normal. To correct for non-normality, Bollen-Stine bootstrapping was used to estimate maximum-likelihood (ML). Bollen-Stine bootstrapped estimates generate adjusted  $p$  values for non-normal data (Kline, 2016). These corrected estimates have been shown to be less biased for larger samples (e.g.,  $N > 200$ ) than default ML estimation (Nevitt & Hancock, 2001).

### **Model Testing**

AMOS 26.0 was used to examine the measurement and structural models. Individual items were used for economic constraints (5 items), marginalization (5 items), and work volition (4 items), to create latent variables for unidimensional constructs. For career adaptability, per the recommendations of England et al. (2020), two items were removed from the scale that were found to assess a separate construct of lack of volition, rather than adaptability. These items were "I am rarely in control of my career" and "I am not in control of my career success." A latent variable was created from the remaining eight individual items for the adaptability construct.

Decent work was modeled as a hierarchical variable with a general factor and five orthogonal subfactors. Only the general decent work factor was included in model

testing. This was done in line with previous studies (Duffy, Gensmer, et al., 2019; England et al., 2020) which have found the presence of a strong general decent work factor, as well as to decrease overall model complexity. Therefore, the baseline predictor model consisted of six latent constructs (five factors plus a general decent work factor).

Kline's (2016) best practices for SEM were followed to evaluate the models with the following fit indices:  $\chi^2$ , comparative fit index (CFI), root mean square of approximation (RMSEA), and standardized root mean residual (SRMR). Goodness of fit for the models were based on typical cutoffs for these indices, following Weston & Gore's (2006) recommendations for cutoffs to be less conservative given the complexity of the model: CFI >.90, RMSEA <.10, and SRMR <.10.

### **Measurement Model**

A measurement model was first tested to observe correlations among latent variables and examine goodness of fit of the observed indicators to their related latent constructs. The baseline measurement model provided an adequate fit to the data:  $\chi^2(314) = 876.97$ , CFI = .926;  $p < .001$ ; RMSEA = .071, 90% confidence interval [.066, .077]; and SRMR = .04. Given this, we proceeded with testing the structural model. Latent factor correlations and descriptive statistics can be found in Table 2.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics and latent correlations of study variables

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Decent work (total)	--					
2. Economic constraints	-.532*	--				
3. Marginalization	-.437*	.576*	--			
4. Work volition	.674*	-.214*	-.112*	--		
5. Career adaptability	.784*	-.395**	-.267*	.693*	--	
6. Proactive personality	.638*	-.184*	-.101	.613	.754*	--
<i>M</i>	71.07	18.73	19.04	19.12	49.74	52.07
<i>SD</i>	14.77	7.68	7.90	4.79	9.23	8.73

\*\*  $p < .01$

\*  $p < .05$

There were several significant associations between the demographic variables and main study variables. Decent work was significantly related to highest level of education, employment status, military branch, and combat experience. Economic constraints was significantly related to sexual orientation, romantic relationship status, military branch, and combat experience. Marginalization was significantly related with sexual orientation, number of dependent children, highest level of education, employment status, military branch, and combat experience. Work volition was significantly related to level of education, employment status, and annual income. Career adaptability was significantly related to highest level of education, employment status, military branch, and combat experience. Lastly, proactive personality was significantly associated with highest level of education. Correlations between the main study variables and key demographics can be found in Table 3.

Table 3: Correlations between study variables and demographics

	Sexual Orientation	Romantic Relationship Status	Number of Dependent Children	Highest level of education	Employment status	Annual income	Military Branch	Combat experience
Decent Work	-0.052	-0.074	-0.075	.132*	-.241**	0.065	-.159**	.126*
Economic Constraints	.122*	.121*	0.101	0.075	0.036	-0.037	.127*	-.159**
Marginalization	.214**	0.059	.117*	.124*	.157**	0.051	.109*	-.194**
Work Volition	0.069	-0.044	-0.024	.230**	-.277**	.173**	0.004	0.038
Career Adaptability	-0.061	0.013	-0.027	.166**	-.181**	0.036	-.107*	.138*
Proactive Personality	0.048	0.026	-0.025	.140**	-0.089	0.043	-0.094	0.092

\*\*  $p < .01$

\*  $p < .05$

### Structural Model

The structural model provided adequate fit to the data:  $\chi^2 (314) = 876.97$ , CFI = .926;  $p = .000$ ; RMSEA = .071, 90% confidence interval [.066, .077]; SRMR = .074.

Table 4 shows standardized estimates for paths estimated within the structural model.

Table 4: Standardized Estimates of Structural Model

Associations	$\beta$	SE	p
Marginalization $\leftrightarrow$ economic constraints	.600	.152	<.001
Marginalization $\rightarrow$ work volition	.012	.050	.813
Marginalization $\rightarrow$ career adaptability	-.067	.034	.052
Marginalization $\rightarrow$ decent work	-.105	.026	<.001
Economic constraints $\rightarrow$ work volition	-.196	.054	<.001
Economic constraints $\rightarrow$ career adaptability	.002	.037	.954

Economic constraints → decent work	-.121	.028	<.001
Work volition → career adaptability	.718	.065	<.001
Work volition → decent work	.362	.061	<.001
Career adaptability → decent work	.458	.063	<.001

Economic constraints, marginalization, work volition, and career adaptability significantly predicted decent work. Additionally, economic constraints and marginalization were significantly positively correlated. Economic constraints negatively predicted work volition while marginalization was not significantly associated with work volition or career adaptability. Work volition had a significant positive association with career adaptability. Figure 2 shows results of the final model.

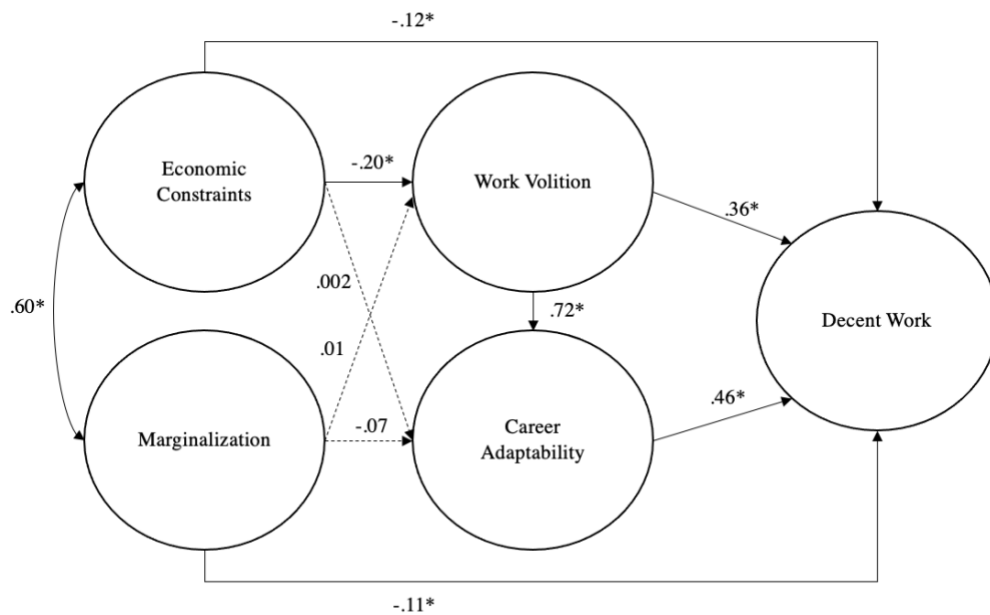


Figure 2. Final structural model.  
Non-significant paths are represented by dotted lines. \* $p < .05$



**Indirect effects.** Indirect effects were examined within the structural model (Table 5). Per recommendations from Shrout and Bolger (2002), we used 1000 bootstrapped samples and bias-corrected confidence intervals to test and interpret significant indirect effects. Work volition mediated the relation between economic constraints and decent work ( $\beta = -.24$ ,  $SE = .07$ , 95% CI [-.39, -.11]). Career adaptability also mediated the relation between economic constraints and decent work ( $\beta = -.24$ ,  $SE = .07$ , 95% CI [-.39, -.11]). Neither work volition nor career adaptability mediated the relations between marginalization and decent work.

*Table 5: Test of Unique Indirect Relations*

Predictor	Mediator	Criterion	$\beta$	SE	Lower bound CI	Upper bound CI
Marginalization	Work volition	Decent work	.0194	.0318	-.0488	.0783
Marginalization	Career adaptability	Decent work	-.0309	.0467	-.1292	.0570
Economic constraints	Work volition	Decent work	-.2426*	.0711	-.3860	-.1057
Economic constraints	Career adaptability	Decent work	-.2008*	.0511	-.3099	-.1078

\*  $p < .01$

## Moderation Analyses

Moderation tests were conducted through multiple regressions in SPSS PROCESS Macro (Table 6). Proactive personality did not moderate the associations between marginalization and work volition, marginalization and career adaptability, marginalization and decent work, economic constraints and work volition, economic constraints and career adaptability, or economic constraints and decent work. Proactive personality was found to significantly moderate the association between work volition and decent work ( $\beta = .04$ ,  $SE = .01$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.02, .06]), as well as career adaptability and decent work ( $\beta = .02$ ,  $SE = .004$ ,  $p < .001$ , 95% CI [.01, .03]).

**Table 6: Tests of Moderation**

Predictor	Moderator	Criterion	Cohen's d	$\beta$	SE	t	Lower bound CI	Upper bound CI
Marginalization	Proactive Personality	Decent Work	--	-.0020	.0081	-2.485	-.0180	.0139
Economic Constraints	Proactive Personality	Decent Work	--	-.0118	.0080	-1.4751	-.0276	.0039
Work Volition	Proactive Personality	Decent Work	.183	.0412*	.0101	4.1020	.0215	.0610
Career Adaptability	Proactive Personality	Decent Work	.14	.0195*	.0043	4.5102	.0110	.0281

\*  $p < .01$ ; *Note:* Coefficients are unstandardized. By convention, Cohen's d of 0.2, 0.5, 0.8 are considered small, medium and large effect sizes respectively.

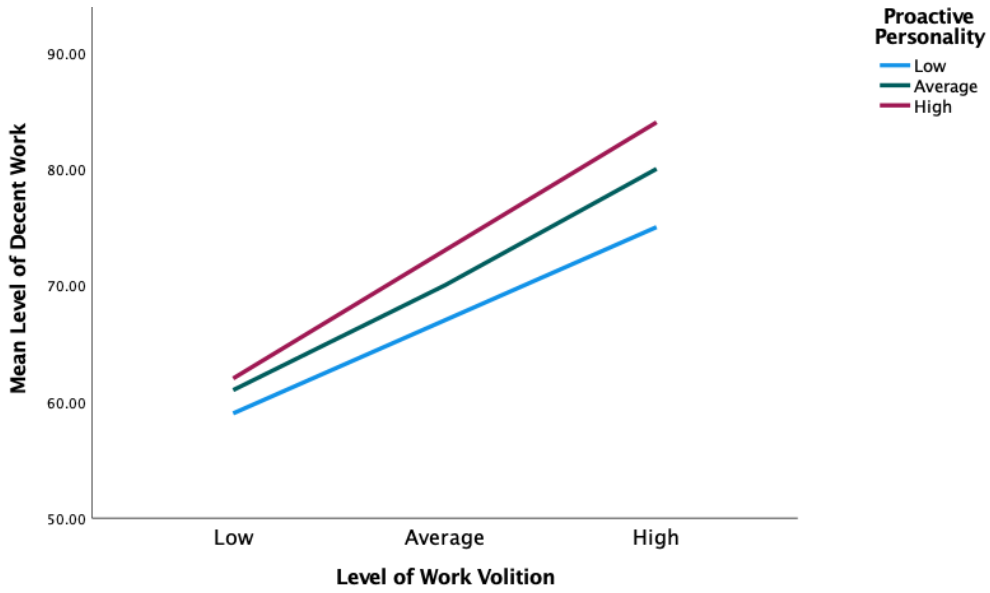


Figure 3. Proactive Personality as a Moderator between Work Volition and Decent Work

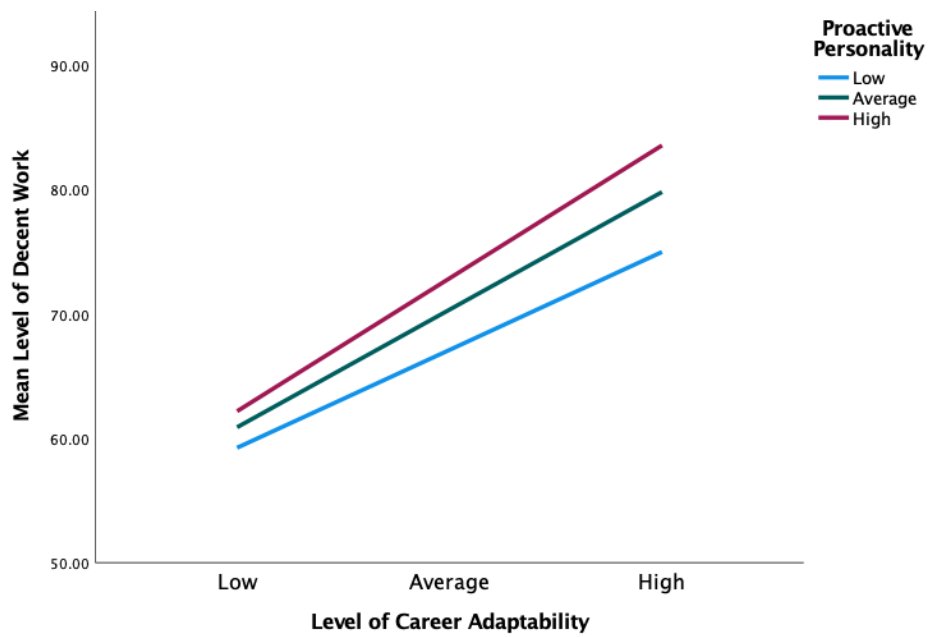


Figure 4. Proactive Personality as a Moderator between Career Adaptability and Decent Work

## **Chapter Four: Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to examine the Psychology of Working Theory (Duffy et al., 2016) model among women Veterans. The PWT model proposes relationships between marginalization, economic constraints, work volition, career adaptability, proactive personality, and decent work. This chapter includes a discussion of the key findings, connections to theory and existing literature, practical implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

### **Discussion of Key Findings**

The research thus far on the PWT model has focused on male Veterans or working women in general, without placing an explicit focus on the unique needs and experiences of women Veterans. Accordingly, the present study extends the current research by exploring how women Veterans, who have spent formative years within a male-dominated military system and may face identity-based discrimination, and are able to psychologically cope with those barriers to secure decent work as civilians.

The study hypotheses were as follows: (a) Marginalization would be positively associated with economic constraints; (b) Marginalization would be negatively associated with decent work, work volition, and career adaptability; (c) Economic constraints would be negatively associated with decent work, work volition, and career adaptability; (d) Work volition would be positively associated with decent work; (e) Career adaptability would be positively associated with decent work; (f) Proactive personality would moderate the relations between marginalization and economic constraints as well as marginalization and decent work, work volition, and career adaptability; (g) Work volition would mediate the relationship between economic constraints and decent work; (h) Work volition would mediate the relationship between marginalization and decent work; (i) Career adaptability would mediate the relationship between economic constraints and decent work; and (j) Career adaptability would mediate the relationship between marginalization and decent work.

Bivariate correlations revealed several significant associations between main study and demographic variables. All contextual variables other than proactive personality (e.g., marginalization, economic constraints, career adaptability, work volition, and decent work) were correlated in expected directions. Regarding key demographic variables, highest level of education and employment status were both correlated with decent work, marginalization, work volition, and career adaptability. These correlations align with theoretical underpinnings of PWT, in that individuals' perceptions of their ability to secure decent work or experiences of marginalization are likely to be connected to their ability to gain higher education or have a secure

employment status (Duffy et al., 2016). Notably, highest level of education and employment status were not significantly correlated with economic constraints. This may be due to the influence of military training as a replacement for college for some Veterans, as Veterans may be able to enter the workforce directly (or with limited college) as their military training might provide sufficient background for attaining decent work.

**Convergent Findings.** The first hypothesis was supported, as the relationship between marginalization and economic constraints was positive and statistically significant. This finding highlights the interconnectedness between experiencing marginalization due to one's gender and their social status. In other words, this relationship affirms previous literature that demonstrates how organizational sexism is tied to disproportionately affecting women from lower social classes (England et al., 2020; Starnski and Hon Sing, 2015).

In line with the PWT model, experiencing marginalization was negatively related to attaining decent work. This supports existing PWT theory that systematic oppression based on identities makes it more difficult to secure decent work. This finding may reflect the impact of the combat ban on women Veterans' ability to advance in their career. As combat is often a prerequisite for military career advancement, women Veterans have been systematically prevented from equal opportunity to move up due to the longstanding ban (Barry, 2013). When women who were unable to participate in combat left the military, they did so with fewer accolades than their male counterparts, impacting their ability to earn jobs that would pay salaries commensurate to men in the

military. Even though the combat ban was lifted in 2015, the legacy of the ban continues to impact women Veterans from all generations who did not receive equal opportunities (Eichler, 2017).

As hypothesized, economic constraints predicted decent work. As many women enter the military due to financial concerns, it is important to recognize how those constraints may continue to contribute to their vocational development in their post-military lives. Moreover, as economic constraints and marginalization are intimately connected, experiencing gender-based discrimination and economic hardships appeared to intersect in the current study. It is notable that the direct relationship between economic constraints and decent work in the present study, while significant, was weak. While much of the PWT literature has supported this predictive link (Diemer & Rasheed Ali, 2009; England et al., 2020; Kozan, Işık, & Blustein, 2019), a growing body of work has found nonsignificant relationships between these variables (Douglass et al., 2020; Duffy et al., 2018). These studies have suggested inconsistencies in findings may be due to differences in their sample's educational levels, where studies with a more highly educated sample tending to be significant (Douglass et al., 2020). This aligns with scholarship that hypothesizes that as the level of education increases, the probability of attaining decent work also increases (Blustein et al., 2019, Wei et al., 2022). The advantages of higher education, or even specialized military training, may have equalized the disadvantages brought by women Veterans' earlier barriers to economic success, leading to economic constraints only having a weak predictive relationship to decent work. It has additionally been suggested by England et al. (2020) that work volition may

be a better predictor of decent work than economic constraints. The present study also had a stronger predictive link from work volition to decent work than economic constraints to decent work.

As hypothesized, the present study found that both career adaptability and work volition significantly predicted decent work. The significance of these relationships underscores the importance of understanding and fostering internal psychological coping skills to improve access to decent work. These relationships suggest that a sense of choice, as well as an ability to be flexible with work tasks, within a career path may be key factors to improved access to decent work. Moreover, there was a strong positive predictive relationship from work volition to career adaptability, which matches other studies that have found support for a predictive relationship in that direction and not a bidirectional relationship as originally hypothesized in the PWT model (Duffy et al., 2018). There was a strong positive correlation between career adaptability and work volition ( $r = .69$ ), speaking to some potential overlap in the constructs as well. Both constructs include a self-efficacy element, which may contribute to the overlap.

Following PWT theory, work volition significantly mediated the relationship between economic constraints and decent work. Lower levels of economic constraints were related to lower levels of work volition, which in turn were related to lower levels of decent work. Therefore, the ability to have choice while navigating careers helps increase ability to secure decent work for women Veterans, even when they have experienced economic hardship. This link has been demonstrated in samples of women civilians (England et al., 2020; Kim et al., 2022) and male Veterans (Duffy et al., 2015),



and is affirmed in the present study that work volition may be a key explanatory variable connecting the perceived experiences of economic constraints with vocational outcomes among women Veterans. The mediating relationship between economic constraints and decent work via work volition was found to be slightly stronger than the direct relationship between economic constraints and decent work, which is consistent with other PWT studies that have demonstrated inconsistencies in the direct predictive path (England et al., 2020).

**Divergent Findings.** Contrary to the PWT model, career adaptability did not serve as a mediator between marginalization and economic constraints to decent work. There is mounting evidence that career adaptability should not be a mediator within the model (Autin et al., 2022; Douglass et al., 2020; Duffy et al., 2018; England et al., 2020; Tokar and Kaut, 2018; Wei et al., 2022). Kim et al. (2022) tested the PWT model with work volition as the sole mediator (that is, leaving out career adaptability) and found that all paths remained significant. It has been suggested that this inconsistent support for career adaptability may be due to how the construct is operationalized and measured (Douglass et al., 2020; Tokar and Kaut, 2018). Per these authors, career adaptability has typically been used for understanding the vocational development of college students (e.g., Buyukgoze-Kavas et al., 2015; Douglass & Duffy, 2015) or recent college graduates (e.g., Guan et al., 2013).

Moreover, the career adaptability measure's use of the term "career" has been criticized for its association with the work of those who are of higher educational and social statuses (Douglass et al., 2020). This terminology may alienate individuals who are

underemployed, unemployed, or do not feel a sense of calling to their work. These concerns may have resonated with a women Veteran sample and explain the nonsignificant findings, as Veterans' experience in the workforce is highly informed by their military training and they may not face the same adjustment challenges as college students or recent graduates. Additionally, as women Veterans are more likely than civilian women or male Veterans to be divorced, have children, and have mental and physical health concerns, they may have more limited occupational choices than a childfree recent college graduate. Thus, the term "career" may not feel as applicable for vocational paths that are chosen out of necessity and circumstance rather than passion and values.

Similarly, the relationship between marginalization and decent work was not mediated by work volition or career adaptability. The lack of a mediating relationship from marginalization to decent work via work volition is inconsistent with other PWT literature. This may be due partly to measurement bias, as the present study operationalized marginalization as organizational sexism rather than through the more general marginalization term as initially developed by the PWT authors. It is also possible that for women Veterans, the direct effects to decent work may be even stronger and are not impacted by internal psychological factors. That is, the effects of experiencing marginalization may be too powerful to be mediated by a sense of choice over their career paths. Moreover, given the widespread marginalization experienced by women Veterans, it is possible that they have a unique set of circumstances and other factors that would better predict their levels of work volition. A previous PWT study

focused on Veterans (with a majority male sample) found that locus of control mediated the relationships between PTSD symptoms, neuroticism, and conscientiousness with work volition (Duffy et al., 2015). It may be beneficial to explore those factors with women Veterans as an alternative understanding of how they develop volition over their careers.

The present study did not find support for proactive personality moderating the relationships that marginalization and economic constraints have with decent work, work volition, and career adaptability. This finding suggests that for women Veterans, the presence of an active personality and “can do attitude” does not buffer the association of organizational sexism and decent work. In other words, personality traits may not be sufficient to disrupt the power of systems of oppression derived from marginalization and economic constraints on decent work.

Interestingly, proactive personality was a significant moderator between career adaptability and decent work, as well as between work volition and decent work. While these paths were not a part of the original hypothesized PWT model, these findings suggest that the association between career adaptability and work volition and decent work can be enhanced by having a proactive personality. That is, if a woman Veteran endorses higher levels of proactive personality, it is more likely that work volition and career adaptability will translate to securing decent work. This may be partially due to the overlapping nature of these three variables. In addition, for a woman Veteran with more assertive personality, it may be easier to tap into a sense of choice and freedom over one’s career. These women may be more inclined to go after available opportunities,

even if those jobs are not exactly what they imagined for the next step in their career, rather than waiting for the “perfect” opportunity to come along.

Proactive personality was moderately and positively correlated with some of the vocational constructs (decent work, economic constraints, and career adaptability). In particular, proactive personality and career adaptability were highly correlated ( $r = .75$ ). Douglass et al. (2020) mirrored these results and suggested that this overlap may be due to measurement bias of the constructs, in that the measures assess behaviors that individuals intend to take but not actual action. As proactive personality is a different construct from proactive goals and proactive behaviors (Crant, Hu, & Jiang, 2016), these findings support the hypothesis made by Douglass et al. (2020) that the proactive personality trait alone is not sufficient to protect against the structural forces of marginalization and economic constraints.

There have been several studies that found that proactive personality may not be functioning as theorized within the PWT (Douglass et al., 2020; Wang et al., 2019). The present study replicated the results of Douglass et al. (2020), who failed to find significant moderation between proactive personality and any contextual variables when looking at a sample of racially and ethnically diverse working adults in the United States. Wang et al. (2019) found that proactive personality moderated the link between subjective social status and work volition among Chinese working adults, but in the opposite direction of the theorized PWT direction. Additionally, there has been evidence that women and older people tend to rate themselves as less proactive than men and younger people, which may have impacted how the participants in the current sample

responded to the items in the proactive personality measure (Crant, Hu, & Jiang, 2016). Given these results, PWT scholars should continue to explore this moderator and consider if measurement of this personality trait should be altered, especially within different cultural contexts.

### **Practical Implications**

The present study highlighted the importance of understanding how structural barriers affect women Veterans' career development. As both marginalization and economic constraints had direct impacts on their ability to achieve decent work as civilians, improving conditions from a systemic level, while also cultivating individual work volition, may be the most beneficial approach to reducing the impact of those barriers. As marginalization was measured through organizational sexism, this study demonstrated a clear need to improve working conditions for women Veterans while they are on active duty as well as upon retirement and transition into civilian life. The following section will outline implications from this study for policy, clinical practice, and research.

**Policy and Systems Implications.** At the systemic level, the findings support the PWT's main assertions that marginalization and economic constraints have negative and direct paths to women Veterans' career development. Moreover, as marginalization and economic constraints are highly positively related, it is seen how intersecting marginalized identities of gender and lower social class can make it even more difficult for women Veterans to secure humane working conditions. There needs to be a fundamental shift in how women are treated while they are active-duty service members,

which will likely have a cascading effect for how they are treated as Veterans. Even though the combat ban has been lifted, there remains stigma against women, and women of Color in particular, in combat and leadership roles that impacts their ability to gain career experience (Mankowski, Tower, Brandt, & Mattocks, 2015).

Moreover, between one third to one half of women in the military report experiencing military sexual trauma (MST) (Kelly, 2021). While there have been sustained policies and practices to provide free MST-related healthcare, these efforts are in response rather than combating the source of the problem. It has been recommended that the military focus strongly on prevention efforts by hiring dedicated, well-trained prevention staff (Acosta, Chinman, & Shearer, 2021). As experiencing MST often leads to premature military separation (Kelly, 2021), going to the root of the issue will help to reduce sexual violence in the military and subsequent impact on both mental health symptoms and job attainment.

As women servicemembers are on active duty and preparing to transition out of the military, it would be beneficial to improve programs that work to reduce experiences of marginalization and economic constraints. Programs such as such as Transitional Assistance Program (TAP), run through Department of Defense, and Compensated Work Therapy (CWT), run through VA, already exist as pathways to connect women Veterans to training and employment options. Recommendations for improving these programs to better fit the specialized vocational needs of women Veterans will be explored below.

As discussed earlier, and supported by the present results, TAP does not do enough to support women as they transition out of the military (DAV, 2015). A large

study exploring the effectiveness of specific TAP components found that the most useful were ones that included a mentor/coach, such as interviewing, resume writing, transitioning to civilian life, entrepreneurship, and virtual career fairs (Perkins et al., 2022). As there was a significant improvement in employment with Veterans who utilized these programs when a coach or mentor was included, it speaks to the need for providing programmatic personalized attention to create actual change for Veterans' career skills. Approximately 61% of Veterans (of all genders) are enrolled in TAP, and it may be beneficial to create specific pathways for women from marginalized backgrounds to engage with coaches (Perkins et al., 2022). For example, offering women mentors with similar backgrounds or creating affinity support groups based on shared identities may help to ease feelings of isolation during the transition to civilian life and reduce the impacts of marginalization (Greer, 2020). Delivery of skills alone is not sufficient, especially for women who have experienced marginalization or economic constraints – the personalized approach is a far more effective and meaningful way to mitigate those systemic barriers, particularly when women Veterans have experienced multiple forms of structural discrimination.

Compensated Work Therapy (CWT) is a VA program that would benefit from increased and improved attention to support the transition of women Veterans and may be particularly useful for decreasing economic constraints. CWT focuses on transitional work and supportive employment programs for Veterans with disabilities and other barriers to employment, in which Veterans are hired by CWT to work in a VA medical center or contracted out to community businesses (VHA, 2020). The spirit of CWT is

very much aligned with the principles of PWT, in which the purpose of work is to provide a sense of meaning, structure, and self-confidence. While the intentionality of work therapy leading to jobs and increased personal fulfillment for disabled Veterans is admirable, the program often falls short in its ideals (Hatton, 2022). Criticisms of CWT include that disabled Veteran workers are often kept as temporary employees, constantly evaluated and under scrutiny, and underpaid (Hatton, 2022; VHA, 2020). In fact, as the program is considered therapeutic rather than purely vocational in nature, Veterans are not allowed to be paid more than 50% of federal minimum wage (Hatton, 2022). As women Veterans are more likely to have a disability than men Veterans and civilians (Prokos & Cabage, 2017), CWT may be a tool that can be more effectively utilized if it is able to create stronger paths to permanent employment for women and is cognizant of the women Veterans' unique circumstances.

**Clinical Practice Implications.** Integrating counseling with a deeper understanding of the function of work is a core tenet of the Psychology of Working Framework (Blustein, 2006). Women Veterans have a deep connection between their sense of personal identity and work identity, and these selves are not easily disentangled. Rather than separating out career counseling from standard psychotherapy, the results from the present study support Blustein's (2006) assertion that therapists should create an inclusive practice that creates space for vocational development within the therapy room. Based on the results, it would be especially important to focus on developing and increasing work volition in women Veterans through counseling. As work volition was both a mediator of economic constraints and a direct predictor of direct work, this



perceived sense of choice evidently plays an important role in allowing women Veterans to secure meaningful employment. Studies have additionally found work volition to act as a moderator between social support and occupational engagement, increasing support for work volition as a key variable in vocational success (Kim et al., 2018).

While it is clear that individual counseling and internal psychological mechanisms alone cannot outweigh the power of systemic oppression, the use of scaffolding may be a useful tool for empowering women Veterans (Blustein, 2006). “Scaffolding” refers to utilizing multiple interventions (e.g., individual psychotherapy, case management, and advocacy work) that interweave to empower clients and increase levels of work volition. Women Veterans are uniquely positioned to receive long-term structural support by way of having access to counseling while on active duty as well as through the VA once they are civilians. Encouraging VA and military clinicians to utilize integrated practice management systems (e.g., Joint Longitudinal Viewer [JLV]) will aid in providing continuity of care for women servicemembers as they transition between active duty and Veteran statuses. Scaffolding will be particularly essential for women Veterans who have greater financial burdens, as the present study demonstrated how economic constraints can be partially mediated by higher levels of work volition to improve access to decent work.

While it is encouraged for counselors working with women Veterans to create space to discuss vocationally related topics and their connection to psychological well-being, it is also understood that much of the therapy that happens within the VA is limited to manualized treatments that may not have room for “off-book” discussions

(Holt & Beutler, 2014). Manualized evidence-based psychotherapies commonly utilized in VA counseling, especially trauma-focused treatments such as prolonged exposure therapy (PE) and cognitive processing therapy (CPT), require strict fidelity to maximize improved treatment outcomes. However, this “one size fits all” approach is not effective for all Veterans, and counselors should be aware of how holding multiple marginalized identities may make manualized treatments especially difficult for women Veterans (Steenkamp & Litz, 2014). Therefore, counselors working within VA settings should consider how they can incorporate an awareness of systemic oppression and marginalization throughout their practice within manualized treatments. For example, if a Veteran seeks treatment for identity or vocational concerns, counselors should consider utilizing an evidence-based psychotherapy that can be more personalized to the Veteran’s needs and can create space to discuss structural barriers, such as acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT), cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), or interpersonal therapy for depression (IPT-D).

**Research Implications.** The present study continues the growing findings that the career adaptability variable, as it is currently measured, is not a significant mediator between the structural variables and decent work. Moreover, the structural variables of marginalization and economic constraints were not found to significantly predict career adaptability. While career adaptability is a significant predictor of decent work, this may be more due to the similarity with work volition rather than distinct aspects of a construct. Similarly, the results from the present study fall in line with previous research that has continuously not found support for proactive personality as a moderator in

expected directions. Therefore, given the mounting lack of support for these two variables, it may be beneficial to remove career adaptability and proactive personality as variables from PWT. Instead, it may be more accurate to include a mediating variable that explores an individual's mental health. Substantial past research has shown how stable mental health leads symptoms to improve outcomes (Biasi, Dahl, & Moser, 2021; Follmer & Jones, 2018; van Weegal et al., 2019).

### **Limitations and Future Directions**

While the findings support the continued development and generalization of the PWT, several limitations of the present study need to be addressed. First, this was a cross-sectional study design, meaning causality cannot be established between variables in the model. While there have been some longitudinal studies (e.g., Autin et al., 2017), future studies would benefit from tracking workers over longer time periods to see how the constructs may change. In particular, it would be useful to better understand if changes in experiences of marginalization over time lead to decreased work volition and ultimate access to decent work.

Second, the present study utilized a scale measuring organizational sexism (Rubin et al., 2019) to measure marginalization, rather than the Lifetime Experiences of Marginalization scale (LEMS; Duffy et al., 2019) originally developed by the PWT authors. This choice was made to better incorporate intersectionality while measuring marginalization. However, inconsistent with most other PWT research, there were nonsignificant relationships between marginalization and many of the contextual variables. Therefore, this scale may not fully capture the construct of marginalization as

conceptualized by the PWT authors. The more generalizable nature of the LEMS items may be incorporating other forms of marginalization that are more representative of the discrimination faced by women Veterans.

Third, while the sample was racially and ethnically diverse, subgroup differences were not examined. As there were ten categories for participants to choose from regarding racial/ethnic background, there were not enough members for each group to make robust group comparisons. Understanding these differences is particularly important for women Veterans, as Black women are enlisting in the military at higher rates than men or women of any other ethnic group (Melin, 2016). Future studies would benefit from having a large and diverse sample to better understand the impact of holding intersectional identities on one's ability to secure decent work. More work is needed to examine decent work in Black women Veterans in particular (Melin, 2016).

Fourth, the decent work scale subfactors were highly correlated with the general factor. In particular, the time and compensation subfactors took up a much larger portion of the variance than other subfactors. Conceptually, this makes sense, as many individuals connote having a "good job" as one that pays sufficiently and gives adequate time off. This lack of equal variance may be occurring as the construct of decent work came from a labor organization definition (ILO, 2018), and was later adapted by vocational psychologists. Future PWT scholars may want to re-visit the distribution of variance across the general factor to determine if there could be a more equitable distribution.

## **Conclusion**

The Psychology of Working Theory has gained support over the past several years for its innovative approach to career development, particularly for marginalized individuals. Thus, the current study tested the PWT to see how the theoretical paths align with the unique experiences of women Veterans. Overall, the results expand the PWT literature by supporting many of its propositions with this population, as well as some notable exceptions regarding the roles of career adaptability and proactive personality. The results offer important data for furthering the theoretical advancement of the PWT, along with relevant implications for policy, practice, and research for supporting women Veterans in their working lives.

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## Appendix A

### Demographics Questionnaire

1. Are you a United States Armed Forces Veteran?\*

  - a. Yes
  - b. No
  - c. I am still active duty

2. What is your **current** gender identity?

  - a. Woman
  - b. Trans woman
  - c. Man
  - d. Trans man
  - e. Non-binary
  - f. Genderfluid
  - g. Prefer to self-identify (include text space)

3. What best describes your gender identity while **on active duty**?\*\*

  - a. Woman
  - b. Trans woman
  - c. Man
  - d. Trans man
  - e. Non-binary
  - f. Genderfluid
  - g. Prefer to self-identify (include text space)

4. What is your sexual orientation?

  - a. Straight/heterosexual
  - b. Gay or lesbian
  - c. Bisexual
  - d. Pansexual
  - e. Asexual
  - f. Prefer to self-identify (include text space)

5. What is your racial/ethnic identity? Choose all that apply.

  - a. Alaskan Native
  - b. Native American (For example, Navajo Nation, Blackfeet Tribe, Mayan, Aztec, Native Village of Barrow Inupiat Traditional Government, Nome Eskimo Community)
  - c. African American/Black (For example, Jamaican, Haitian, Nigerian, Ethiopian, Somalian)
  - d. Asian (For example, Chinese, Filipino, Asian Indian, Vietnamese, Korean, Japanese)
  - e. Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander (For example, Native Hawaiian, Samoan, Chamorro, Tongan, Fijian, Marshallese)

- f. Middle Eastern or North African (For example, Lebanese, Iranian, Egyptian, Syrian, Moroccan, Algerian)
  - g. Latinx/Hispanic (For example, Mexican or Mexican American, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Salvadoran, Dominican, Columbian)
  - h. White/Caucasian (For example, German, Irish, English, Italian, Polish, French)
  - i. Prefer to self-identify (include text space)
6. What is your age in years (e.g., 20, 27, 35)?
7. Are you currently in a romantic relationship with a partner or partners?
- a. Single
  - b. Partnered with one partner
  - c. Partnered with multiple partners
  - d. Divorced or Separated
8. If answered yes, are you? (Mark all that apply)
- a. Not applicable
  - b. Married or in a civil union, and living together
  - c. Married or in a civil union, and living apart
  - d. Not married or in a civil union, and living together
  - e. Not married or in a civil union, and living apart
9. How many dependent children do you have? ("Dependent children" are your children in your household that are either younger than 19 years old or are a student younger than 24 years old.)
- a. 1
  - b. 2
  - c. 3
  - d. 4
  - e. 5
  - f. 6
  - g. 7
  - h. 8
  - i. 9
  - j. 10+
10. What is your highest level of education?
- a. High school with no college
  - b. Some college
  - c. Trade/vocational school
  - d. College degree
  - e. Professional degree
11. What is your annual income?
- a. <\$25K
  - b. \$25K-\$50K
  - c. \$51K-\$75K
  - d. \$76K-\$100K

- e. \$101K-\$125K
  - f. \$125K-\$150K
  - g. \$151K-\$200K
  - h. \$201K or more
12. What is your employment status?
- a. Full-time employment
  - b. Part-time employment
  - c. Multiple part-time jobs
  - d. Student
  - e. Unemployed
  - f. Service-connected
  - g. Prefer to self-identify (include text space)
13. Which military branch did you belong to?
- a. Army
  - b. Navy
  - c. Air Force
  - d. Marines
  - e. Coast Guard
14. Did you experience combat?
- a. Yes
  - b. No
15. How many years were you on active duty (e.g., 1, 3, 6)?
16. What years were you on active duty service?
- a. Start year: \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. End year: \_\_\_\_\_

\* If participants indicate they are not Veterans or are still on active duty, they will be informed that they are not eligible for this study and will be re-directed to an exit page.

\*\*If participants indicate they identify their active duty gender as a man or trans man, they will be informed that they are not eligible for this study and will be re-directed to an exit page.



## Appendix B

### Decent Work Scale (DWS; Duffy et al., 2017)

1. I feel emotionally safe interacting with people at work.
2. At work, I feel safe from emotional or verbal abuse of any kind.
3. I feel physically safe interacting with people at work.
4. I get good healthcare benefits from my job.
5. I have a good healthcare plan at work.
6. My employer provides acceptable options for healthcare.
7. I am not properly paid for my work.\*
8. I do not feel I am paid enough based on my qualifications and experience.\*
9. I am rewarded adequately for my work.
10. I do not have enough time for non-work activities.\*
11. I have no time to rest during the work week.\*
12. I have free time during the work week.
13. The values of my organization match my family values.
14. My organization's values align with my family values.
15. The values of my organization match the values within my company.

Participants respond on a Likert-type scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

Factor 1 (Physically and Interpersonally Safe Working Conditions): Items 1-3

Factor 2 (Access to Health Care): Items 4-6

Factor 3 (Adequate Compensation): Items 7-9

Factor 4 (Hours that Allow for Free Time and Rest): Items 10-12

Factor 5 (Organizational Values Complement Family and Social Values): Items 13-15

\*Items 7, 8, 10, and 11 are reverse coded.

## **Appendix C**

### **Economic Constraints Scale (ECS; Duffy et al., 2019)**

1. For as long as I can remember, I have had very limited economic or financial resources.
2. Throughout most of my life, I have struggled financially.
3. For as long as I can remember, I have had difficulties making ends meet.
4. I have considered myself poor or very close to poor most of my life.
5. For most of my life, I have not felt financially stable.

Participants respond on a Likert-type scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

## Appendix D

### Organizational Sexism Scale\* (OSS; Rubin et al., 2019)

1. I have received fewer opportunities for promotion and career progression than men while in the military.
2. I have been treated unfairly by my employer, boss, or supervisors because I am a woman.
3. I have had less job stability and security than men.
4. I was treated unfairly by my peers while in the military because I am a woman.

Participants respond on a Likert-type scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

\*Modified to include military-specific language.

## Appendix E

### Work Volition Scale, Volition subscale (WVS; Duffy et al., 2012)

1. I can do the kind of work I want, despite external barriers.
2. I feel total control over my job choices.
3. I've been able to choose the jobs I want.
4. I feel able to change jobs if I want to.

Participants respond on a Likert-type scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

## Appendix F

### Career Futures Inventory, Career Adaptability subscale (CFI; Rottinghaus, Day, & Borgen, 2005)

1. I am good at adapting to new work settings.
2. I can adapt to change in my career plans.
3. I can overcome potential barriers that may exist in my career.
4. I enjoy trying new work-related tasks.
5. I can adapt to change in the world of work.
6. I will adjust easily to shifting demands at work.
7. Others would say that I am adaptable to change in my career plans.
8. I tend to bounce back when my career plans don't work out quite right.
9. I am rarely in control of my career.\*
10. I am not in control of my career success.\*

Participants respond on a Likert-type scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).

\*Items 9 and 10 are reverse coded.

## Appendix G

### **Proactive Personality Scale (PPS; Seibert, Crant, & Kramer, 1999)**

1. I am constantly on the lookout for new ways to improve my life.
2. Wherever I have been, I have been a powerful force for constructive change.
3. Nothing is more exciting than seeing my ideas turn into reality.
4. If I see something I don't like, I fix it.
5. No matter what the odds, if I believe in something I will make it happen.
6. I love being a champion for my ideas, even against others' opposition.
7. I excel at identifying opportunities.
8. I am always looking for better ways to do things.
9. If I believe in an idea, no obstacle will prevent me from making it happen.
10. I can spot a good opportunity long before others can.

Participants respond on a Likert-type scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).