

Background and Purpose

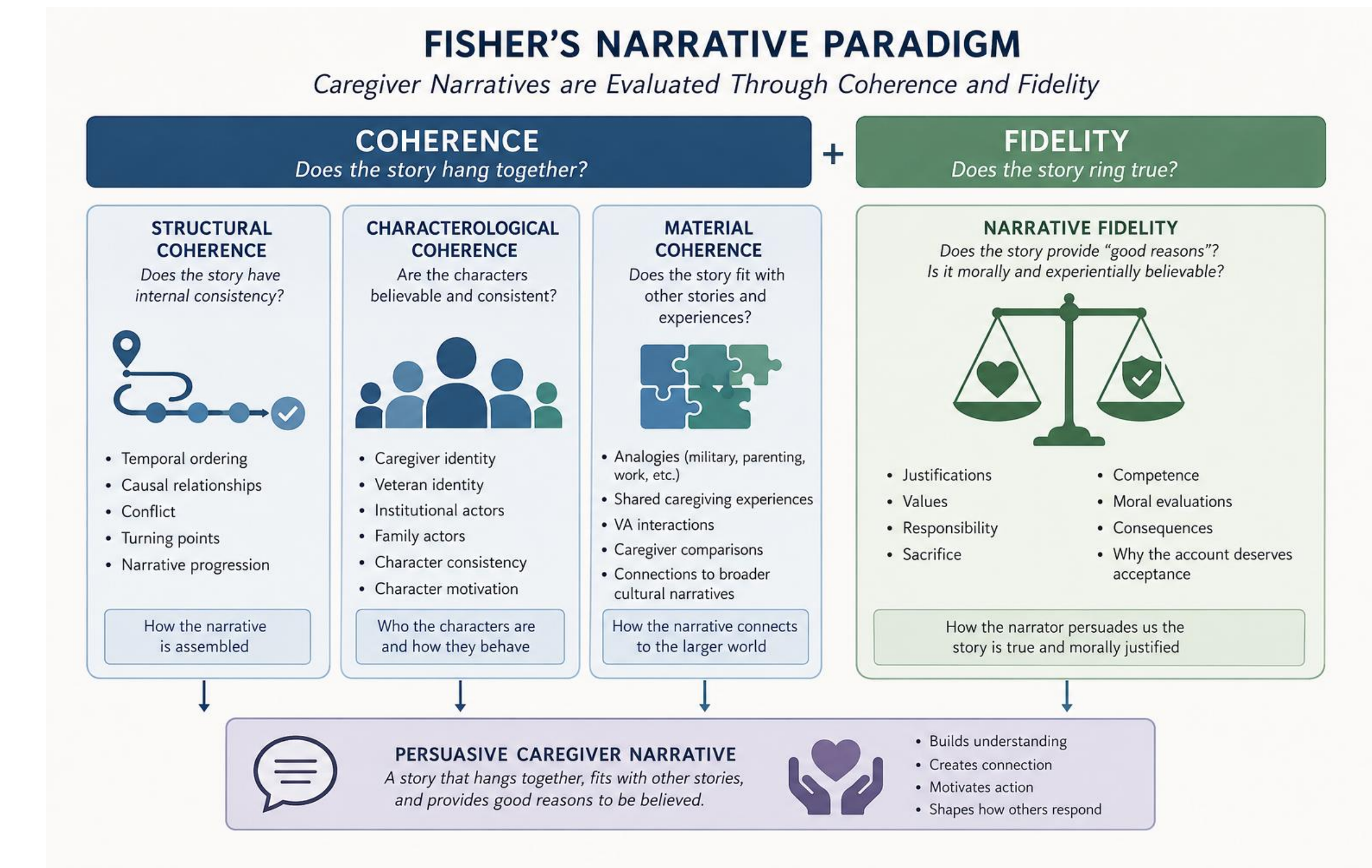
Caregivers of military service members and veterans are at an elevated suicide risk compared to the general population (Delgado et al , 2021). This risk is associated with caregiver strain and burden, which can ultimately affect the health and readiness of service members and veterans (Delgado et al, 2021; Ramachand et al, 2024). Navigating complex systems, these caregivers often interact across healthcare, government, social, and personal systems. This project conducted a secondary analysis of existing caregiver interviews, focusing on five caregivers who indicated in a survey that they had experienced suicidality. This project seeks to identify how these caregivers narrate their caregiving experience.

“All forms of human communication should be seen fundamentally as stories.”

- Walter R. Fisher

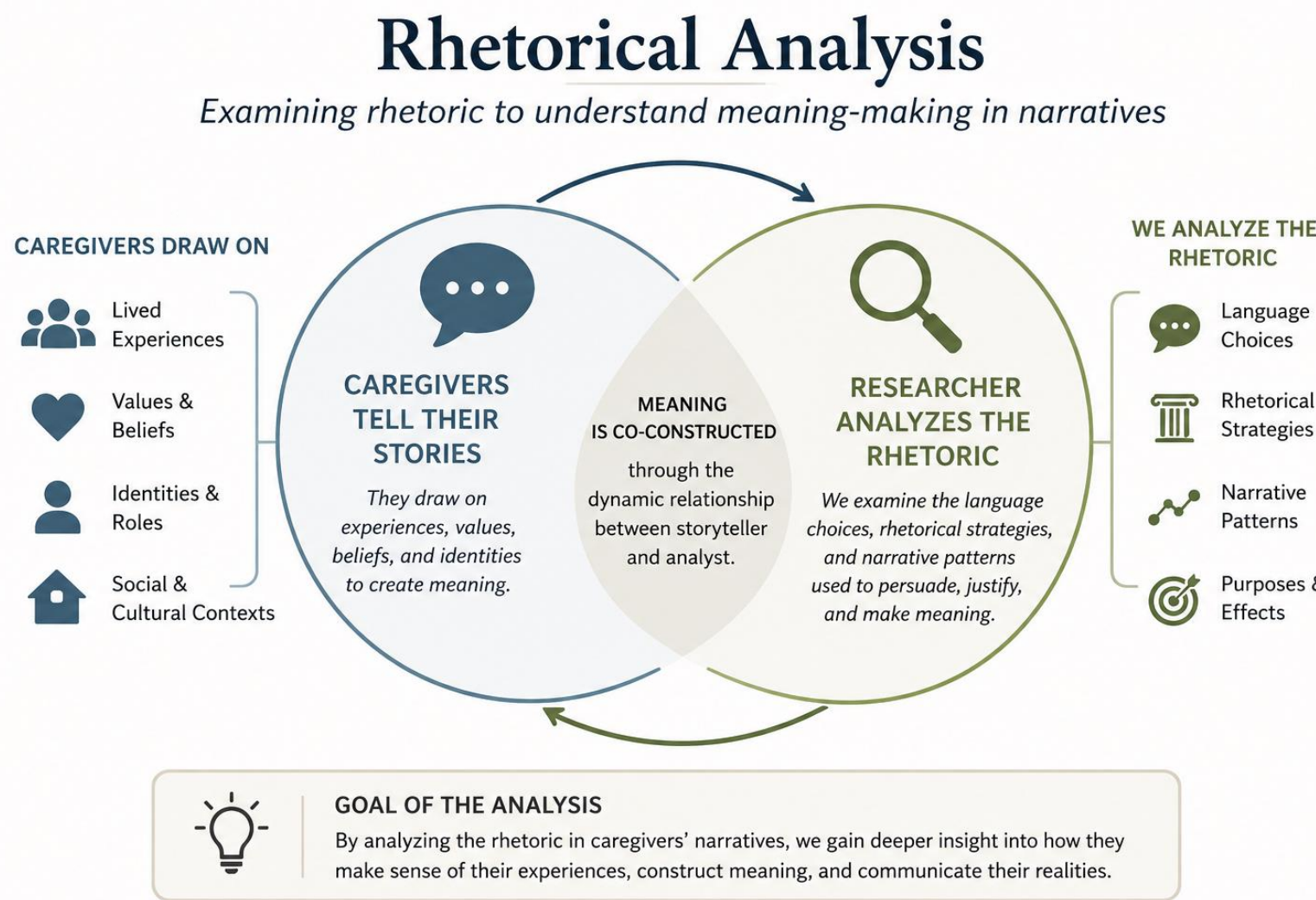
Methods

This study employed a Narrative Rhetorical Analysis, utilizing Walter Fisher’s Narrative Paradigm as a theoretical lens for analysis.

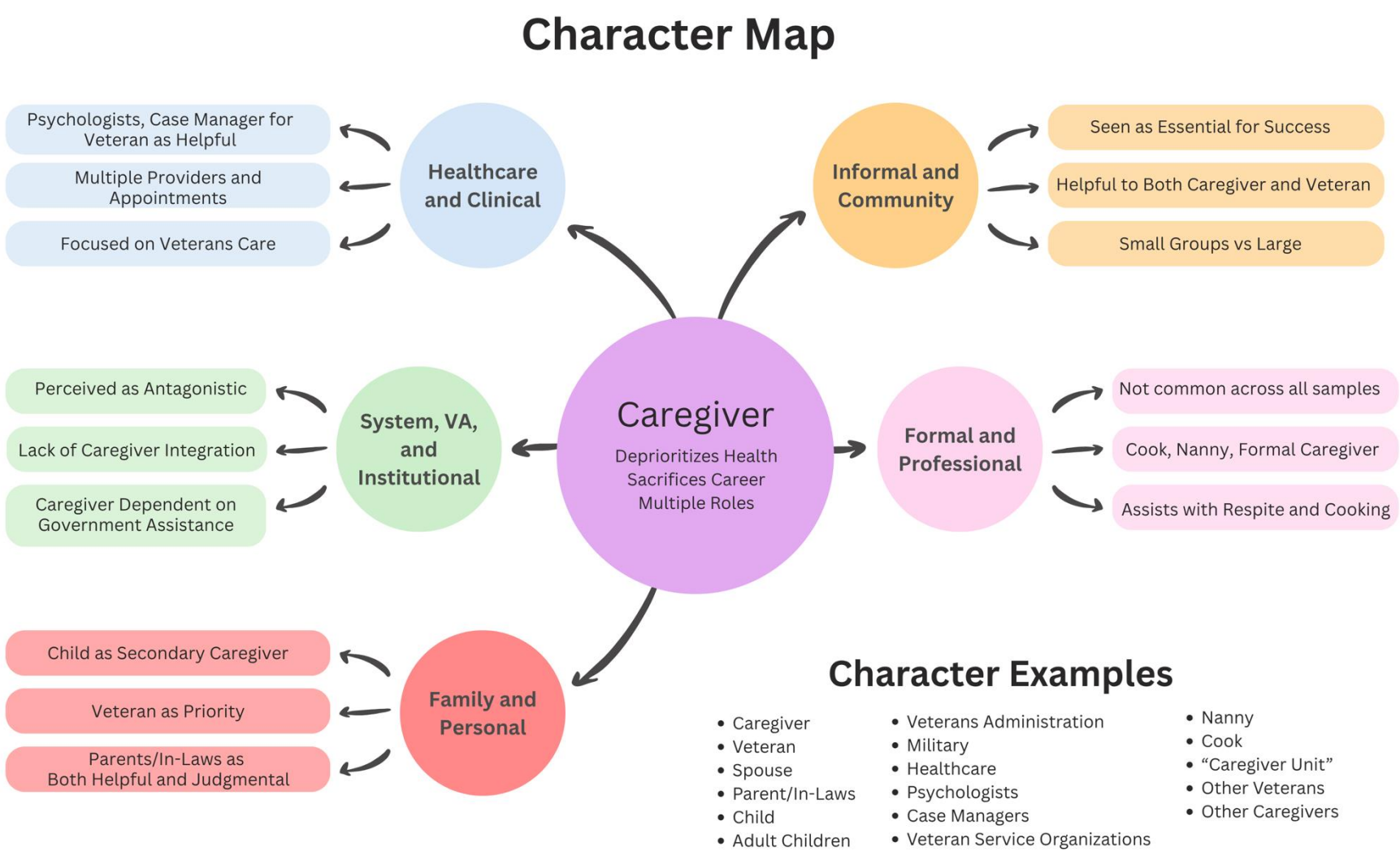
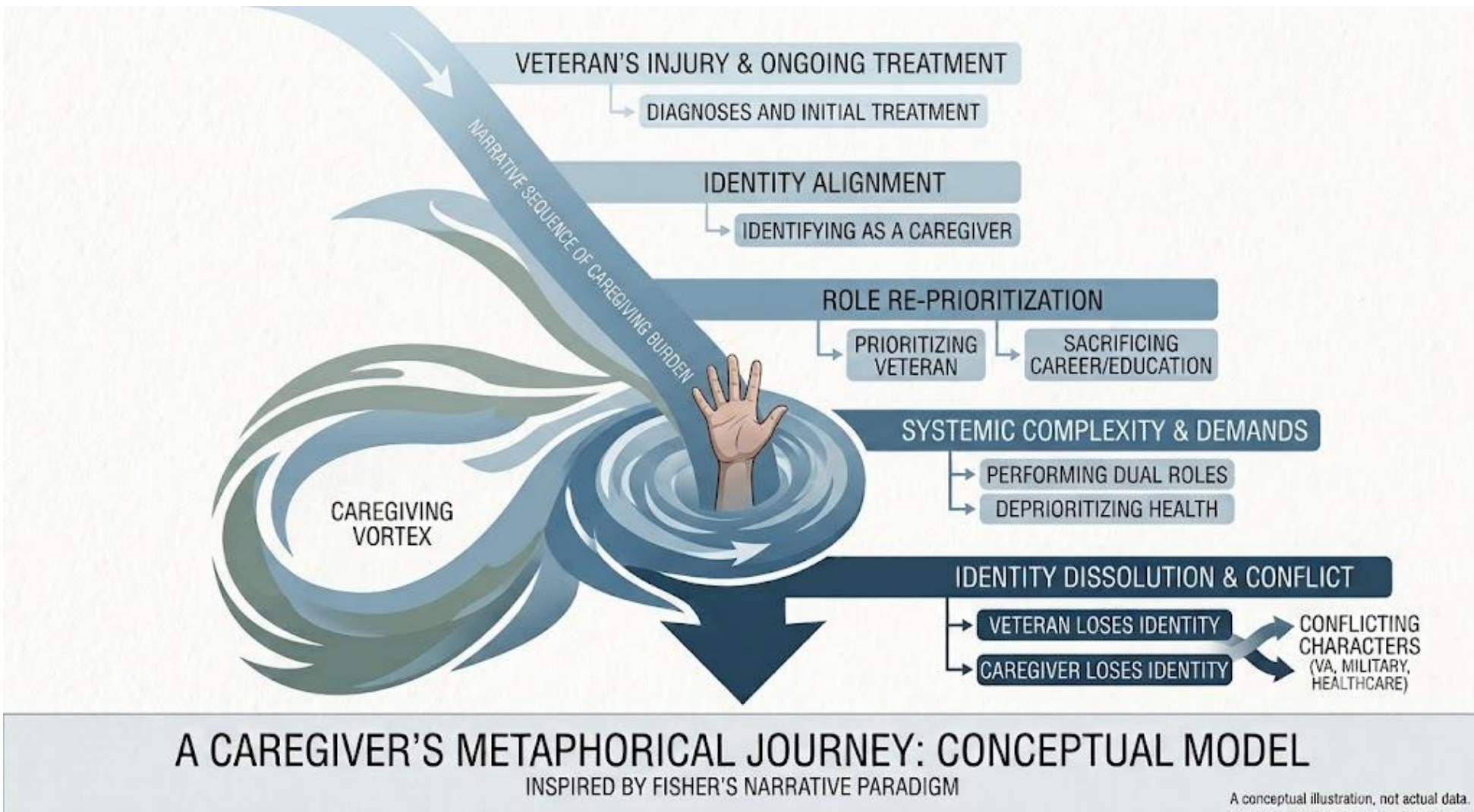


Analysis

A secondary analysis was conducted *a posteriori* to identify the different narratives and rhetorical properties in caregiver interviews



Results



Results (Cont.)

Rhetorical Markers for Caregiving	Type of Marker	Excerpts from Interviews
Unpaid Labor or Work	Metaphor	"They rely on caregivers to make sure that the person is from point A to point B and make sure everything's done, but other than that, get out of the way. We're basically the unpaid labor."
Swimming/Drowning	Metaphor	"And throw those two together and you feel like you're drowning. And there are resources for us and there are places to turn, which we are so lucky we are—as a community, are not just constantly drowning."
World Falling Apart (Veteran)	Idiom	"Um, today, it's really more just keeping him happy and not suicidal 'cause suicidal ideation comes hand in hand with having his entire world ripped apart."
Declining Health (Caregiver)	Hyperbole	"Absolutely. My health is so much worse."
System Conflict	Generalization	"We're in our 40s, and we're already retirees, living on a fixed income, worrying when that money's gonna be taken away for some stupid, petty reason because some politician has a point to make or somebody has a wild hair across their butt in the office"

Discussion and Implications for Future Research

The coherent narratives shared by caregivers reveal how experiences are organized into meaningful accounts through relationships among characters, conflicts, and justifications. Rather than explicitly discussing suicidality, caregivers constructed narratives that reflected ongoing negotiations of responsibility, identity, and institutional challenges. These rhetorical patterns provide insight into how caregivers experiencing suicidality make sense of their caregiving experiences. Future research should include larger sample sizes and comparative analysis with caregivers who do not indicate suicidality.

Acknowledgments

This project is a collaboration between the Caring for the Caregiver Program and TORCH Lab San Antonio at the University of Texas at San Antonio and TORCH Lab Central at the University of Utah. This work is part of the larger Caregivers Health and Wellbeing Study, led by Dr. Roxana Delgado at UT Health San Antonio. We gratefully acknowledge the contributions of the study participants, research staff, and collaborating institutions.

References

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