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An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis of Women Veterans Transitioning Back into Civilian Life

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An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis of Women Veterans Transitioning Back into

Civilian Life

by

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A Dissertation Presented to the

College of Arts, Humanities, & Social Sciences

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Abstract

Officially, women have been serving in the United States military since 1948 when President Truman signed the Women's Armed Services Integration Act. Women currently make up approximately 8% of active duty military. Based on progress due to equality and equity, women are now occupying positions previously designated for men. Although women have made great strides in the military, there is limited research on women in the military or how their military service affects them. There is even less literature on women who have transitioned out of the military. For this reason, I conducted an interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) with a focus on feminist theory to gather information about the lived experiences of women who have transitioned out of the military. Through the analysis portion, seven super-ordinate themes were established. Saturation requirements were met with four participants. This study will enhance the marriage and family therapy profession by providing better understanding on how to relate to this population while filling the gaps within the literature about women veterans and transition. Through this study, women veterans had a place in which their voices were heard.

Keywords: women veterans, interpretative phenomenological analysis, transition, equality and equity

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Imagine you are serving in the Armed Forces (also known as military)—where you spend your time performing physical training (PT), drills, and training exercises in preparation for that moment when you deploy with your unit or by yourself as an individual augmentee (IA; attached to a unit already deployed) on a mission. All this extensive training allows you to perform at peak level without thinking. Armed Forces refers to the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard (Library of Congress, 2012). Military refers to any or all of the Armed Forces (Library of Congress, 2012). These terms are often used interchangeably. For more on these terms, refer to the glossary in Appendix A.

The military operates on the concept of muscle memory. Shusterman (2011) defines muscle memory as paradigmatic and sensory perceptions that allow someone to perform skills in an automatic fashion without conscious planning of the steps required to perform a specific task. In other words, PT, drills, and training becomes ingrained into "schema or patterns deeply embedded in an individual's central nervous system" (Shusterman, 2011, p. 4) thus becoming a part of your identity and your new way of life. Continue to imagine that after years of service training and missions, the time has come for you to start your transition out of the military and into civilian life. Can you imagine the process? What thoughts do you have? What are the next steps? What about benefits, disability, and medical care? How will your family respond? These questions, along with countless others, become a life-changing reality for service members. The importance of this study is to understand the transition process, including learning about the lived experiences of women who have already made this journey. One aspect of this journey is

to comprehend the military structure and have a better understanding on how to train military members to come home after going to war.

Personal Interest in the Topic

As a Family Therapy Ph.D. student, I became interested in the topic based on my own experiences. I served eight years in the United States Army, with two combat tours in Iraq. My experience as a woman in the military included being a part of a marginalized population—even though women have served for over 70 years in the military. Disrespect was a common part of my experience due to my sex and gender. Sex is whether a person is male or female through their biology (United States Department of Defense, 2016). Gender is understood as the socially defined roles and characteristics of being male and female associated with that sex. However, Andermahr, Lovell, and Wolkozitz (1997) provided an in depth understanding of how gender is defined stating it was created to help distinguish between sex: biological (i.e., male and female) and socio-cultural meanings (i.e., masculinity and femininity). Using gender, the dominant tendency minimizes differences between the sexes and privileges gender over sex.

While serving in the military, I learned about the idea of the types of women who serve in the military. Women in the military would fall into one of these types: whore/slut; dike (referring to being lesbian and/or including acting like a man); or bitch. In my experience, the military's Equal Opportunity (EO) program worked hard to stop this from happening, however, it continued while I served, and it is safe to assume is still occurring.

An additional source of denigration came when I got injured, resulting in disabilities and increased limitations. The Medical Evaluation Board (MEB) decided I

was no longer able to fulfill my soldiering duties, which resulted in an honorable

separation from the United States Army. Separation (also known as discharge) is defined

as no further military status by means of expiration term of service (ETS), Retirement,

Medical Separation, or Medical Retirement (Headquarters Department of the Army,

2000). Whereas character of service at separation is a determination reflecting a soldier's

military behavior and performance of duty during a specific period of service. The three

administrative characters are: Honorable, General (Under Honorable Conditions), and

Under Other Than Honorable Conditions. The service of soldiers [use of soldier is due to

the source being from the Army, however, all branches have the same characters] in entry

level status is normally described as uncharacterized. Bad Conduct or Dishonorable are

punitive discharges under the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ; Headquarters

Department of the Army, 2000).

It was through this decision that I started my own transition back into civilian life,

leaving my military status behind. It was behind me, but not forgotten, as I adopted my

new veteran status. Civilian is referred to a non-military service population (Library of

Congress, 2012). Veteran is a person who served in the active military, naval, or air

service and who was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable

(Electronic Code of Federal Regulations, 2017).

There is a saying that the military trains service members to go to war, but they do

not train them to come home. Generally, the application of this is for reintegration after a

military deployment and/or mission. However, I believe this is true when transitioning

back into civilian life as well. Literature often inaccurately uses the terms reintegration

and transition interchangeably. Reintegration is helping service members re-establish

connections with their families, communities, and employers upon re-deployment (Per Diem, Travel, and Transportation Allowance Committee, 2017). Often reintegration is often applied to Reserve and National Guard components, since they walk the line of civilian and military at the same time. Transition, on the other hand, is a result of leaving the military service (Headquarters Department of the Army, 2000). Even though reintegration is a vital aspect of military life and learning how to reintegrate while in the military is a significant skill, further discussion on reintegration is outside the scope of this study. In order to set the context of this study first I will describe military culture. With a better understanding of the context of the military, a contextual understanding could be applied to transition from the military resulting in more significance of this study.

Military Culture and Identity

The understanding of culture varies between people and ideas. For example, Ng (2012) understood culture to represent variations in language, religion, socioeconomic status, race, and so on. It is this experience with different cultures that shapes our own perceptions, creating unreasonable expectations or stereotypes about cultures (Ng, 2012) Conversely, according to anthropologists, culture is understood as personal refinements (e.g., classical music, the fine arts, world philosophy, and gourmet cuisine) that signify a cultured person (Ferraro, 2006). Ferraro (2006) provided additional examples of culture definitions in accordance with Tylor (1871): "a complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society;" Down (1971): "a mental map which guides us

in our relations to our surroundings and to other people;" and Hatch (1985): "the way of life of a people" (as cited in Ferraro, 2006, pp. 27-28).

When defining culture, Wilcoxon, Remley, and Gladding (2013) included *subculture* which "exhibits characteristic patterns of behavior sufficient to distinguish others in the dominant society or culture," and *intraculture*, which includes "educational background, socioeconomic status, acculturation, and urban and rural background" (p. 6). Furthermore, Baldwin, Faulkner, Hecht, and Lindsley (2012) discovered that there are layers to culture and how culture is defined. Those layers include: structure/pattern (ideas, behaviors, symbols); function (tool for achieving some end); process (ongoing social construction); product (in terms of artifacts); refinement (based on individual or group); power or ideology (group-based power); and group-membership (place or group of people, focus on belonging; Baldwin et al., 2012).

According to the previous definitions and understandings, the military is not only a culture, but a subculture that separates itself from the dominate culture and society, also known as civilian society. Weinstein and D'Amico (1999) invited civilians to imagine what it would look like to step onto a military base for the first time, comparable to entering a foreign country—not knowing the culture, language, the rules of behaviors, or dress code. According to Hunter (2007), the idea of any culture is that it "has a set of norms and rules; some are overt, such as those written in manuals, while others are covert—unspoken but understood" (p. 13). During the Counsel of College and Military Educators conference, presenter Dianne Morrison-Beedy, former Dean, stated, "Culture shifts [do] take place. Culture change doesn't happen overnight" (Morrison-Beedy & Gill Rossiter, 2018).

Military culture is often determined in part by the Department of Defense (DOD), which regulates all policy and procedures while working to update them frequently, adhering to all new laws or policies. DOD train and equip the Armed Forces through our three military departments: The Army, Navy, and Air Force. The Department of the Navy also comprises the Marine Corps branch. The primary job of the military departments is to train and equip their personnel to perform warfighting, peacekeeping, and humanitarian/disaster assistance tasks (U.S. DOD, 2017).

Brim (2016) posed the question, if service members cannot follow basic everyday rules and regulations, such as wearing their uniform or saluting at an officer, how could the expectation to follow the rules of engagement in combat exist? Weinstein and D'Amico (1999) argued for United States' civilians to take a more active role, learning how the military directly and indirectly affects millions of people. Even though these authors have different opinions about who should be responsible for military culture, both agreed rules and regulations are primary occurrences within the military. To better understand military culture and identity, it is important to understand the concept of total institution.

Military Total Institution

Some might argue the training to go to war comes from the ideas of Goffman (1969) about total institutions. Goffman (1969) defined a total institution as

> A place of residence and work where a large number of like-situated individuals
> cut off from the wider society for an appreciable period of time together lead an
> enclosed formally administered round of life. (p. 11)

For clarification purposes, when referring to the entity of the military and concept of total institutions, the two merge together to be defined as *military total institutions* (Brown, 2011). When broken down into smaller parts, Sociology (2016) explained how the process of resocialization, accompanied by degradation ceremonies, is common within total institutions. Yet literature often refers to these concepts in broader terms such as military culture and identity (Ensign, 2004). Ensign (2004) described the driving force of the military culture as "a group dynamic centered around male perceptions and sensibilities, male psychology and power, male anxieties and the affirmation of masculinity" (p. 136). By better understanding the military culture and how it operates, we can better prepare veterans to come home, both in reintegration or transition.

Caforio (2006) stated, a total institution contains a single place, regulated under a single authority in accordance to a rational plan, and unfolding in contact with the same group of people, generally, a much more numerous group than one's usual sleep or leisure group within normal life. Civilization includes fundamental aspects such as the fact that people will sleep, amuse themselves, and work in different places with different companions, under different authorities, and with no rational overall pattern (Caforio, 2006). Conversely, the residents of that institution do everything together all the time with limited to no interaction with anyone outside the institution. Outside the military institution, these established boundaries create the divide between civilians and total institutions.

Davies (1989) discussed the difference between opened and closed institutions and which one of the categories the institution resides depends on the "batch-like" environment in which the institution treats individuals (p. 91). Another way to understand

the concept of batch-like is closed institutions such as prison, where individuals do not have the freedom to leave, and there is continued same treatment for all. Compared to treatment being cookie-cutter, open institutions such as private schools have the freedom to leave, allowing for more individual treatment.

Features of Military Total Intuitions

Under a total institution, there are three features that exist. First, the institution has total control over the individuals. Second, institutions take away identities of residents to weaken the residents' self-identity and ensure conformity to the institution's rules (Sociology, 2016). Third, harsh treatment, and often abuse, are elements which residents are subjected to, to ensure they are part of the institution.

Feature one: total control. Ensign (2004) established how the military discourages displays of individualism and emphasizes conformity. According to Davies (1989), the military total institution serves as an intermediate between open and closed institutions. The reason for this is because the service member does not have the right to leave the service anytime they wish, yet they would have the freedom to leave the base. Service members fall under the same rules, policies, procedures, and Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ), with the same standards.

However, others have argued that the military is a closed institution, for they are completely blocked off from society to include their own judicial system, medical system, schools, commissary [grocery store], daycares, civilian jobs, car repair shops, libraries, museums, uniforms and alterations shops, food services, laundry services, barracks, family housing, Post Exchange/Base Exchange (PX/BX) [similar to a department store], and mail system (Brown, 2011; Hunter, 2007). Based on the

understandings previously, for this study, the military would be in the category of a closed total institution. Since total institutions have a couple of types, the term military total institution outlines the type specifically for the military (Brown, 2011).

Feature two: no individual identities. It is important to understand that the resocialization of peoples' values and beliefs change drastically based on the settings in which they live (Sociology, 2016). Hunter (2007) described part of the resocialization process is when the service members begin to learn the language of the culture for acceptance. Ensign (2004) talked about the steps, attributed to resocialization, mentioned previously. The steps start in basic training, beginning with "tearing down" the service member, breaking down their individualism (Ensign, 2004; Hunter, 2007). This is followed by "building compliant aggression," which entails unswerving obedience and ruthless aggression (Ensign, 2004). The next stage is "building up to kill," which includes the preparation to rebuild from recruits into soldiers [in this case, the use of Soldier describes all service members, not limited to a single branch, and it also demonstrates the use of language within the literature as not a true reflection of the language of the military] (Ensign, 2004). To become a soldier is to complete the "training to kill" step, where service members literally learn to kill other human beings, thus resisting their natural instincts to not kill (Ensign, 2004). Throughout all the steps, service members become exposed to a variety of activities where they are building rapport with their basic training class, learning to protect each other while minimizing their fear, increasing their knowledge and skills, and pushing their body passed previous limits (Ensign, 2004).

Unit cohesion is another reason the military purposely attempts to keep military service members and civilians separate (Harrison & Laliberté, 1997). For example,

enhanced unit cohesion minimizes the possibility that members would desert their comrades if the unit comes under fire (Harrison & Laliberté, 1997). One way in which the military attempts to support unit cohesion is by discouraging interaction with civilians, including putting down civilian roots. Therefore, military members move approximately every two to four years, though the military still encourages the unit to socialize together, often drink together, and participate in rituals (Harrison & Laliberté, 1997).

      Feature three: harsh treatment. Resocialization from feature two often goes hand and hand with degradation ceremonies found in feature three. Degradation ceremonies are an encounter in which a resident of a total institution experiences humiliation, usually in front of other residents or officials (Sociology, 2016). Sociology (2016) provided an example of feature three by discussing Drill Sergeants, stating "Drill Sergeants have also been known for harshly treating new recruits: some observers defend this practice as necessary for military discipline and readiness, while others consider it to be unjustified abuse" (para. 5). Drill Sergeants are the military personnel of Noncommissioned Officer (NCO), selected and trained by the military to train incoming military service members in either Basic Training or Advanced Individual Training (AIT), where the service member learns their Military Occupational Specialty (MOS), also known as a military job. For example, when a Drill Sergeant calls a physically unconditioned male a "girl" or "lady" to question their manhood in front of other recruits (Sociology, 2016). This is an attempt to promote an environment where the boy becomes a man and emerges into manhood with the purpose to serve and protect as a product of a socially constructed notion about men in the military (Sjoberg, 2014).

Appearance and Physical Requirements

Military identity includes physical fitness and appearance in uniform (Ensign, 2004). Colonel Pierce Rushton Jr., West Point's director of admissions, once stated "there used to be a medical regulation that ruled out ugliness…extreme ugliness was a disqualifier" (as cited in Ensign, 2004). Promotion boards require service members to take a department photo of themselves in their dress uniform, as appearance is part of the decision process regarding promotions. If service members do not meet the appearance standards for the service, they are denied promotions for advancement.

It is a requirement for service members to pass their physical exam, also known as Physical Training test (PT test), along with height and weight. Each branch has their specific requirements. PT tests, along with height and weight requirements, allow men and women of different ages to have different requirements. In some regards, this could be providing equity to women, based on the belief women and men have a biologically different make-up and build (Mackenzie, 2015). For example, women generally have shorter legs and smaller lungs, so the time to complete a run is longer; however, women have stronger hip flexor muscles which allows for more sit-ups. On the other side of the coin, this is not treating the sexes equally, and we could expect more backlash from men towards women about not being able to cut it as a service member (Mackenzie, 2015). Deeper exploration on this example is found later, in the section on gender equality and equity. Within the literature, no one comments on the age categories, and studies continue to focus attention on gender. Currently, discharging from the military for failure to meet PT and height and weight standards continues to happen to service members no matter the gender or age, resulting in an administrative discharge instead of a medical discharge.

Rank, Grade, and Type

Another aspect of military culture and identity deals with military rank, grade, and rank type (enlisted or officer). Rank is the order of precedence among members of the Armed Forces. Commissioned Officer-Commissioned grade; Enlisted-Enlisted grade; Warrant Officer-Warrant grade (Library of Congress, 2012). Likewise, grade is a step or degree, in a graduated scale of office or military rank that is established and designated as a grade by law or regulation (Library of Congress, 2012). For example: An Enlisted (rank type) Sergeant (rank) E-5 (grade).

Rank, and sometimes last name, are used to address military service members instead of first names. For example: Private, Staff Sergeant, Sergeant Brown, Colonel Jones, Command Sergeant Major Robertson, Lieutenant Price, and so on. The service member's rank, grade, and position become a part of a service member's identity. In other words, they transition from John to Sergeant Brown. On the flip side, they then transition back from Sergeant Brown to John after leaving the service. As service members gain rank, they also gain prestige within the organization. This prestige is a part of the identity and fuels the power of the individual within the military due to the hierarchy. Within the hierarchical structure lives the chain of command comprised of a variety of rank and grade service members similar to the hierarchal nature of a totem pole. The chain of command is set into place for accountability and organized structure of the military. Ensign (2004) discussed an important aspect in dealing with rank and structure of the chain of command:

If your superior officer gives you an order that you think may be improper or illegal, you are in a difficult spot. If you obey, you may bring future trouble down

on yourself. If you refuse, however, you will certainly be called to account

immediately. (p. 6)

As a service member, you are not identified as an individual person and cannot make

decisions for yourself. However, sometimes there are individual dilemmas a service

member needs to be aware of to protect themselves. These are discussed in the following

sections.

Military Hypermasculinity

Militarism identifies the sources of women's compliance with, and resistance to,

militarism and the gendered nature of military values: highlighting the masculinism of

war by devaluing women while celebrating the men (Humm, 1990). As part of the

degradation ceremonies, similarly, Francke (2004) described how tearing down

femininity to pump up masculinity is commonly present in the military culture. Males are

called names such as: "sissies," "crybabies," "girls," while told phrases like "so we are

having menstrual cramps this morning?" (Francke, 2004). Likewise, female service

members experience this as well.

However, it appears different for females. By calling females names such as

"you're a wuss," "baby," "boy," "you goddamn female," the military takes away the

femaleness to make them more like men (Francke, 2004). According to Humm (1990)

degradation ceremonies fall in line with the ideas of pacifism. Pacifism involves concepts

of nonviolence and ideas about the relation of militarism and gender; for example,

military practices depend on degraded definitions of woman hood- definitions based on

women's second-class citizenship and sexual exploitation.

Weinstein and D'Amico (1999) discussed how women incoming into the military were entering "No-*Woman*-Land" [italics in original] and within this "hostile environment" women don camouflage to make it through this environment (p. 5). Hunter (2007) described the masculinity in military culture as *hypermasculinity* due to the way the military reinforces traditional masculine traits found in the military. Humm (1990) described this as androcentrism, male centeredness, which is the value set of our dominant culture based on male norms.

Due to the hypermasculinity found in the military culture, a common practice is to have women conform to the male standard. One way this is done is by *mirror*-ing. Women act as mirrors reflecting back to men an enlarged view of masculinity rather than acting for themselves, defining her as "Other.*"* This sense of other defines the woman's identity (Humm, 1990). Other is a concept described later.

Katzenstein (1998) discussed three "gatekeeping" ways activists face as a result to keep the military culture as a hypermasculine environment and ways that pressure conformity for women in the military. First, the "refusal on the part of peers and superiors to acknowledge inequality as an institutional problem" (p. 81). Within the military, the chain of command does not like to acknowledge their inequality problem, which then becomes a consequence of an exacerbated problem. Second, a "form of social control exists in the form of discouraging women from finding common cause with each other" (p. 84). This allows the military to continue to isolate women from each other, reducing the ability of women to become a support network for other women and rally together for a greater cause, which would diminish the chance of retaliation from other military members. The third is a "source of women's silencing is the chain-of-command-

system that structures military accountability" (p. 85). If women are rallying together in an effort to be agents of change, the military loses its ability to remain in power, reducing the effectiveness of the chain of command. These gatekeeping procedures make it difficult for activists to fight for changes within the military institution. They also delay any progress in the equality of women serving in the military. These tactics continue to pressure women to conform to the hypermasculinity within the military instead of allowing women to be separate from men while still being equal to men. One could argue that this pressure to conform to be more like a man plays into the identity of women and how they view themselves as women and service members.

Background of the Problem

Within the United States, approximately 1% of the population serves on active duty in the Armed Forces when it's peace time, and 3-5% serve during non-peace time (war and/or conflict; DADSb, 2015). Active duty is known as full-time duty in the active military service of the United States (Library of Congress, 2012). The transition cycle takes place when new members enter the service and other service members transition out of service, thus changing the transitioning service member's status from active duty military to veteran. Furthermore, while there are personnel serving on active duty, there is an additional 17% of the population, known as veterans, that completed their military service (DADSb, 2015). This totals 18-22% that are currently serving or have served at any given time. However, when dividing that 18-22% veteran population by sex, it leads to approximately 92% being male and 8% being female (DADSa, 2015). Males represent 18,529,804 of the veteran population and females represent 1,578,528 of the veteran population (DADSa, 2015). For the purpose of this study, sex will refer to male and

female, and gender will refer to man and woman, while sex and gender refer to identities being biologically assigned and determined at birth.

These numbers are estimates and vary among researchers. Even though researchers cannot agree on an exact percentage, they do agree that the number of women serving in the military continues to grow, with estimates at 15% by the year 2035 (Department of Veterans Affairs & National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2011). With women filling more ranks and positions within the military, it is important to explore the journey women have taken to serve in the military.

Women have been volunteering and/or temporarily assigned to the military since 1775, with the start of the Revolutionary War (Nathan, 2004). During this time, women would assume male identities to serve in the military (Friedl, 1996). Since women could not serve their country the same way that men served, they would have to disguise themselves as men or would operate in other situations such as receiving a temporary assignment to the military based on the commanders' discretion to be nurses, school teachers, spies, or AT&T (phone) operators, to name a few (Nathan, 2004).

It was the 1948 Women's Armed Services Integration Act—70 years ago—that allowed women to receive permanent military status in the Armed Forces. However, these positions remained positions of support instead of frontline action. As time passed, the military changed its policies to give women permission to take on more roles previously designated for men only. For example, it was not until 67 years after permanent military status was granted that women could serve in combat positions (Chappell, 2015). The progression of having more women in the military allowed women

to become commanders, generals, and participants in special operations such as Rangers, Special Forces, Navy Seals, and so forth.

The advancement of women in the military has been a long and vigorous journey. Even though women have made strides in their military service journey, the struggle continues between equality versus equity. Equality is based on the idea that no individual should be less equal in opportunity or in human rights than any other (Humm, 1990). In the military equality is defined as all Veterans/Service Members receive the same number of treatments, support, resources, etc. (Uchendu, 2016). Whereas equity is defined as the number of treatments, support, resources, etc. is determined by the individual's needs instead of it being a set number being equally distributed (Uchendu, 2016).

Major General Suman (2010) believed that in order to protect our fighting potential in the Armed Forces, women in the military do not deserve equity standards instead of equal standards. In other words, he is not a supporter of giving service women different treatment than service men, seeing them all as equal and not as individuals with different needs. However, for the Department of Veteran Affairs (VA), women are a "special group" (Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration, Benefits Assistance Service, 2016), even though women make up 8% of the military population.

The Department of Veteran Affairs (VA) is a federal Cabinet-level agency that provides near-comprehensive healthcare services to eligible military veterans at VA medical centers and outpatient clinics located throughout the country; it provides several non-healthcare benefits including disability compensation, vocational rehabilitation, education assistance, home loans, and life insurance. It provides burial and memorial

benefits to eligible veterans and family members at 135 national cemeteries (Department

of Veteran Affairs, 2017).

Disability ratings come from the VA after a service member is discharged from

military service and the service members evokes the process for disability compensation.

Disability compensation is a tax-free monetary benefit paid to veterans with disabilities

that are the result of a disease or injury incurred or aggravated during active military

service. The benefit amount is graduated according to the degree of the veteran's

disability on a scale from 10% to 100% (in increments of 10%). Compensation may also

be paid for disabilities that are considered related or secondary to disabilities occurring in

service and for disabilities presumed to be related to circumstances of military service,

even though they may arise after service. Generally, the degrees of disability specified

are also designed to compensate for considerable loss of working time from

exacerbations or illnesses (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018). In other words,

the service member never had an injury or illness before entering the service or the injury

or illness has been made worse as a result of the service. The VA then becomes

responsible for treatment of these illnesses and injuries as a result of their military

service, resulting in service-connected disability producing a percentage known as

disability rating. Soldiers who receive a disability rating of 30% or greater are either

placed on the Temporary Disability Retirement List (TDRL) or the Permanent Disability

Retired List (PDRL). Soldiers receiving a rating of 20% or less will receive disability

severance pay. The Army only rates medical conditions that result in the Soldier being

determined unfit for continued military service through the Physical and/or Medical

Evaluation Board (PEB/MEB). The VA rates a soldier for all conditions incurred in or

aggravated by military service (Defense Finance and Accounting Service, 2017; Deputy Chief of Staff, Warrior Care and Transition, 2017).

By helping women get additional treatment services that men do not get or require, this creates labels and perceptions against women. However, some might argue that these labels define women as not being equal to men. Despite the fact that women continue to progress through the heavy terrain, there is still much work required, including the studying of military transitioning for women. It was through my own experience as a woman in the military and transitioning back into civilian life that I was influenced to study this topic.

The Military Transition Process

The military transition process begins with the DOD Program (TAP). TAP provides information, tools, and training to ensure service members and their spouses are prepared for the next step in civilian life, whether pursuing additional education, finding a job in the public or private sector, or starting their own business. This redesigned TAP is the result of an interagency collaboration to offer separating service members and their spouses better, more easily accessible resources and information to make their transitions more successful (Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program, 2017; Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration, VA Benefit Briefers Transition Assistance Program (TAP; 2017). TAP begins approximately one year (this is a newly established part of the program; before it was six months) before separation for most service members and two years before separation for retirements (previously, this was one year, before the policy changes in 2014).

The exception would be medical separation and medical retirements, which have limited timeframes due to the military determining the separation date, with limited separation time for processing. During the transition time, while in the TAP, the expectation for service members to perform their duties in their current position and status continues. In my experience working in military human resources, it is often the needs of the military that outweigh the needs of the service member during their transition period. In other words, the military needs are higher than the individual and their transition process. More on the TAP program in a later section.

Statement of the Problem

Women have made monumental advances within the military and the roles that they perform. Yet, in the literature, women in the military are studied far less often than men. Even though the literature uses reintegration and transitioning interchangeably, it still generally only references men. Envision what it must mean for women to serve in the military with the idea that they are a small population. There is limited research on women in the military, with even less research on women that have transitioned out of the military. However, the literature breaks down transition into situations, events, and actions as common themes. These include problems like coping with military sexual trauma (MST; Maguen et al., 2012), gender equality/equity (Kelty, Kleykamp, & Segal, 2010), family/relationship concerns (Grossbard et al., 2013), mental health and physical health concerns (Lehavot, Hoerster, Nelson, Jakupcak, & Simpson, 2012), substance use/abuse (Burkhart & Hogan, 2014; McKinney, McIntire, Carmody, & Joseph, 1997), suicide (Hazle, Wilcox, & Hassan, 2012), unemployment (Szelwach, Steinkogler, Badger, & Muttukumaru, 2011), educational situations (Ryan, Carlstrom, Hughey, &

Harris, 2011), homelessness (Posey, 2012), and legal problems (Brown, 2011). In Chapter II, I will discuss these concerns and how transition impacts these factors in further detail.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of women veterans transitioning back into civilian life after their military service. By studying the experiences of women, I started closing the gap in the literature between sexes and genders, while also providing a voice to women in the effort to further demonstrate equality and equity throughout their transition process. By studying women veterans during their transition, I explored the meaning of their military experience, their transition, and how it impacted them and their families. I completed this study using the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) research method (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2007). I recruited participants for this study with the following criteria: active duty veteran, female, woman, and heterosexual. I conducted the IPA interviews for participants at a local therapy office.

When researching various research methodologies, I came across phenomenology. Phenomenology started as a philosophical movement focusing on the person undergoing the phenomenon or lived experience through consciousness and the context of conscious experience, such as judgements, perceptions, and emotions (Connelly, 2010). I knew this was the methodology I wanted to focus my attention on because it fit with my personal experience of being a woman who served in the military. Upon further research, I discovered the differences between descriptive and interpretative analysis approaches. Under these approaches, I was able to determine the descriptive

approach does not align with my personal epistemology. For this reason, I decided to explore methods which fall under the interpretative analysis approach.

Feminism and Feminist Theory

I used feminist theory as a framework for understanding women veterans and their transition. Often interchanged throughout the literature are the terms feminism and feminist theory. Feminism is the belief of the social, economic, and political equality of the sexes (Oxford University Press, 2017). Although largely originating in the West, feminism is manifested worldwide and is represented by various institutions committed to activity on behalf of women's rights and interests (Brunell & Burkett, 2016).

Feminist theory is an expansion of feminism into theoretical discourse which developed into a variety of disciplines with four core principles: (a) elucidate the origins and causes of gender inequality; (b) explain the operation and persistence of this state of affairs; (c) delineate effective strategies to either bring about full equality between the sexes or at least ameliorate the effects of ongoing inequality; and (d) imagine a world in which sexual inequality no longer exists (Oxford University Press, 2017). "According to feminist epistemologies… categor[ies] whose 'content' and meaning are dynamic and multileveled and one whose relationship to other categories and social relations (e.g., class, culture, and race), as well as to knowledge, remains both contested and central" (Alcoff & Potter, 1993, p. 121). Luepnitz (1988) explained there are many types of feminists and understood what joins the various feminists together is the "desire to reform the social order in way that would permit the full economic, political, and social participation of women" (p. 14). In other words, feminism is associated with the act of doing, where feminist theory is the theoretical underpinnings or epistemologies which

guide how feminism operates. Throughout this study, I will combine these two ideas into one, referring to both as feminism.

The military's treatment of women often results in disagreement between men and women. It is a common myth that feminism is for women only. However, men can also believe in feminism and partake in its mission for equality of sexes (Luepnitz, 1988). Men can be allies for women, helping to achieve equality between people. "Men, too, must contribute distinctive forms of specifically feminist knowledge from their particular social situation" (Harding, 2004, p. 135).

There are several organizations that were created to help men and women join in the mission for equality between sexes. According to Raptim Humanitarian Travel (2018), "Many organizations are working day and night to solve the inequality between men and women." Raptim Humanitarian Travel provided a list of 20 organizations that are working towards equality of genders (para 1). One of those organizations on the list is HeForShe. UN Women (2016) the creators of HeForShe, proclaimed a powerful mission for moving towards equality of genders, affirming:

> The world is at a turning point. People everywhere understand and support the idea of gender equality. They know it's not just a women's issue, it's a human rights issue. And when these powerful voices are heard, they will change the world. The time for that change is now. HeForShe is inviting people around the world to stand together to create a bold, visible force for gender equality. And it starts by taking action right now to create a gender equal world. (para 1)

Similarly, in the fight for equality, the It's On Us campaign is a collaboration between Civic Nation and the United States Department of Education, working to end sexual

harassment and assault based on the White House Task Force to Prevent Sexual Assault (Civic Nation & U.S. Department of Education, 2018). It's On Us is helping all genders, through education and conversations, take action against sexual harassment and assault. Sexual assault programs will be discussed in more detail a later section.

Waves of Feminism

Aikau, Erickson, and Pierce (2007) viewed the concept of waves as "feminism *moves* and develops *over time and place* [italics in original]" (p. 3). They further explained how the idea of the waves is a metaphor discussing the movement of theories, methods, politics, and knowing across a time line (Aikau et al., 2007). Luepnitz (1988) concluded that to know about feminism in the present, one must also study the history of women. It is through this studying of women historically that socially constructed ideas become debunked or proven to be fact, allowing for proper documentation of women instead of socially constructed norms. As feminism continues to grow, develop, and evolve, new waves will follow. Throughout the literature, there is some discussion of the coverage of the different wave time periods and what experiences fell under which wave, along with the number of waves which exist. Each of the following waves capitalizes on the previous waves. No matter the wave, Falk (2009) attributed social change in our society to the perseverance of women and their supporters and their fight to be equal. Social change refers to a narrow agenda which promotes the recruitment of women, over time, into areas of power from which they had been previously excluded (Humm, 1990).

Nevertheless, O'Berirne (2006) both agreed and disagreed with Falk (2009). The researcher agreed that women are making changes in society; but also believed these changes are not for the better and that women, especially feminists, are making the world

a worse place. Within this view, O'Berirne goes through and explains all the different ways in which they believed the impacted changes from feminists has reduced progress for women in society, challenging successes from feminists. For instance, O'Bernirne (2006) provided the example of how feminists reduced the rate of domestic violence within households. However, instead of accepting a job well done, feminists quickly went on to dating relationships, promoting the idea that enough is never enough. In the next section I will provide a brief overview of each wave, for a detailed account of each wave is out of the scope of this study.

Wave I. Donovan (1985) argued the start of the first wave was during the Enlightenment Age, where European societies, especially women, wanted equal treatment like men. Women have been fighting for equal treatment since the creation of the Declaration of Independence (1776) and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man (1789), proclaiming these documents work on the belief that both women and men had natural rights, not because of gender but simply as human beings (Donovan, 1985).

Yet most would agree the first wave of feminism took place in the 19th and early 20th century, ending approximately in the 1920s (Andermahr, Lovell, & Wolkowitz, 1997; Humm, 1990). It emerged from an environment of urban industrialism and liberal, socialist politics (Rampton, 2015). It was not until the American 1848 Geneva Falls Convention of Women [also referred to as the Seneca Falls convention] that feminism made it on the map and started gaining momentum (Humm, 1990). Over 300 men and women rallied together to support equality for women, using the values from Enlightenment liberals (Donovan, 1985; Rampton, 2015). It was through these beliefs that feminists acted to create change, selecting the right to vote as a first step in getting

equality for women. The central dispute during this wave is that "women remain enslaved because of a corrupt process of socialization which stunts their intellect and teaches them that their proper purpose in life is to serve men" (Donovan, 1985, p. 8).

Wave II. The second wave of feminism was in search of political bases for America, Britain, and Germany during the late 1960s (Andermahr et al., 1997; Humm, 1990). Andermahr et al. (1997) referred to the second wave as the "resurgence of feminism and the women's liberation movement (WLM)" (p. 238). With the start of civil rights and the anti-war movement, women began to form consciousness-raising groups (Humm, 1990). These groups trajected movement from civil rights into women's liberation, leading the way from minimizing differences between men and women to celebrating a woman-centered perspective (Humm, 1990; Rampton, 2015). The second wave explored ways to extend egalitarianism through the understanding of the oppressiveness of imposed gender divisions (Humm, 1990).

There were two political movements, The Women's Rights Movement (WRM) and Women's Liberation Movement (WLM), which lead to the reshaping of public and private life (Nicholson, 1997). During these movements, sexuality and reproductive rights were dominant issues (Rampton, 2015). In the WRM, professional women put pressure on federal and state institutions to end the discrimination women experienced in the paid labor force (Nicholson, 1997).

However, it was the work of the WLM to convince both women and men of the importance of women's oppression throughout history while proving its fundamental principle of social organization (Nicholson, 1997). During this time, the members of the WLM were constantly attempting to contradict the general cultured beliefs that

differences in men and women were deeply rooted in nature and women and men are basically the same (Nicholson, 1997). The WLM wanted to change the status quo, focusing on the latter and creating the understanding of difference (Nicholson, 1997).

While searching for theories to document women's oppression and to debunk previous theories of Marxism, Simone de Beauvior established women being the *"Other"*. Andermahr et al. (1997) understood "Other" as an affirmation of absolute difference between the how a woman is treated and the self-identity. Likewise, Humm's (1990) definition included the concept that men created this idea of "Other" to make women inferior to them. The discussion of "Other", "Othering," and "Otherness" comes up again later in more detail as it pertains to gender equality and equity.

De Beauvior's work was also founded on the ideas about the "basic power imbalance[s] between women and men" (as cited in Nicholson, 1997, p. 7). Feminists were not only focusing on gender, but also relationally discussing the imbalance of power in other areas on how gender could influence other factors such as race, class, and sexuality. These feminists were working towards the definition of identity, encompassing all factors which make up someone's identity and not just gender (Nicholson, 1997). At that point, women of color became part of the movement, their voices having been heard (Rampton, 2015).

Wave III. A third wave of feminism started in the 1990s and carried through 2008 (Aikau et al., 2007). If the second wave of feminists had not achieved greater economic and professional power, there might not have been room for a third wave, which is interesting because some of the third wave feminists critiqued the second wave feminists and their accomplishments by claiming the second wave had unfinished work

(Burkett & Brunell, 2018). Yet instead of becoming part of the existing machine, feminists in the third wave began rebuilding the machine (Burkett & Brunell, 2018). In other words, feminists of the third wave did not want to be driving the same car as their predecessors; they wanted to build their own car in their own image.

Burkett and Brunell (2018) saw the third wave as influenced by postmodernist movement by questioning, reclaiming, and redefining the ideas, words, and media about womanhood, gender, beauty, sexuality, femininity, and masculinity. Sexual liberation from the second wave became expanded on and transformed into gender identity and sexuality, shaped by society with the ability to express one's gender identity without repercussions (Burkett & Brunell, 2018). The women of the third wave stepped on stage as strong and empowered, defining feminine beauty for themselves as subjects, not as sexual objects as previously viewed by sexist patriarchy (Rampton, 2015).

Third wave feminists were breaking boundaries not only with gender, but sexual orientation, class, ethnicity, and identity. It was this use of intersectionality that helped to expand the areas of feminism past the roles of genders (Davis, 2008). Using intersectionality, feminist scholars began to migrate from other disciplines, coming together to join forces and bring their perspectives through the disciplines they had studied (Davis, 2008).

It was in this wave that technology such as the internet blossomed, exposing the world to cyberspace which feminists used to cross gender boundaries (Rampton, 2015). Women started to have leading roles in television series and movies, developed singing careers, and female children were portrayed as smart and independent. With the ease of publishing online in electronic magazines, blogs, and chat rooms, women began sharing

their stories, redefining labels and terms, and producing videos as a way of getting their work out.

Wave IV. Some literature suggests a fourth wave of feminism beginning in 2008 (Rampton, 2015). During this wave, feminists focused on issues including: sexual abuse, rape, violence against women, unequal pay, slut-shaming, the pressure on women to conform to a single and unrealistic body-type, and gains in female representation in politics and business, along with the rights of homosexuals (Rampton, 2015). Feminists focused their attention on the "isms" as they continued to advocate for equality (Rampton, 2015).

In our society, there appears to be a negative connotation to the word feminist. Some might argue this is due to the empowerment of the various waves of feminism, resulting in most people abandoning the word feminist as a label which defines them. In other words, people do not want to be defined in a negative way. However, this "in-your-face" term seems to be the one that best supports feminists and people working towards equality, thus allowing for a transition of the term from gender specific to representing full gender equality (Rampton, 2015). As the waves of feminism transitioned, so did the meaning of the terms within feminism, resulting in a more accepted version of the term feminist. This accepted version in the third wave has carried on into the fourth and fifth waves as well.

Sharp (2009) contended that gender has privilege and with that privilege comes power. Even though Sharp (2009) did not discuss which gender has privilege, feminists argue that the male gender has the most privilege, allowing men to have all the power. Sigmund Freud is well known for describing women as having neuroses from being too

emotional. Freud believed women should not be trusted and was paramount in further building the social constructs about women being the weaker gender and the need for providing more privilege and power to men. Feminists have been concerned with relationships between emotions and power throughout most of the feminist waves.

Sharp (2009) understood the term emotional to be the intersection between personal and social, which may contain the physical representation of emotion or be hidden and carried as a burden. However, in Jaggar's (1989) seminal work, the researcher argued that emotion is not so easily defined, consequentially leading to more questions than answers due to the way societies view emotions in daily life and scientific contexts. Throughout history, feminists have continued their attempt to integrate rational and emotional binaries, even though Western society continues to exclude women due to their emotional qualities (Pedwell & Whithead, 2012). According to Jaggar (1989):

> Not only has reason been contrasted with emotion, but it has also been associated with the mental, the cultural, the universal, the public and the male, whereas emotion has been associated with the irrational, the physical, the natural, the particular, the private and, of course, the female. (p. 151)

There is a growing interest in emotions and how those emotions define the self and relationships to others (Pedwell & Whitehead, 2012). As feminists explore the power of emotions, while also understanding how emotions play a part in our society, they begin to further understand how emotions become a source of a person's individual truth. Hemmings (2012) noted that "in order to know differently, we have to feel differently," highlighting the importance of knowledge and emotion working together in unison to create change (as cited in Pedwell & Whitehead, 2012, p. 119). Likewise, Jaggar (1989)

proclaimed "by construing emotion as epistemologically subversive, the Western tradition has tended to obscure the vital role of emotion in the construction of knowledge" (p. 151). So instead of pretending emotions do not matter or suppressing emotions, utilize them to gain knowledge. In this exploration, feminists have expanded on postmodern ideas. The fourth wave is a collective place where theory and practice come together.

Wave V. Recently, there is discussion about a fifth wave based on journalist Caitlin Moran's concept of future feminism (Anselmi, 2012). Fifth Wave feminists (2015) will focus on more recent developments in gender beyond those binary definitions of man and woman. American Marie-Antoinette, producer of Coochie Power Brands (2016), explained that the fifth wave is upon us and quickly approaching, concluding that we have not seen it yet. The researcher further described the fifth wave as affecting everyone to bring about global sustainability; helping women to bring about more empowerment, evolution, and resolution; and an uprising and transformation of women (American Marie-Antoinette & Coochie Power Brands, 2016). However, there is limited research on the fifth wave; as a result, further explanation does not appear in this study. As feminism becomes a part of a person's identity, it becomes a part of how they view the world. Similarly, military culture becomes a part of a veteran's identity and how they too view the world.

Significance of the Study

Active military and veterans are a population that has limited research even though they are approximately one-fourth of the population of the United States. Therefore, research on the effects of military service, including transition, would benefit

a variety of mental health professions including marriage and family therapists (MFTs), mental health counselors, social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, and other professions such as medical, business, education, social economics, military organizations and processes, and world organizations. As an MFT, I know other MFTs find the military to be an area of interest. According to Public Law (PL) 109-461; dated December 22, 2006; titled: *Veterans Benefits, Health Care, and Information Technology Act of 2006* was created:

> To amend title 38, United States Code, to repeal certain limitations on attorney representation of claimants for benefits under laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, to expand eligibility for the Survivors' and Dependents' Educational Assistance Program, to otherwise improve veterans' benefits, memorial affairs, and health-care programs, to enhance information security programs of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes.
>
> (Veterans Benefits, Health Care, and Information Technology Act of 2006, 2006)

Through this law, MFTs and Mental Health Counselors (MHCs) were added to the VA as clinicians allowed to work with veterans. However, it was not until December 2010 that the VA released the qualification standards (found in the VA Handbook 5005/101, with the most current version dated April 18, 2018) allowing for the hiring of MFTs and MHCs to begin (National Board for Certified Counselors, 2019)—four years after the law was passed. As a result, the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) combined forces with the White House on the *Joining Forces* initiative in 2011.

Launched in 2011 by First Lady Michelle Obama and Dr. Jill Biden, Joining

Forces is a national initiative in the United States to mobilize all sectors of society

to give our service members, veterans, and their families the opportunities and

support they have earned. A significant component of this initiative is meeting

the behavioral health needs of service members, veterans, and their

families. (American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy [AAMFT],

2011)

Even after the official combination of forces with the Joining Forces initiative in 2011,

the VA did not release an official statement of using MFTs and MHCs until April 24,

2012 stating: "The [VA] has expanded its mental health services to include professionals

from two additional health care fields: marriage and family therapists (MFT) and licensed

professional mental health counselors (LPMHC)" (Office of Public and

Intergovernmental Affairs, 2012).

AAMFT did not stop there though, more recently in the fall of 2018, AAMFT

also created engagement programs known as *Topical Interest Networks* for members.

AAMFT defines topical interest networks as: "ranging a variety of topics and specialties

that are important for MFTs, these groups offer a wide array of ways to connect to MFTs

with your focus" (American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy [AAMFT],

2018a). Within those topical interest networks, *Working with Military Personnel and*

their Families, was one of the areas of interest. This networking group is known to do the

following:

The Working with Military Personnel and their Families Interest Network will

provide a community to connect members with experienced mentors and

supervisors who work with military personnel. The Network will develop standards for culturally competent providers, a database for community outreach opportunities, and participate in advocacy efforts that educate and inform military and government leadership of the positive impact MFTs and systems integration has with military personnel and their families. Benefits of this Network include: (a) Online community for networking and peer to peer consultation. (b) eNewsletters focused on different sectors of the military. (c) Trainings and guides on cultural competency. (d) Informational resources to increase understanding of unique needs and approaches to working with military families. (AAMFT, 2018b)

In a recent study of 32 active duty Army service members, the study "explored how professional titles may impact trust and confidence among active-duty United States Army soldiers" (Hartman, Schuermann, & Kenney, 2018, p. 213). Participants were provided eight vignettes where they ranked the mental health profession based on trust and confidence of their profession. MFTs scored relatively low compared to other professions in six of the eight areas (post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety disorder, depression, substance use disorder, suicide risk, and sleep problems). Yet trust and confidence were highest for MFTs in two areas (i.e., martial problems and parenting issues). This example provides concerns for MFTs and the military population based on professional titles and understanding of the individual professions. One might argue this is a result of MFTs' short exposure time as VA clinicians. Another agreement could be made expressing how titles influence people and perceptions of the professions. However, the previous study provides evidence to the gap in the literature and limited knowledge of military and MFTs.

Furthermore, this study expands the current literature to include the lived experiences of women veterans concerning transition. It also benefits MFTs to understand military culture. This study will assist MFTs by providing an added value of increasing their knowledge about this topic. This increased field literature will apply a systemic understanding with cultural competency and reducing culture deficiency of the transition process of veterans. Further studying of this population will also better serve the military and veteran populations by understanding their individual processes with transition and how it impacts their families and the community. It would serve the purpose of educating civilians about the military and veteran population on their transitional experiences, along with what might be helpful to the veteran throughout their transition.

Summary

In Chapter I, I introduced the topic of women in the military and later transition into veterans through military culture and identity. I introduced the concept of a military total institution and how the created the environment of military hypermasculinity. I further stated the problem as it pertains to transitioning back into civilian life. I explored feminist theory along with the waves of feminism in order to explain the concepts around gender as it pertains to women veterans. I covered the military transition process and the gap within the literature around women veterans and transition. In Chapter II, I will review the literature in more depth covering women veterans and transition.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The literature about women veterans transitioning back into civilian life is limited and focuses mostly on men. Of the available literature, it is divided into subcategories, including military sexual harassment, assault, and violence; gender equality and equity; transition and reintegration; family and relationships; and potential problems veterans face after transition which include: mental and physical health concerns; divorce; parenting problems; unemployment; educational development; homelessness; family/relational issues; domestic violence and intimate partner violence; and legal problems. In all, the literature does not discuss transition but instead focuses on issues and concerns around transition. In other words, the literature concentrates on the symptoms instead of the problem and continues to treat the symptoms instead of the problem.

Military Sexual Harassment, Assault, and Violence

Recently, military sexual harassment, assault, and violence is making headlines and reports continue to grow—resulting in an abundance of literature. Men and women experience sexual harassment and/or assault while serving in the military; however, reports are higher for women than men (Henderson, 2015; Hunter, 2007). A 2012 survey indicated that 6.1% of women had experienced sexual assault in the prior 12 months, compared to 1.2% of men who experienced sexual assault (Amara & Krengel, 2016). This demonstrated an increase from the same survey conducted two years prior, where the reported incidents of sexual assault for women was at 4.4% (Amara & Krengel, 2016). Francke (2004), Hunter (2007), and Weinstein and White (1997) included several illustrations of women telling their stories about the sexual harassment and/or assault(s)

they experienced. In these examples, the survivors gave more details of their experiences, described what they faced, while also discussed the actions taken by the military after they came forward to report sexual harassment and/or assault.

With growing rates of service members coming forward, the military created trainings and programs in response to, and for the prevention of, sexual harassment and sexual trauma. Even with these policies and programs in place, the numbers of women sexually harassed and/or survived MST continues to grow (Amara & Krengel, 2016). Several possible reasons in which women experience sexual harassment and/or assault while serving are the gender divide between men and women, sexual orientation, and domestic violence.

Gender Divide

One of the biggest arguments that points to why sexual harassment and/or assault takes places in the military, especially for women, is the divide of genders in military culture. Women fall into the category of "Other," not the typical heterosexual, male service member (Weinstein & White, 1997). As an example, Meola (1997) described their personal experience as a service member, during which time they experienced sexual harassment at every assignment and witnessed abuse of fellow women service members. They also experienced sexist remarks which allowed for the gender divide to continue and be acceptable amidst the service members (Meola, 1997).

In another example, Herbert (1998) stated,

It was believed that a woman who would place herself in an environment that was both numerically and ideologically "male" must either be looking for a husband or for multiple sexual partners or must wish that she were, in fact, male. (p. 1)

Due to the hypermasculinity endorsed in military culture, the military exhibits much higher rates of sexual harassment and assault than other organizations (Hunter, 2007). Herbert (1998) stated this was part of the "proclamation of sexual prowess" (p. 8). Falk (2009) discussed this as a matter in which as women ascend, men begin to react through the expression of sexual harassment to keep and protect men's social status. No matter what the underlining factor is, if women were to report, it would make their "life a living hell" (Meola, 1997). This could be the result of women not accepting the dominance of men, again to keep their social status (Falk, 2009).

Military culture "made the enforcement of sexual harassment polices impossible" (Francke, 2004 p. 147). Military culture fosters masculinity and degrades femininity. Due to this systemic denigration of feminine attributes, the male service member increased harassment instead of eradicating it (Francke, 2004). Studies conducted on men in groups, to record behavior and understand the extend of masculinity, showed that the military culture had examples of each category, while fitting the definition of sexual harassment (Francke, 2004). Unfortunately, the author does not provide details to the categories or further explain how the military met those categories. Another example of the justification of masculinity is the myths created and told which include attempts to cause secondary victimization, reinforcing the idea and belief that women deserve this type of treatment (Hunter, 2007). Since harassment within military culture is a by-product of hypermasculinity, is there room for women to report?

One reason women would choose not to report sexual harassment and/or abuse is how the system handles the situation:

> Unofficially, the command climate fostered an environment where it was not safe
> to report sexual harassment, and silence was the only safe option. To report an
> incident of sexual harassment could alter a … career path irreversibly for the
> worse. (Meola, 1997, p. 148)

For example, Ensign (2004) described a female, aged 23, discharged after a male accused the female of sexual harassment. This came after this female had accused the male of the same thing, and the male received no criminal or discharge action. When the female explained the decision to not report earlier or on previous occasions, she stated it was part of the culture, a "culture of sexual intimidation" directed at female cadets (p. 172).

In another example, Meola (1997) described situations in which the commanders ignored the complaints, were part of the complaint, or responded with negative beliefs. In Meola's own personal experience, when they refused sexual advances, the abusers would question Meola's sexual orientation based on the logic that if females did not want sex from the man, then the female must be a lesbian.

Sexual Orientation

Sexual orientation refers to an individual's emotions or physical attraction to the same and/or opposite sex (heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual; Secretary of the Army, 2015). Abusers would allege that the accusers were not the right sexual orientation—heterosexual—as a common practice when dealing with the complaints of sexual harassment. Osborn and Benecke (1997) described this practice as hiding behind the "don't ask, don't tell" policy. The "don't ask, don't tell" policy allowed service members to serve if they had other sexual orientations as long as they did not discuss it. However, if they were to "tell," then separation from the military under conduct unbecoming

transpired. Likewise, Francke (2004) wrote that for men to preserve their superiority over women, the exclusion and/or denigration of women needed to take place. One might argue that this exclusion included piggy-backing on the policies already in place about homosexuals serving in the military as an attempt to allow the military culture to go unchanged.

Osborn and Benecke (1997) described this as being a way for the military to retaliate against women, since most of the actions undertaken were to separate women accusers under the gay policy once accusations and formal complaints were in place. In accordance to the DOD Servicemembers Legal Defense Network (SLDN) policy report, women discharges were 21%, with 30% of those discharges falling under the gay policy (as cited in Osborn & Benecke, 1997). Francke (2004) described this process as a "lesbian witch-hunt" that had little to do with lesbians at all and more to do with the hyper-heterosexual military culture of men threatened by the presence of women (p. 166).

Sexual Assault and Domestic Violence

Service members need to protect themselves when it comes to domestic violence. Research has demonstrated a higher percentage of domestic violence in the military compared to civilians, due to military culture and its acceptance of violence (Hunter, 2007). The military's own Inspector General's Office (IG) [a department of the military which is in place to investigate service personal complaints, concerns, and take reports, for example, with the chain of command] stated, "Military service is probably more conductive to violence at home than any other occupation because of the military's authoritarianism, its use of physical force in training, and the stress produced by perpetual moves and separations" (as cited in Hunter, 2007, p. 75). Even within the

military culture, domestic violence has been perceived as a family problem and not a criminal problem, reducing the amount of criminal reports (Hunter, 2007). However, this research does not specify the gender of the perpetrator and the gender of the victim, only that it is more prevalent in military culture.

Additionally, Hunter (2007) discussed a correlating factor between sexual assault and domestic violence, indicating that sexual assaults are higher amongst families that also have issues dealing with domestic violence. Again, going back to this notion of military culture as correlated to sexual assault, veterans become incarcerated for the crime of sexual assault at twice the rate of civilians (this discussion did not include gender specifics, but there was the implication that men were more likely than women to conduct these acts; Hunter, 2007). It could be implied that resocialization continues after separation, including ideas about hypermasculinity and the treatment of women through acceptance of sexual harassment and/or assault, domestic violence, and so forth. This will be further explored in a later section.

Gender Equality and Equity

Segal, Segal, Bachman, Freedman-Doan, and O'Malley (2001) expressed that military service was previously not a routine career option for "American girls and young women" to consider since it was a male institution even though in other countries women have been serving in their militaries (p. 49). Jesse Brown, former Secretary of Veterans Affairs, during the "Proceedings" of the National Summit on Women Veterans' Issues, held September 25-27, 1996, stated "for too long, the role women played in the military has been ignored. Women have been there for the nation; the nation must be there for them" (as cited in Furey, 1999, p. 87).

Terminology

In this section, I will be defining terminology regarding sex, gender, and sexual orientation. Distinguishing these terms will help shed light on what it means to be a woman serving in the military. Sex refers to the biological anatomy parts of male and female (United States Department of Defense, 2016). Gender is the socially defined roles and characteristics of being male and female (United States Department of Defense, 2016). Sexual orientation denotes an individual's emotions or physical attraction to the same and/or opposite sex (heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual; Secretary of the Army, 2015). The use of these terms in literature and society is sometimes interchangeable. However, for this study, I will be using them in accordance to their definitions previously established to allow for accuracy of the terms and what they represent. Going forward, sex is male or female. Gender is man or woman, while sexual orientation will be known as heterosexual, homosexual, or bisexual. Some common terms defining homosexual, such as lesbian or gay, may replace the use of homosexual.

In today's current age, the use of sonograms helps determine the baby's sex biologically—meaning will they have a penis for a boy or a vagina for a girl. Highlighting the gender of the baby, announcements or gender reveal parties are a common practice. Earlier was an illustration of how these terms become interchangeable in common language. Herbert (1998) discussed how even the youngest of children distinguish between sexes by identifying the boy genitals or the girl genitals. Feminists would refer to this idea as social constructionist and believe the creation of even the word and concept of gender was the act of social constructionism (Andermahr et al., 1997). Sex difference is sexual inequality and difference, developed in the 1960s. Research

which covers a broad spectrum beginning with differences between the sexes in attitudes and abilities and research finding the origins of these in terms of sex role socialization (Humm, 1990).

The Social Construction of Gender

Social constructionism results in socially constructed themes, concepts, ideas, and language through the construction of word usage. The concept of gender is believed to be a social construction (Andermahr, Lovell, & Wolkowitz, 1997). For example, sex is biologically assigned, where gender is determined based on the ideas around the individual sex—hence the idea that girls should wear pink and boys should be wear blue. Sjoberg (2014) understood this idea of social construction as "training" to see the world in masculine and feminine terms, making this normal to not view it in those terms would be to see it as not normal and out of place (p. 54). As a society, we are training people to determine and establish gender in accordance to sex and what roles gender requires of the individual. This idea that only *real men* [emphasized added] can serve in the military, as reinforced through the resocialization and degradation ceremony processes, still exists in current military culture. Harrison and Laliberté (1997) understood this process as a utilization by the military to conform to the socially constructed ideas about gender. In essence, they do not believe the military created these concepts of gender roles and masculine and feminine ideals. Instead, the military is making full use of these already created social constructs and employs them within their organization to build solidarity.

Movies, media, and literature also play a big part in the creation of these ideas—further validating that the military did not create these ideas and only continues to utilize them in their efforts to maintain the military as they desire. Women in military positions

are either eliminated in movies or their roles are inaccurately depicted, especially in recounts of war and conflicts (Sjoberg, 2014). In a similar argument, the scrutinization of Disney princess movies proposed the idea that women need a man, especially to save them and take care of them (personal communication, P. Lott, 5/20/2013). Further expanding on the socially constructed ideas around women, Disney princesses provide an example of how the military did not create these socially constructed gender roles, but reinforces them and uses them to their advantage.

As a society we have socially constructed the idea around gender, providing value to an inanimate concept. The belief that one's gendered behavior status as man or woman becomes a natural extension of one's sex is a common practice in society (Herbert, 1998). Humm (1990) referred to this concept as *biological determinism*, which is the concept that physiological differences between men and women determine social roles. Based on the sex someone might be, there were natural behaviors that would be present to match the sex with the gender, ensuring the following of "gender rules" (Herbert, 1998, p. 59). For example, there is the belief that if someone has male anatomy (sex), then he is a boy (gender), and must also act as a boy would—rough and tough, manly, the head of the household, and so on (gender rules). Conversely, if someone has female anatomy (sex), then she is a girl (gender), and must also act as a girl would—caring, nurturing, motherly, and so on (gender rules). Currently, these types of discussions are different than in previous times.

Herbert (1998) wanted to know more on "how the experiences of women in the military have been mediated by gender and sexuality, specifically as related to their serving with men" (p. 136). The researcher sent out 500 surveys to women veterans with

a response rate of 394 returned surveys, a 79% completion rate. The 15-page

questionnaire had seven sections to include: personal information; military service;

education; personal assessment; personal resources; gender; and sexuality. Those sections

were measured using yes/no questions, multiple-choice questions, open-ended questions,

check-off items, and Likert-scale items. Herbert (1998) asked participants in that study to

define masculine and feminine concepts in their own terms and discovered they gave

stereotypical responses of what these terms meant. The participants explained they did

not agree, but this is what society determined these words should mean. In Herbert's

(1998) study, the researcher explored the perceptions of how women served in the

military and how these women internalized the concept of gender, including how even

other women would avoid certain women, depending on their level of femininity and/or

masculinity.

Gender equality. When discussing genders and equality, even with all the

advancements, this is one area where the more things change, the more they stay the

same. For example, the division of genders is so deeply ingrained in our society and our

beliefs that when a woman is having a child, the most common first question the woman

gets is, "Is it a boy or girl?" Another common question asked to expecting parents is, "Do

you want a boy or girl?" These questions imply that the gender of a child is currently

valued over other important aspects such as the health of the child. When one gender is

valued over another gender, this results in different treatment and expectations for each

gender. Treatment of children based on gender instead of developmental stages often

creates cases of inequality for the child. This leads to the puzzling question of why we are

still seeing inequality of genders. Lorber (2000) makes the following argument:

The answer, I suggest, is that gender divisions still deeply bifurcate the structure

of modern society. From a social constructionist structural gender perspective, it

is the ubiquitous division of people into two unequally valued categories that

undergirds the continually reappearing instances of gender inequality. I argue that

it is this gendering that needs to be challenged by feminists, with the long-term

goal of not just minimizing, but of doing away with binary gender divisions

completely. To this end, I call for a feminist degendering movement. (p. 80)

Sjoberg (2014) explained that women's experiences are going to be different than men's

experiences, since the treatment and relating of women is that *as a woman*. Since women

supposedly possess feminine character traits, this continues the socially constructed ideas

of the roles of women, further enhancing or reducing women's experiences compared to

men.

Gender harassment. Falk (2009) determined that gender harassment plays on the

idea of men's experiences. Gender harassment is defined as "the unwillingness of some

men to allow women the same rights and privileges which male status guarantees" (Falk,

2009, p. 74). Men harass women in the hope of keeping their own status, based on their

experiences with male status and power. Some ways men do this in the military is by

failing to respond to orders by women, damaging or losing equipment, not providing the

necessary equipment to women service members, or documenting any mistake made by

women, especially in leadership positions. Gender harassment is harder to discern

because it is more covert, resulting in women leaders not being able to lead their troops

and a lack of disciplinary actions on the men disobeying and disrespecting women (Falk,

2009). Through gender harassment, men will do anything to sabotage women service

members to keep their power and status and to allow the idea that only men can serve, because women have the power to destroy men's careers in the military (Falk, 2009).

Distinguishing Between "Others"

The military capitalizes on socially constructed ideas about gender, and masculine and feminine concepts to create solidarity within its ranks and structure. This unity is in hopes of creating the concept "this one is not like the other," used by the military to help service members distinguish between military and the enemy (Harrison & Laliberté, 1997). As the military builds unit cohesion, they begin to separate between friend and foe—the enemy, through dehumanizing the enemy and determining unlike persons, which includes women. "Excluding and derogating women are important parts of combat unit bonding" (Harrison & Laliberté, 1997, p. 37). The derogation and objectifying of women are done through making women the targets of violence or sexualizing women, such as bombs and guns being called names like Bouncing Bettys or the control lever being referred to as joystick or in cadence calls (Francke, 2004; Harrison & Laliberté, 1997).

In the process of attempting to distinguish the other, the military ultimately reinforces the distinguishing of "Other" on women service members. Other is a critical concept developed by Simone de Beauvior in 1953 to explain how, in patriarchal culture, women are set up as the negative, the inessential, the abnormal to the male. Women are Other because men define them as inferior. The building of the Other concept was from Sartre's ideas where societies built by men based on the notion of women being inferior. The researcher later expanded this theory of Other to include *Otherness*, meaning outside the system (Humm, 1990). Andermahr, Lovell, and Wolkowitz (1997) understood Other

as to affirm an absolute difference between the one who is so treated and the self. Virgina Woolf, a British writer, has also been contributed as using the ideas of Other understanding women are separate from men based on the patriarchal assumptions about the conformity between gender ascription and social values (Humm, 1990). Donovan (1985) defined the concept of Other and its various forms such as otherness and *othering* and how the self and the not-self perceive Other:

> The first concerns the internalization of Otherness that colonized groups experience; and the second, the phenomenological reconstruction of realize that is essential to the liberation process. Internalization of Otherness means that one has come to identify oneself through the eyes of the dominant group in society. One becomes fixed on the level of an object that exists for and is constituted by the dominant group. In the case of Blacks it is not accept the White racist definition of the black as Other; in the case of women it is to accept the make sexist view of women as Other. To accept such a role… is to accept being an object; it is to deny the subject-self that is autonomous and creative. To become an object means ultimately to risk madness and schizophrenia; the denial of the subject-self necessarily means a fundamental falseness. It means engaging in a perpetual lie.
>
> (p. 136)

Shift to Differences

Around the 1980s, feminists began the discussion of shifting from Other to differences. Instead of Other being something which feminism used as a form of oppression, the change to differences allowed women to become empowered (Hekman, 1999). Feminists believed that validation of differences was a necessary step for the

feminist movement. During this period, feminists explored the differences through social and discursive construction of sexual difference which allowed them to discover a wide array of differences, thus creating a change in basic assumptions (Hekman, 1999). This paradigm shift comes with the 20th century belief in postmodernism—relativism as opposed to absolutism (Hekman, 1999). Hekman (1999) argued that in searching for differences, feminist theory developed an epistemology of truths rather than Truth.

Similarly, Gerhard (2001) juxtaposed equality as "neither an absolute [Truth] principle nor a firm standard, but a 'relational concept' [truths]. It expresses a relationship between two objects, people, or conditions and determines the respect in which they are to be viewed as equal" (p. 7). Solaro (2006) described how the presumption of men as making good soldiers until proven otherwise is a popular belief, yet women often needed to prove themselves both as an individual and a group. Before determining equality, differences must first be determined. Difference originally started with an understanding to be the difference between sexes, men and women, through natural biology, gender and culture. Later, other qualifiers were included in this definition to include, but not be limited to, race, class, ethnicity, able-bodiedness, and culture (Andermahr, Lovell, & Wolkowitz, 1997). To put it in mathematical terms, absolute equality means identity, meaning a = a, while equality is expressed as a = b (Gerhard, 2001).

> In terms of legal equality between men and women… principle of equality assumes that men and women are different and that they will not become identical as a result of equal treatment but will be able to preserve their difference. (Gerhard, 2001, p 8)

Neuroscience differences. As previously mentioned, gender is so deeply ingrained into our beings that science decided to weigh in on the matter, utilizing neuroscience to help debunk myths related to gender and sex. In the field of neuroscience, the meaning of biology and the brain takes on another denotation then those of postmodernist and social constructionist. Hoffman (2012) argued that even though the brain and functions of the brain might show differences amongst the sexes, that does not mean the sexes "hav[e] a different worth" or "hav[e] different rights" (p. 31). For example, Hoffman (2012) worried that these fundamental differences in math and science between men and women makes it harder for women to pursue math and science fields. Hoffman (2012) included in the study the discovery of no major differences between men and women, including permanent differences amongst genders, mental health, and gender 'hard-wiring', to name a few (pp. 51-53). Likewise, Mailbom (2012) discussed how there is no evidence that demonstrates women "care" more than men do, or feel emotions more than men will, or simply think more than men (p. 56).

Hoffman (2012) identified physical differences within the brain between men and women (sexes). However, these were not factors that contributed to gender differences. Solaro (2006) wrote about two assumptions which factor in race and differences between sexes:

> … gender was a bigger obstacle to overcome than race, and that little if any meaningful parallel could be drawn between Blacks and women because, Black or White, men are men and women are not. Differences between the sexes are perceived to be far deeper, more important, and more intractable when it comes to aggression and strength than differences between the races. Sex, in short, is

perceived to be a behavioral determinant that governs how people relate to each

other in ways that race never can. Put differently: People may be educated out of

prejudice, but they can never be educated to put aside gender differences, even

when women prove themselves competent and trustworthy. (p. 154)

Gender is so deeply ingrained into our beings as a society that historically, Black men

received the right to serve in the military before women; there were laws to protect

animals from abuse before similar laws were passed regarding women and children; and

within the United States' Presidential elections, there was a Black male elected president

before a woman. When a woman ran for the presidency, the United States voted for a

conservative White male, instead of allowing a woman to become president of the United

States. These examples show that gender affects the progress of women, to the point

where animals were protected before women.

It also leads to the discussion around male dominance. According to Humm

(1990), the word "male" in of itself represents dominance resulting as part of a dual or

multiple system of dominance: capitalism, patriarchy, heterosexism, racism, and

economic power which involves discrimination based on class and race continuing to

support and perpetuate male dominance. Humm (1990) further expressed this concept of

male dominance further enhances male power and the constructs in which women are

ordered to conform instead of being their own vision of truth.

Division of Labor Between Genders

Until recently, the military operated with a division of labor between genders. For

example, there was the belief that men are suited to be fighting heroes and women should

play the secondary roles of support (Harrison & Laliberté, 1997). Likewise, Weinstein

and D'Amico (1999) reported "gender boundaries also establish and maintain a division of political power in society, because the behavior and roles associated with one gender are more valued than those associated with the other" (p. 4). LaGuardia-Kotite (2012) highlighted that even though women and men receive equal pay in the military, compared to a corporate workforce, the military is not as progressive when it comes to promotions of women in comparison to men that serve in the military.

Sjoberg (2014) argued that without the discussion and implementation in theory and practice around the importance of gender, there becomes a hindrance in international security through accuracy and ethical scholarship in world politics. In other words, when a society fails to converse over gender and gender related issues, the society's international security becomes threatened. For instance, combat positions are an integrative part of international security, and these positions serve the demands of war and conflict, helping to maintain the freedom of the United States. Not only is the discussion about gender important for the women in the military, but it is even more important to discuss how the views on gender potentially affect national and international security on many levels, including getting the most qualified person for the job by not limiting them to gender specific roles.

Women in Combat

The General Accounting Office (GAO; as cited in Sadler, 1997) described how women in combat during the Gulf War created no perceivable concerns. Women in these cases did not have many differences as compared to their male counterparts. For example, both men and women equally were unable to deploy for various reasons. Women and men worked together as a team to complete the mission, living in the same

horrendous conditions with little to no complaints. Yet what would be even more apparent during this time was that "it was now evident that women were risking, indeed sacrificing, their lives in combat situations, while their 'right' to serve in combat and to be recognized for their military accomplishments was being officially denied" (Katzenstein, 1998, p. 48). During and after the Gulf war, society became divided about women serving in war, especially in combat positions. There was even disagreement between feminists regarding women serving in combat positions (Peach, 1997).

Even though the reports of women serving in the Persian Gulf War were received positively and were accompanied by legal representation from Congress and feminists, it was not until recently that women could serve in positions other than support due to concerns about their serving on the front lines (Sadler, 1997). Katzenstein (1998) explained this has taken place due to feminist protests in the form of "interest-group politics" inside the military instead of protests on the streets. In other words, without these interest-groups, there would have been little change inside the military regarding gender equality and equity policies taking effect. Katzenstein (1998) believed this form of feminist activists started as early as the 1970s; however, the efforts became further embedded with the efforts of women aviators around 1991—approximately in the third wave of feminism. Solaro (2006) added that it has taken over 30 years, from Vietnam to Iraq, for certain changes to take place within the military to integrate women, orchestrated by active feminists, service women and men, and a new generation of military leadership.

With the help of these interest groups, the rights of women began to change within the military including allowing women to serve in combat positions instead of

only support positions. Fenner and deYoung (2001) provided arguments for and against women serving in combat in their book, *Women in Combat: Civic Duty or Military Liability?* Fenner took the side of having women serve in combat positions and looked favorably at issues that would affect women, such as: killing of women and children; physical strength; emotional stability; being part of the team and creating bonding; intelligence scores on entrance exams and education levels; and biological differences, including women's ability to become pregnant and have children. Conversely, deYoung took the position against women serving in combat roles, attempting to debunk Fenner's previously stated arguments (Fenner & DeYoung, 2001).

Mackenzie (2015) argued that the positions against women serving both in combat and in the military helps to spread myths about women and their service, further imposing on the security of women to serve. These myths are the stories we tell ourselves to help suffice our own narratives and reinforce the values instilled in us (Mackenzie, 2015). Solaro (2006) gave a personal account of their experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan, which the researcher summed up as "women are now firmly part of the American military, in all its aspects...it's time to drop all remaining combat exclusion policies and procedures as a matter both of military necessity and of equality of obligation in citizenship" (p. 23). The first combat position change was in favor of women being fighter pilots (Katzenstein 1998). In the researcher's astonishing book, LaGuardia-Kotite (2012) interviewed 17 women "who have broken barriers or performed extraordinary feats that sometimes required the changing of policy, law, and even culture in the traditional male-dominated military" (p. xix). Zeigler and Gunderson (2005) suggested that "women should not be excluded from any occupation within the

military… women may bring unique skills to the armed forces that their male counterparts cannot offer" (p. 4). This conviction is an important aspect, which literature previously failed to address.

Zeigler and Gunderson (2005) believed this was the work of postmodernist feminists. Instead of trying to fight or counterargue the old views on gender, they provided a change in perception, which aligns with the postmodern views of marriage and family therapists as well. The idea that not all women have the same experience allows for feminists to view more than one theoretical framework as an instrument to help bring about change (Zeigler & Gunderson, 2005). In, January 2016, laws changed, allowing all combat positions in all military branches to open for women (Horoho, 2015; Pellerin, 2015). Along with the change in combat positions, women received access to special and elite operations such as Ranger, Special Forces, Navy Seals, Air Force Para jumpers, and Marine Corps infantry, to name a few (Pellerin, 2015).

Another major debate references conscription, also known as the draft. Conscription in the United States is a process for only men. All United States men are required by law to register for the draft on their 18th birthday. Then men would be called in a sequence determined by random lottery number and year of birth. Then they would be examined for mental, physical, and moral fitness by the military before being deferred or exempted from military service or inducted into the Armed Forces. Currently, only men ages 18-26 are required to register with the Selective Service System (Selective Service System, 2017). The issue of the fairness of conscription has been discussed for quite a while: men are required to register for the draft to serve in the military, while women can volunteer and will be put into nonmilitary service (Solaro, 2006). Recently,

this discussion around conscription continues to take place with different organizations

fighting for inclusion of women into the conscription. However, no change has been

made at this time regarding women and the draft.

Perceptions of Men Towards Women

Even though women have been, and continue to be, faced with discriminatory

behavior, men believe women receive preferential treatment and benefit from dual

standards, as reported in an Army's 1997 survey, where half of male soldiers believed

this to be true (Sadler, 1999). Sadler (1999) understood this polarization, focusing on

issues such as "physical-fitness standards, work assignments, pregnancy, and sexual

harassment" (pp. 51-52). For instance, the military has identified differences in the

physiological features of men and women. Some men are convinced that these

differences allow women to have easier standards to complete their PT requirements,

instead of understanding "standards set for women required the same effort/ability by

women that the standards set for men required of men" (Campbell & D'Amico, 1999, p.

71). To address the physical fitness standards with equality and equity in mind when

comparing men to women, Campbell and D'Amico (1999) suggested reducing the focus

of physical strength by employing aerobic and anaerobic tests to level the playing field

while enhancing fitness/wellness. Currently, the different branches, especially the Army

have evaluated their fitness programs to reduce separation of genders and enhance service

members abilities for combat situations and readiness. This also comes at a time where

the discussion about transgenders in the military comes into place. Even though

transgenders have not legally been granted permission to serve in any of the military

branches, the discussions still continue around this topic, which further creates the need around gender neutral fitness examinations.

In summary, "women in the military live under a microscope. They are faced with daily challenges about their right to be in the military, their ability to do the job, and often, their sexuality" (Herbert, 1998, p. 112). Fenner (2001) also stated "it is so easy to exclude, or to use and forget, marginalized groups because we have not addressed the fundamental issue of their participation" (p. 23). When it comes to women serving in the military, we have seen changes over time. These changes were possible through feminists, support of interest groups, and women service members advocating for women in the military. Even though these changes are a huge stride in the right direction, some would argue, we still have a long way to go with the treatment of women as citizens with "citizenship" both in civilian and military communities (Fenner, 2001, p. 23).

Transition and Reintegration

Process of Separation or Discharge

To become a veteran, the service member must separate or discharge from the military. There are four different ways in which a service member can leave military service: (a) expiration term of service (ETS), (b) retirement, (c) medical separation, or (d) medical retirement (Headquarters Department of the Army, 2000). Upon discharge, the recording of *Character of Service at Separation* happens within the service member's records and in their discharge paperwork [also known as a DD-214]. Those character of services are Honorable, General (Under Honorable Conditions), and Under Other than Honorable Conditions, with punitive discharges under the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) including Bad Conduct or Dishonorable (Headquarters Department of the

Army, 2000). All previous definitions were explained in Chapter I. According to the new

DOD policy, after extensive research, the process of transition should begin as early as

one year prior to separation or two years if retiring, except for unforeseen separations

(Orvis, 2018). With this new DOD policy, the military attempts to prevent events such as

homelessness and unemployment through resources such as financial planning, Veteran

Affairs (VA) benefits such as disability, housing loans, educational benefits, and

promoting education (Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program, 2017;

Orvis, 2018).

Once separated, veterans are encouraged to become enrolled in the VA system

and take advantage of all their benefits as part of the transition process. To receive

benefits from the VA, veterans must obtain an Honorable Character of Separation.

Currently, there are speculations that the VA is reevaluating this requirement, especially

for service members discharged without proper diagnoses or those who developed

substance abuse problems while serving, as a result of their time in service. Veterans can

find the most updated information from the VA offices and should always consult with

professionals when exploring their VA benefits.

Disability Compensation

Veterans can enroll in the VA system and file a claim for disability, also known as

VA Service-Connected Disability Compensation. Based on evaluations, a disability

rating may be given resulting in compensation for injuries, illnesses, diseases, etc.

received while serving in the military. Compensation can change, depending on the

progress or decline of evaluated problems, along with the VA's determination that the

disability is permanent or temporary (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018).

However, it was not until the Vietnam era that women received full and equal benefits to their male counterparts (Garrick, 2015).

Moreover, the diagnosing of PTSD is higher for men than women, which may be because women generally do not serve in combat, making it harder for women to prove their symptoms of PTSD instead of mood disorders (as cited in Garrick, 2015). On the compensation scale, a formula used to calculate disability percentage, a diagnosis of PTSD often results in higher compensation than mood disorders, resulting in less compensation for women veterans compared to men counterparts. Less compensation has additional effects on service members. Brim (2016) encourages clinicians treating and diagnosing service members and veterans to remember "diagnosis drives disposition" (p. 23), meaning that there is a difference in separation or impact on careers when dealing with diagnoses, especially if they have similar symptomology but the diagnosis differs. When comparing men and women veterans receiving 100% disability, the total of men was 305,510 compared to 17,860 women, signifying that men receive higher compensation for injuries than women (Garrick, 2015).

According to Garrick (2015), women often do not see themselves as veterans, which results in them not applying for VA benefits or filing claims for compensation at the same rate as men do. Yet of the women who do file claims and enroll in the VA system, many tend to seek out and utilize their VA medical benefits more than men (Ross et al., 2015). Amara and Krengel (2016) believed this is due to the VA opening clinics specific to women starting in the 1990s. Although the VA continues to create specialized clinics for women to include clinics dealing with reproduction and mammography, there

still is a gap between services between men and women due to the persistent myth that

the VA is an institution for men.

In a recent editorial in the NYTimes, Steinhauer (2019) discussed how women

veterans "feel like a piece of meat" when attending the VA for services. The article again

discusses how the VA's attempt to the solution to this problem is creating individual

clinics for women veterans. However, some might argue this is another attempt to keep

women veterans separate, and not treated equally from male veterans. Instead of

addressing the problem such as hypermasculinity the VA disguise the problem by

blaming women, which also continues to convince men women receive preferential

treatment instead of equitable treatment.

Biological differences between men and women, particularly sex-specific

hormones, could contribute to mental health differences. For example, women during

reproduction years seek VA medical services at a rate of 42% compared to men, and 29%

seek services when in the age range for perimenopause (Ross et al., 2015). Overall, as the

degree of disability increased, the decline in overall health took place, "with mental

disabilities impacting physical health more than the converse" (Garrick, 2015, p. 346).

Transition Versus Reintegration

During the Council of College and Military Educators Conference (2018), Elvin

Lantigua, who serves as the veteran liaison, expressed his belief that "transition doesn't

happen overnight. Veterans need to learn a new culture, a new language, and they need to

learn what to let go of and what to keep" during their process of transitioning (Bulger,

Pohribnak, Lantigua, & Whisenhunt, 2018). This goes back to the idea of how the service

member, stripped of their civilian understanding during the resocialization process, became a member of a military total institution.

As discussed in Chapter I, the use of the terms transition and reintegration are interchangeable in the literature. Even though this is an incorrect use of these terms, the literature sometimes represents them together. In this study, the use of these terms is by the actual definition, except for the literature that uses them together. For example, the discussion on the "reintegration war" refers to the word reintegration but is actually speaking on factors dealing with transition (Hazle, Wilcox, & Hassan, 2012, p. 229). However, except for personal accounts, there is limited research specific to military transition.

Transition Assistance Program. Women continue to feel like they are truly unprepared for civilian life, which demonstrates that we train them to go to war, but we do not train them to come home. The DOD became aware of this problem with transition and implemented new policies and procedures via the Transition Assistance Program (TAP). Orvis (2018) reported that a complete program overhaul was done to the TAP program in 2014 and was implemented into the DOD in 2015. Within this program overhaul, changes included counseling on finances, mental and physical health, education, and career services (Orvis, 2018). Since this is a fairly new version of the program, there is not any statistical information on the success of the program.

Contrary to previous studies, McDermott (2007) highlighted in their dissertation, the importance of not only studying the failed transitions of veterans, but the successful ones as well. When service members knew their service was coming to an end, they started to prepare earlier to help with the transition (McDermott, 2007). This idea is

similar to the new TAP procedures, allowing for more time to prepare for civilian life, especially for service members who are only doing one enlistment term.

Concerns After Transitioning

In Kintzle, Rasheed, and Castro's (2016) study, nearly 1,300 veterans were surveyed with additional follow up focus groups in the Chigacoland area (Cook, DuPage, Lake, & Will counties) geared towards understanding the needs of veterans during transition. The researchers found that military transition resulted in 61% of post-9/11 vets compared to 33% of pre-9/11 vets, reported difficulty adjusting to civilian life. Most of the veterans reported that they needed time off to adjust before attempting to tackle employment or education, with some just not knowing what they wanted to do with their lives (Kintzle et al., 2016). Yet even with these statistics, this article did not explain what makes transition so difficult or the needed adjustments. It does not provide the experiences of the service members on transition. The researchers concluded, "The ease through which this transition is made has a profound impact on post-service well-being" (p. 6). In other words, veterans' well-being is highly impacted if their transition were to go smoothly. This is a phenomenon in itself, which poses the question, "Why are we not talking about transition of our service members?"

In the available research, the general theme is that it is male dominated or centered around men. As Ritchie (2015) boldly declared, "The lack of statistics on female service members is in contrast to the extensive scientific literature on male service members" (p. xviii). Hence, this further explains the importance of studying the phenomenon of transition for women veterans. Nevertheless, Morin (2011) wanted to know what made transition hard for some and easy for others. In that study, Morin

conducted a logistic regression statistical analysis of the Pew Research Center survey of 1,853 veterans to measure the effect of any given variable on the likelihood that a veteran had an easy or difficult time re-entering civilian life. The researcher determined 18 factors that made it easier or harder to transition. Of those 18 factors, the researcher determined 10 were the most significant in this study. The six factors that made a significant difference in it being harder included: experienced a traumatic event; seriously injured; post 9/11 veteran who was married while serving; post 9/11 veteran; served in combat; and knew someone killed/injured. The four factors that showed an easier transition included: college graduate; understood missions; officer (referring to rank of service member); and religious post 9/11 veteran.

Furey (1999) stated, "Over the last few years, we have begun to recognize that both the services required for these women and the issues they face as they return to civilian life are different from those of male veterans" (pp. 87-88). However, as powerful as that statement was, there remains to be limited research discussing what those differences between men and women might be. Even in this source, there were no examples of validated outside sources to establish the validity of this statement. As Sjoberg (2014) suggested, the roles of women are altogether reduced and misrepresented or eliminated in war and conflict. One can speculate that this elimination of the roles of women in war and combat continues in transition as well, as is apparent within the literature on transition. Stern et al. (2000) and Skinner et al. (1999) found that since the demographics of women veterans are changing, there is the need for policy changes to address the needs of all women veterans of different military eras and their similarities and their differences, especially within the VA.

In a recent grounded theory study of 20 female veteran's experiences entering, serving in, and transitioning out of the military, Burkhart and Hogan (2014) found that women felt like they were not treated equal while serving in the military, apart from women that served in the health care fields. The researchers also reported, women have a different experience relating to transition than that of men, meaning that because they were female it was not acceptable to appear to be "militant" (p. 119) or had to work harder at not being so assertive for females were not allowed to be assertive. Even though their study focused more on transitions in general, including the transition into the military and military life, the part about "experiencing stressors of being a civilian" (p. 119) highlighted three subcategories: feeling unprepared for civilian life, two lives, and coping with PTSD symptoms. It was in here that women explained what it was like to transition from the military.

Lack of support. One common issue women veterans report upon transitioning is the lack of support from the community (Ross, Garovoy, Mccutcheon, & Strauss, 2015). Often, women report a lack of unit support, as discussed earlier. Women do not even associate with other women, often feeling ostracized from both women and men while serving. Then, when they transition, women have feelings of ostracization from their family, friends, and community because these people forget that women can be veterans as well (Ross et al., 2015). These feelings of having an unsupported transition potentially result in mental health disorders, along with physical consequences (Mcgraw, 2015).

In another study on the Women Accepted for Voluntary Emergency Services (WAVES) in the Navy, Suter, Lamb, Marko, and Tye-Williams (2006) described how the military service helped women grow into mature, self-confident women. However, the

women found the transition into civilian life problematic, partly due to pressure to meet traditional gender role expectations, and the resulting isolation experienced when they no longer related to the civilian women in their hometowns. Demers (2013) revealed in a different study, when analyzing women veterans' identities upon coming home, the following themes emerged: (a) dirty time bombs, (b) mourning who I was, (c) questioning who I am, and (d) composing who I will be (p. 499). In these themes, women questioned their identities, which became a part of their mental state as well. These women were trying to rediscover who they were, while coping and managing the stresses of coming home.

<div align="center">**Military Families and Relationships**</div>

Marriage and family therapists (MFTs) are especially interested in relationships and how different aspects make up the relationship. According to Rambo, West, Schooley, and Boyd (2013), "What makes family therapy a distinct profession is its relational focus" (p. 3). The field of family therapy typically operates on the general systems theory, which is usually credited to Ludwig von Bertanlanffy for their understanding of the whole is greater than the sum of the parts (Rambo et al., 2013).

> If a person is studied in isolation, then the inquiry must be concerned with the nature of the individual. If the field of inquiry is expanded to include the interaction of behaviors and the context in which these behaviors occur, the focus shifts from the isolated monad, between the parts of a system. From a systems perspective, the observer of human behavior turns from an inferential study of the mind to the observable manifestations of relationship. (Becvar & Becvar, 1999, p. 6)

In other words, the systemic understanding utilized by family therapists is the concept that the identified patient is not the individual to be fixed or cured, but the system in which the individual operates within—or as Becvar and Becvar (1999) designated it—as understanding the individual within the relationships. To further explore family therapy's utilization of relationships and system is out of the scope of this study. In this section, a variety of relational aspects are covered, including relationships with the family of the service member and how the family serves along with the service member.

Family Members Included in Total Institution

As previously mentioned, distinct gender roles are prevalent amongst military members. However, as a by-product of military institutionalization, these gender roles also include family members. Spouses (i.e., women to male service members) were originally known as *camp followers*. This term later became *dependent* to represent the spouse and the families of the service member based on the idea that women had become dependent on the military for survival (Lehr, 1999). Later, *family member* became the preferred word choice, replacing dependent. Nevertheless, the word dependent is still common in everyday military speech. For example, military personnel refer to getting a dependent I.D. card, or listing your dependents on your forms, etc.

In some regards, families do depend on the military since they also do not have civilian roots. Families relocate with the service member around different stations and bases (Harrison & Laliberté, 1997). Harrison and Laliberté (1997) stated that the creation of national programs in support of military families was done in the hopes of maintaining and enhancing retention and readiness amongst military members. Nattaya Leuenberger expressed the view, "When my husband signed up, I lost my rights" (as cited in Lehr,

1999, p. 120). Spouses and children socialize with other children and spouses for support while the husbands are out of the house on deployments (Harrison & Laliberté, 1997). Lehr (1999) elaborated on this socialization being reliant on factors such as branch of service; rank and/or position; nationality of both the wife and husband and peer's husband and wives; languages spoken; age; educational level; or background.

Spouses and families must keep within the military traditions and regulations, as well as the service member. In this regard, spouses and families must adhere to the military structure and polices regarding fraternization, meaning spouses of enlisted members must not associate or interact with officer spouses (Lehr, 1999). This is a prime example of how the military attempts to control whom one might make friends with and to what degree the forming of relationships takes place, while also limiting the socialization and support within the family and the unit.

Commanders on installations have control over spouses through actions based on their behavior. Families must also appear to represent the military and cannot cause situations that hurt unit cohesion. Examples include: if a wife of a service member would be trouble for the command team, removing the wife from the installation at the Commander's discretion; deciding if the wife needed protection or is the abuser; families being thrown out of housing or schools on the base, and so forth (Lehr, 1999).

Family care plans are a vital part of mission readiness and required for any service member that has a spouse or children (Canuso, 2015). The requirement of this plan is to have it within the first 30 days of getting married or having children. Failure to have a current family care plan results in separation from the military. In some regards, the military is ensuring the safety and protection of the family in case something was to

happen to the service member. Yet this can be perceived as another way the military has control over service members and their families since without this plan the service member separation from the military will transpire (Canuso, 2015).

Family Labor Division

Family members' roles are often determined by gender when distributing work within the family (Harrison & Laliberté, 1997; Lehr, 1999). While men deployed, the women were expected to be at home providing supportive, domesticated roles at home waiting for the men. Hence, military wives marry service men, but must also follow the rules of the institution which employs them (Lehr, 1999). These women would take care of the children, clean the house, cook, and provide the care and support while the husband was serving their duties. However, when it comes to women being the service member, there is no research about men that marry into the institution or what their roles entail. This goes back to the socially constructed gender roles in which society tells men and women how to behave and what they are responsible for within the dominant societal norms.

When women become the primary service member or the family is dual service (i.e., both spouses serve in the military), this also affects families, causing changes to the traditional family structure (Canuso, 2015). With all these changes to military families via dual service members and female service members comes additional changes from the military, including preparing for deployments. Canuso (2015) reported that women who come into the military unmarried are less likely to marry, which is different than their male counterparts. Similarly, women veterans are more likely to stay single after a divorce compared to male veterans and age-matched civilian women (Ross et al., 2015).

As speculation, this might be a result of the amount of unwed single mothers who either become pregnant while in the service or, after becoming pregnant, find service in the military to be beneficial to them and their families for increased job security and benefits. Based on the statistics mentioned previously, the military has seen an increase of women with children serving in the military, often without a partner to assist them, increasing the need for family care plans. Thus raising children on their own is a risk factor for women veterans to become homeless (VHA Office of Mental Health, 2012).

Effects on Military Families

Both men and women find it difficult to prepare and separate from their families for missions and deployments (Canuso, 2015). They suffer from significant cognitive dissonance because they are also honored to serve amongst the fighting forces (Canuso, 2015). This cognitive dissonance is created from wanting to be loyal to the military and their units while also remaining loyal to their families. Military families also struggle because they are loyal to the military, while also being deeply saddened by the service member leaving the family. Both service members and their families worry about deployment and missions, due to the possibility of death or injury, or simply the fear that the service member will not return the same as before they left. Similarly, both service members and families carry this cognitive dissonance, with each participant attempting to find an acceptable level of comfort while also accepting their place within the military and family. Patel, Morissette, Holleran Steiker, and Sorrells (2016) debated on the family roles that might contribute to the use of substances when service members are returning from deployment and/or reintegration with their families during transition. There are

many resources which could help military families as they prepare or return to reintegrate back with their families.

The relationships of service members, including but not limited to families—nuclear and extended—friends, and significant partnerships become affected in other ways, such as: employment of spouses; education for dependents; family victimization after a sexual assault; being forced to live the life the military wishes instead of their own life; and constant conversations around the idea that their spouse is not the individual they married, to name a few (Hunter, 2007). Also, military families experience unique challenges, including, "military-related psychological trauma [and] physical injuries; unique rules and regulations within the military; social stigma; [lack of understanding and access to resources] in the community; single parenthood; divorce; unemployment; lack of support for children; and other factors" (Hazle et al., 2012, p. 230). Since families have been a part of the total institution, it is not a far stretch to assume families need to learn how to transition as well, not just the service member. Yet the literature does not focus on the families during transition.

Family Care Plan for the Veteran

Once the service member transitions, family care plans take on a different meaning. The implication is that the family is now going to take care of the veteran once they leave the military. However, this is not often the case, especially when the veteran has a disability. Drebing, Mueller, Waltrous, and Penk (2016) expressed the concerns about veteran families and the importance of them having education pertaining to the veteran's specific needs. Each veteran requires different needs, and it now becomes the responsibility of the family members to help determine what they might need. The

military is no longer providing that support and structure. In other words, the military no

longer has control over the individual and cannot enforce anything like they could

previously. This leaves the family to step in and take over where the military left off,

putting additional pressure on the families to take care of the veteran and their needs.

Potential Problems Veterans Face After Transition

Even though the literature is scarce when it comes to veterans and transition, there

is some literature on potential problems veterans face after transition. Some of the

potential problems include mental and physical health concerns, unemployment,

educational development, homelessness, legal problems, and family/relational issues.

Mental and Physical Health Concerns

The nature of the work as an MFT often includes interest in, and advocating for,

the mental health of our clients. Research indicated a link between some mental health

and some physical health issues working together systemically (Kemp & Quintana, 2013;

Prince et al., 2007; World Health Organization, 2001). "For all individuals, mental,

physical, and social health are vital strands of life that are closely interwoven and deeply

interdependent" (World Health Organization, 2001, p. 3). One of the requirements before

diagnosing includes ruling out medical conditions, since medical symptoms can mirror

psychological symptoms and vice versa. However, other literature continues to define

physical and mental health as separate entities that do not impact each other. In this

study, I will be exploring mental and physical health as interrelated aspects of the service

members' lives.

Stigma around mental health. In a recent premiere of the documentary, *Lift the

Mask*, Kevin Lynch, CEO and Founder of the Quell Foundation and Navy veteran,

addressed concerns about mental health stigma, where Kevin boldly stated, "we have been able to reduce many illnesses and diseases like cancer and AIDS, yet we cannot seem to be able to reduce mental health illnesses" (personal communication, K. Lynch, 4/2/2018). Kevin believes this is based on the stigma associated with mental health by concluding "It is because we are not talking about it. If we were to talk about it the same way we talked about cancer or AIDS we could reduce mental health illness too" (personal communication, K. Lynch, 4/2/2018).

While serving, service members carry perceptions and beliefs with them that "become internalized into the service member's identity and are carried forward with him or her in time, even as the service member transitions out of active military service. Mental health stigma can therefore continue to persist even among veterans" (C. J. Bryan, 2016, p. 400). C. J. Bryan (2016) reported that anywhere between 20-25% of veterans meet the criteria for at least one mental health or psychiatric condition, while less than half will seek professional help. Because of this stigma, military service members and veterans are not seeking the help they need—especially veterans—due to claims of not feeling welcomed, inadequate services, the extended wait periods, and other barriers to care (Ghahramanlou-Holloway et al., 2015).

The military is notorious for advising members to drink water and take 800 milligrams of ibuprofen as a remedy for any ailment. This is often a fundamental joke amongst service members and veterans while at the same time becomes part of the pill epidemic discussed in another section later. However, the fear that service members could lose security clearances, be forced to separate from the service, or get accused of being a malingerer often superseded any chance of breaking the stigma and seeking help.

Stigma around mental health has a strong presence within the civilian world with an even stronger presence in the military. The stigma is even worse for women because of the belief that women are weak. Ghahramanlou-Holloway et al. (2015) discussed the additional harassment women might experience while serving, adding that complaints, either physical or mental but especially mental, would exacerbate the harassment.

Comparing female and male veterans. When comparing the Women's Health Survey and the Veteran's Health Survey which sampled male veterans, even though the title suggests all veterans, military men reported worse health than their civilian counterparts, and military women reported lower scores on all domains of health status compared to civilian women (Skinner et al., 1999). When comparing men and women veterans, women veterans scored lower on all scales apart from physical functioning and general health perceptions which reflects the presence of considerable health care needs for women (Skinner et al., 1999).

Even though service is voluntary, military deployments are not—with a few policy exceptions. Not all service members will face a deployment in their military career, and the ones that do often deploy more than once. Some will deploy as many as three or four deployments. When comparing men and women one year after a deployment, men and women had the same reports for medical concerns. The difference is found in the ranking and frequency of the symptoms listed later. Defraites, Niebuhr, Teneza, Clark, and Ludwig (2015) used data from the Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC) and the Armed Forces Health Surveillance Center (AFHSC) to compare health of men and women after a one-year deployment. The AFHSC manages the Defense Medical Surveillance System (DMSS) which supports data of the military from 1990

with almost 10 million military personnel. Defraites et al. (2015) provided tables highlighting those differences between men and women in one-year post deployment, measuring hospitalizations and ambulatory visits (excluding pregnancy, labor, and delivery).

In the ambulatory visit charts, both women and men ranked the following diagnostic categories (one to four) the same (a) injury and poisoning, (b) mental disorders, (c) musculoskeletal diseases, and (d) signs and symptoms (Defraites, et al., 2015, pp. 12-15). There were no significant gender differences between symptoms. After deployment, approximately 28% of women and 21% of men received at least one mental health diagnosis. Yet Defraites et al. reported that women are two times more likely to obtain a diagnosis of adjustment, anxiety, depressive, and personality disorders when compared to men, even though men and women equally report mental health concerns after a deployment. These ailments are often present even after transition. Humm (1990) believed this was due to the current medical model which gives more diseases associated with depression and anxiety to women than men as a result for social control.

PTSD and TBI diagnosis. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a psychological wound to the brain, as where traumatic brain injury (TBI) is a physical wound to the brain. PTSD is a mental health problem which might develop after experiencing or witnessing a life-threatening event like combat, a natural disaster, a car accident, or sexual assault (National Center for PTSD, 2013). In comparison, TBI is a result of an injury to the brain after some sort of jolt, blast, or impact which then impairs cognitive functioning or changes behaviors, depending on the location of the injury in the brain (Tepe & Garcia, 2015).

The National Center for PTSD (2013) presented the following statistics on PTSD

for adults based on the United States population:

> (a) About seven or eight out of every 100 people (or 7-8% of the population) will
>
> have PTSD at some point in their lives. (b) About 10 of every 100 women (or
>
> 10%) develop PTSD sometime in their lives compared with about four of every
>
> 100 men (or 4%). (para 4)

Similarly, PTSD Statistics (2013) reported an overall prevalence rate in adults about 8%

and a gender difference of about twice as many women compared to men receive a

diagnosis of PTSD. Civilian women, on average, are more likely to meet criteria for

PTSD and suffer longer with the symptoms of PTSD compared to civilian men.

According to the Office on Women's Health in the United States Department of

Health and Human Services (2018),

> Women usually have PTSD symptoms longer than men (on average, 4 years
>
> versus 1 year) before diagnosis and treatment. Women with PTSD are less likely
>
> than men to have problems with alcohol or drugs after the trauma. Both women
>
> and men who have PTSD may also develop physical health problems. (para 5)

Yet female veterans continue to be more likely to receive diagnoses as adjustment,

anxiety, depressive, and personality disorders instead of PTSD when compared to male

veterans, even after demonstrating similar symptomology (Amara & Krengel, 2016).

One could speculate that women suffer longer with PTSD, as stated previously,

due to misdiagnosis, or treatment of the symptoms instead of the cause. Even with

comorbid diagnosis of TBI, female veterans screened higher for TBI than male veterans

and received different comorbid diagnoses instead of PTSD like their male counterparts

(Amara & Krengel, 2016). Currently, there is limited research on how TBI affects women in general and even less research on women veterans with TBI. Additional injuries can result after a TBI has taken place (see Tepe & Garcia, 2015 for a list of additional injuries).

When comparing PTSD across genders, women veterans obtained higher rates of PTSD if there was a sexual assault. However, when controlling for factors like sexual assault, women veterans were less likely than men veterans to receive a diagnosis of PTSD, resulting in men receiving higher percentages of PTSD diagnoses and higher disability ratings from the VA for the service-connected diagnosis of PTSD (as cited in Peterson, Lynch, Dondanville, & Wright, 2016). Ritchie et al. (2015) described how women receive the diagnosis of PTSD because of a military sexual assault instead of combat, and PTSD from sexual harassment and/or assault is greater and affects the service member more than combat PTSD.

Sexual assault in the military is "more difficult for military personnel to deal with than [it is] for civilians" (Hunter, 2007, p. 182). One reason is the inability to be free, meaning they cannot just move away or get another job; they are often working next to their accuser within a structure that supports and fosters an environment for the assault to take place (Hunter, 2007). Receiving the diagnosis of PTSD is often the result of comorbid diagnoses such as substance use disorders, major depression, and neurotic disorders (Amara & Hendricks, 2016). The diagnosis can also be tied to a TBI; according to Maguen, Madden, Lau, and Seal (2012), veterans that report head injuries often experience PTSD and increased alcohol consumption.

Sleep disturbances. Veterans often report sleep disturbances resulting in sleep disorders. The recommendation is to assess sleep in addition to assessing mental and physical variables (Pruiksma, Taylor, & Peterson, 2018). Some common sleep disorders in veterans include sleep disordered breathing, insomnia, delayed sleep phase disorder, and shift work. Disruption in sleep can occur for a variety of reasons such as PTSD, TBI, eating disorders, physical/chronic pain, substance abuse (including caffeine), medication use, psychiatric disorders, mood disorders, suicidality, stress, trauma, and nightmares (Sims, Mammen, & Germain, 2016). Factors such as PTSD, depression, suicidality, and alcohol abuse contribute to nightmares (Sims et al., 2016). People suffering from nightmares attempt to solve the problem by avoiding sleep or by not regulating their emotions; this further exacerbates the problem and increases the likelihood of having a nightmare or intensified nightmares. This in turn aggravates the sleep symptoms and sleep disorders.

Physical injuries. Until early 2011, military equipment was designed for men and their anatomy. This resulted in women suffering from additional physical injuries such as carrying additional weight causing musculoskeletal injuries, chaffing, and bruising—since the equipment used to protect them had been designed for men (Naclerio, 2015). An example of physical injury is the result of military equipment and protective gear that could result in chronic pain. Poor fitting gear puts unnecessary strain on the body, while potentially limiting overall function and purpose of the gear (Naclerio, 2015). Chronic pain, especially in spinal disorders such as degenerative disk disease, can be a result of from prolonged use of body armor (Mcgeary et al., 2016).

Disordered eating and weight gain. According to a recent study, one in six women veterans reported having issues around disordered eating (Henderson, 2015). There are several reasons why women veterans are showing higher numbers of disordered eating including: mission and deployment schedules, monitoring weight to meet requirements, and attempting to meet societal standards. There are many studies that report the effects of additional weight on the body; these include an increased risk for heart attacks and stroke, depression, joint and muscle concerns, cancer, and high blood pressure and/or cholesterol (Helpguide.org, n.d.; Stanford Health Care, 2018; The National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases Health Information Center, 2015).

Hoerster et al. (2015) discovered that veterans that have PTSD and/or depression diagnoses were more likely to partake in binge eating, which has been linked to obesity. Even though this majority of participants in the study were male veterans (91.5%), it demonstrates concerns around comorbid diagnosis and how mental health disorders might affect disordered eating habits and patterns while also showing how disordered eating results increase weight gain leading to obesity in veterans. In reference to weight, veterans and non-veterans measured about equally with one-third being overweight, classified as obese, with a larger portion measuring as overweight but not obese (Koepsell, Littman, & Forsberg, 2012). Weight gain has been correlated with combat-related traumatic events, including the onset of PTSD and/or physical injuries, while stress has proven to either cause additional eating or a reduction in eating, affecting weight gain (Henderson, 2015). Gastrointestinal (GI) disorders such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and dyspepsia are common amongst veterans, contributing to disordered

eating and weight gain. These disorders are predominately in women and often linked with other disorders such as anxiety and depression or PTSD (Savas et al., 2009).

Likewise, unhealthy/disordered eating is glamorized throughout the food industry within the United States, as seen in portion sizes, fast food eating, and the amount of processed foods compared to other countries (Grogan, 2008; Keel, 2005). The media portrays the ideal body image that is only achievable through some fad diet—reframed as healthy lifestyles (Grogan, 2008; Keel, 2005). When googling military diets, several diets come up to help service members cut pounds or inches to help them achieve weight standards.

Infertility. The VA Women's Health Services (2017) understood infertility to be "when a couple does not become pregnant after 12 months of trying" (p. 1). Infertility can affect males and females. The Service Women's Action Network (SWAN) report published in December 2018, contained the survey results of 799 women veterans regarding areas of access to birth control, infertility services, and abortion care within the military and veteran populations. As a result of their study, the following results were determined: (a) 37% of active duty reported having trouble conceiving, (b) Reserve and Guard reported 33% reported having trouble conceiving, (c) Retirees reported infertility concerns at 31%, and (d) women veterans reported at 33% of infertility concerns either while serving or after separation. Civilian women report a rate of infertility at approximately 12% (Haring, Kirby, Perkins, Tefera, & Nguyen, 2018). In other words, women military and veterans report a significantly higher infertility rate (almost triple) compared to civilian women.

Mattocks et al. (2015) found that a small portion of the women received diagnoses of infertility from the VA, even though there is an increase in women veterans suffering from infertility. Of the ones that did receive a diagnosis, nearly 40% were receiving treatment from non-VA providers, highlighting the importance of the VA to become better equipped to service women veterans with infertility concerns. The VA Benefits and Health Care (2018) stated, "Veterans with certain service-connected conditions that result in infertility may be eligible for infertility treatment and services paid for by VA" (para 1). The use of "certain" in this statement might imply that not all infertility service-connected conditions will result in treatment covered by the VA. In the SWAN report, women are claiming their infertility is actually service-connected, yet the military and/or the VA are not acknowledging the link between military service and infertility, resulting in women veterans having to pay out of pocket for infertility treatments (Haring et al., 2018). As one of the criteria from the VA for the veteran and/or spouse to receive treatment for infertility, the service member must have a partner and be married (VA Women's Health Services, 2017). Arguments could be founded on both sides pertaining to this matter. Some might argue this is due to the family care plan required for military, reducing the chances of having a family care plan with no spouse. On the other side, some might suggest this is a way for the military to control women and their reproductive rights. More on concerns around marriage and divorce of women veterans to follow later.

Substance use and abuse. According to Defraites et al. (2015) in the comparison between women and men, men were more likely to carry the alcohol and/or substance disorders diagnosis. The exception is found in Hankin et al. (1999), where women that suffered sexual assault were two times more likely to have a comorbid substance abuse

diagnosis. Mcgeary, Mcgeary, and Blount (2016) discussed the growing concern with chronic pain in the military population based on that fundamental idea of take a pill and carry on; with the increase of chronic pain comes an increase in opioid use and abuse.

When comparing veterans and nonveterans in terms of smoking cigarettes, McKinney, McIntire, Carmody, and Joseph (1997) found that veterans smoke more cigarettes than their civilian counter parts, especially women veterans. They reported that the national average for current smokers was 34% for veterans compared to 28% for nonveterans, with 74% of veterans having smoked a minimum of 100 cigarettes in their lifetime, compared to 48% of nonveterans (McKinney et al., 1997). McKinney et al. (1997) suspected two possible reasons veterans smoke more than civilians, which include cigarette companies targeting veterans by providing cigarettes in rations and also the service member trying to fit in with their superiors, who usually smoked.

Suicide. Suicide has been a growing concern among veterans and civilians alike. However, veterans are approximately 1.5 times more at risk for suicide compared to civilians, except for veterans aged 17-24, who are four times more at risk for suicide than civilians of the same age range (C. S. Bryan, 2016). Ramchand, Acosta, Burns, Jaycox, and Pernin (2011) reported since 2004 veteran suicides have doubled and it is the second leading cause of military deaths (as cited in C. S. Bryan, 2016). The concern was so high that the VA elected to provide emergency mental health services to veterans with discharges other than honorable (Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs, 2016). Ghahramanlou-Holloway et al. (2015) reported that serving in the military comes with several risk factors for increased thoughts about death and dying, especially for military women. Those indicators included exposure to several "physical (e.g., sleep deprivation,

injury), psychological (e.g., anticipation about deployment, trauma exposure), and psychosocial stressors (e.g., relation and/or parenting issues)" (Ghahramanlou-Holloway et al., 2015, p. 243). Similarly, C. S. Bryan (2016) stated that there are multiple indicators for suicide, including influences on social and individual levels, gender, and stigmas around suicide and mental health. Yet there is additional speculation that the increase in suicides coincides with the military conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan due to additional exposure to combat.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reported that 21% of female deaths are from suicide: poisoning (37%), firearms (30%), and suffocation (24%) are the most common methods for women (as cited in Ghahramanlou-Holloway et al., 2015). Hunter (2007) found that the reporting of psychological symptoms was higher for women survivors of sexual harassment and/or assault, including the increase of suicidal thoughts and attempts, with a 44% increase compared to a non-victimized population.

Unemployment

Amara and Krengel (2016) reported that more women joined the military because of work being difficult to find in the civilian world (42% compared to 25% of men). Typically, women veterans have higher unemployment rates then male veterans (Szelwach, Steinkogler, Badger, & Muttukumaru, 2011). When comparing women veterans to non-veteran women, veteran women have been shown to have higher unemployment rates (Szelwach et al., 2011).

Sjoberg (2014) described one reason for higher unemployment rates among women: women in civilian life are often expected to be the providers in unpaid care labor such as reproduction, parenting, caring for the household, and caring for the elderly; this

demonstrates an inequality between men and women's labor while also creating an environment where women's labor is less valued. Humm (1990) defined this as reserve army theory, coined by Irene Bruegal, which describes how women function as a reserve army of labor in capitalist patriarchy. Women's work is regarded as marginal, or in reserve, because of ideologies such as the "male bread winner" and "women's place is in the home."

Approximately in the 1980s, recognition was brought forth regarding the wage gap as it relates to the gender gap. Hence, with the difference in the views of women's labor, there is a significant wage gap between women and men in the civilian world, even though they are doing the same work. Differences between men and women in employment and income continue to support the gender gap in the work force. Women believe their right for equality of opportunity and, therefore, they attach patriarchy as a sex class (Humm, 1990).

In most parts of the United States, the consideration of women in the work force results in the ideas that they are secondary wage earners (even though more women are reporting head of household), which results in lower wages and job insecurity (Sjoberg, 2014). Since veterans are returning into civilian life, these claims would become influences in how veterans obtain jobs or get paid. These claims affect veterans, especially women veterans, because they are returning to this role after having equal pay in the military. In essence, if women veterans are receiving less pay or are expected to be secondary wage earners, how are they supposed to support their families if they are the head of household or single mothers?

Klee, Armstrong, and Harkness (2016) disagreed with these claims regarding gender and equal pay, believing that veterans mismanage the money they make, subsequently writing bad checks, having bad credit, or declaring bankruptcy. Issues revolving around money often creates "marital discord, poor decision-making, depression, suicidal thoughts, and homelessness" (Klee et al., 2016, p. 211). These authors believe that veterans make enough money to support themselves, yet they refuse to use the money responsibly. There is often a misconception that military and veterans make a great deal of money, as demonstrated previously.

One example to explain Klee et al.'s (2016) view is that service members have not been taught about simple day-to-day budgeting or long-term finances because everything is provided to them (e.g., housing, food, and utilities); this ties back into that idea of total institution. Often, service members begin their military careers straight out of high school and/or college with little to no guidance on adulting concepts (e.g., budgeting or retirement, balancing a check book, etc.). Furthermore, the military does not teach these skills as part of their military duties. If the service member was not taught those adulting skills before entering the military, the situation becomes further exasperated, affecting the service member within the military and upon transitioning. Even though the military provides several skills that are beneficial for gaining employment (e.g., being on time and in the right uniform or dress code), the military does not prepare service members to know how to manage their money, how to pay bills, or maintain a job, thus reducing the rate of employment for veterans.

A common link was found between money problems or debt and mental illness (Klee et al., 2016). Equally, Ainspan and Smith-Osborne (2016) found that the transition

from having a purpose and meaningful career while in the military to being unemployed has a great impact on the veteran's psychological wellbeing, often resulting in the veteran doubting their own abilities. Before separating, these service members knew what to do for advancement and they knew how to maintain their career. Yet, in the civilian world, veterans begin to relearn these skills. This is another example of how a systematic transition works for veterans and how the literature is not focusing on transition—further justifying the need to study transition.

To further explore unemployment, Garrick (2015) found that women veterans with disabilities were less likely to maintain employment across their lifespan in comparison to non-disabled veteran counterparts and the general population. If being a woman automatically reduces the chance of getting employment in comparison to men, then women having disabilities on top of it reduces the employment percentage even more, resulting in higher unemployment rates for women veterans and even higher rates of women veterans with disabilities, especially PTSD (Drebing, Mueller, Waltrous, & Penk, 2016).

Kleykamp (2013) studied the unemployment, earnings, and college enrollments of veterans in comparison to civilians. The researcher discovered that veterans post 9/11 have a higher rate of unemployment, especially women veterans versus their male veteran counterparts. In comparison to civilians, unemployment was higher for veterans, especially women veterans. In reference to employment after service, the bridging hypothesis can be used to help explain the racial differences between groups and to determine if military service is advantageous or disadvantages for different groups (Kleykamp, 2013). Through this bridging hypothesis, employers make the determination

if military service helps or hinders the hiring organization, with the employer's perceptions of military status being taken into consideration.

Szelwach et al. (2011) found that women veterans returning to civilian jobs in rural areas have a much more difficult time finding employment compared to veterans working in the urban areas, significantly reducing the employment rate for these women in these areas, while increasing the risk for homelessness. Under federal law, veterans who served in a certain military campaign during active duty or whom have disabilities meet the criteria for preferential treatment over non-veterans when it comes to hiring (see Neal, 2016 for criteria list) (Neal, 2016; Szelwach et al., 2011). Yet there is no evidence that shows the effectiveness of these laws and programs (Szelwach et al., 2011).

One possible reason veterans have a harder time obtaining and or maintaining employment is due to the cost associated with hiring employees that have health conditions and disabilities. Goetzel et al. (2004) found that health conditions and disabilities resulted in higher percentages of absences, thus reducing the productivity of the individual while increasing productivity costs for the business. As previously mentioned, veterans suffer from a variety of conditions both physical and mental, when transitioning. These conditions might end up costing the employer on average anywhere from $327 to $392 for each employee per condition (Goetzel et al., 2004). It is not a far reach to understand that if veterans have some sort of health or disability concern that reduces productivity, employers may not want to take on the additional cost to their company in order to support veterans obtaining employment.

Educational Development

Once separated from the military, veterans are usually seeking employment and/or education. Veterans "experience some disorientation upon re-entering the civilian workforce and classroom" (Lafferty, Alford, Davis, & O'Connor, 2008, p. 7). Ainspan and Smith-Osborne (2016) linked education and employment together, stating that veterans are under undue amounts of psychological stress as they look for employment or search for educational programs and as they adjust to leaving the military to work for the civilian work place or educational environments. Some jobs might require education along with job experience in a particular field.

I remember when I transitioned and applied for unemployment, the only jobs the unemployment office would allow me to apply for to meet their requirements was in the human resources field, since that is what I did in the military. However, I remember discussing with them on several occasions that that was the job the military picked for me, not the job I wanted to do or learn. Hence, the unemployment office's policies forced me to continue my education instead of returning directly into the work force. This experience is common with other service members as well. Now, imagine military jobs [known as MOS] such as Infantry or Cav Scout, which do not necessarily have a civilian counterpart. What do these service members do? The example validates the difference between the theory of transition and its practice, which ultimately affects the service member during their transition.

Unlike previous years, veterans are taking more advantage of their educational benefits. One reason veterans are utilizing their education benefits is due to the increase of the national average of student loans debt being higher than in previous years. Women

are leading the way in these benefits, with more than 80% taking full advantage of their education benefits, either through Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment or the GI Bill, and 12% of those women continuing to advanced degrees (Garrick, 2015). Falk (2009) claimed that with the rise of civilian and veteran women attending college, there was still a lag between wages of men and women with the same degree and experience; the only separating factor is their gender.

Frequently, I heard veterans say they joined the military to attend college. The question arises, "What does that mean for veterans and colleges?" As a veteran and a student, their classification becomes part of a subpopulation known as student veteran (Vaccaro, 2015). Vacchi (2012) defined a student veteran as any student who is a current or former member of the military. As a result of the study, Vaccaro (2015) concluded that a "one size fits all" approach does not work best with student veterans, stating "findings suggest professionals should engage in professional development focused on the diverse perspectives and experiences of student veterans" (Vaccaro, 2015, p. 357).

Lieutenant Colonel (retired) Alicia Gill Rossiter stated their personal experience as a veteran and as an educator of veterans that "Veterans learn differently, work differently, and often continue to work as a team. Veterans shift from algorithms thinking to critical thinking. They want to know more. They want to advance what they already know" (Morrison-Beedy & Gill Rossiter, 2018). Ryan, Carlstrom, Hughey, and Harris (2011) discussed a similar experience, that veterans are both similar and different from their civilian counterparts, and it is up to the academic advisers at educational institutions to learn the difference to support veterans during their educational transition as they

matriculate through higher education. When studying about academic success for veterans, seven themes emerged: (a) bridging the gap between military and civilian life; (b) rebuilding a support system outside of the military; (c) readapting to the culture of civilian life; (d) finding meaning in a new life perspective and purpose; (e) battling the stereotypes; (f) taming the fight-or-flight response; and (g) attitudes about mental illness carry over to civilian life (Kato, Jinkerson, Holland, & Soper, 2016, pp. 2136-2141).

Homelessness

Former President Barack Obama stated, "In the United States of America, no one that served in our uniform should sleep on our street" (as cited in Posey, 2012, p. 34). Yet the National Coalition for Homeless Veterans maintains that there are approximately over 106,00 homeless veterans, with only 14,000 beds available for them (as cited in Posey, 2012). LeeAnne Summers reported women veterans are more than twice as likely to become homeless than civilian women (as cited in Posey, 2012, p. 34). Gamache, Rosenheck, and Tessler (2003) found the statistics to be higher, resulting in it being 3.6 times more likely for women veterans than civilian women, with an increase to 4.4% for low income veterans. According to The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development: Office of Community Planning and Development (2017) veteran homelessness in 2017 showed an increase of 18% with 7% of that being women.

Posey (2012) conducted a documentary, interviewing women veterans that were homeless and gathering their experiences. In the researcher's documentary, the researcher found it was difficult to gain the trust of women veterans that were homeless. The women veterans the researcher did speak to did not want to be part of the documentary, fearing that the researcher was trying to exploit them for their personal gain. Posey (2012) was

able to find one homeless veteran woman who consented to an interview, leaving Posey to conclude that "The issues of women veterans were very complex and could not be summed up in one blanket topic" (Posey, 2012, p. 10). The interviewee explained, "I ended up homeless quite a few times. Not being able to really relate to people and being detached from people like my family and I wasn't really able to hold a job when I got back home" (Posey, 2012, p. 36).

Ross et al. (2015) stated that even though there is a higher number of male veterans that are homeless, women veterans are increasingly at risk of becoming homeless, with 39% having experienced MST. Some of the risk factors pertaining to homelessness include PTSD from MST, disabilities and overall worse health, and unemployment. Women veterans that are single mothers are at higher risk for becoming homeless (Hamilton, Poza, & Washington, 2011; VHA Office of Mental Health, 2012; Washington, 2010). There is a debate over whether or not race becomes a factor for increased homelessness among women veterans. For example, The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development: Office of Community Planning and Development (2017) stated Hispanics were more likely to be at risk, whereas Fargo et al. (2012) stated that Black women were at higher risk. Perl (2015) found that military pay grade and active duty service were higher risk factors for homelessness, especially for women veterans. Factors which decrease homelessness include being a college graduate and marriage, which correlates with previous findings (Washington et al., 2010).

Family/Relational Issues

Both men and women report having trouble within their families after separating from the military, with it being a strain on their families (Amara & Krengel, 2016).

Veteran women, especially, discuss struggles with social support from family and friends.

Approximately 20% of veteran women have no one to depend on during times of crisis,

especially when they are not talking with partners, parents, and/or children about their

military experiences (Cotten, Skinner, & Sullivan, 2000). Family members often report

common responses to sexual assault from the military, such as denying that the assault

took place, thus reducing trust in the military to keep their family member safe (Hunter,

2007).

      Divorce. "Veterans are the most underserved population and are more likely to

end their marriage through divorce" (personal communication, R. Heller, 1/6/2019).

Pollard, Karney, and Loughran (2008) discussed their preliminary findings suggesting

that there are more incentives for military to get married while serving, but those

incentives are no longer relevant after transition, creating higher divorces.

      Taken together, these findings suggest that the military provides incentives to

      marry (for men and women) and remain married (for men), but that once the

      servicemembers return to civilian life and these incentives are absent, they suffer

      higher rates of marital dissolution than comparable civilians. This suggests that

      the military may encourage unions that would not normally be formalized into

      marriage in a civilian context and are consequently more fragile upon exit from

      the military. (p. 3)

      Cox and Gearhart (2011) highlighted some important issues on the horizon

pertaining to women in the military as they become a larger percentage of the force: (a)

lower rates of marriage than male counterparts, (b) much higher rates of dual-military

marriages, (c) higher rates of divorce, (d) much higher rates of single parenthood and physical custody, and (e) the needs of male spouses will also become more important. Hefling (2011) expressed military women are twice as likely to divorce compared to their male counterparts—which is at higher rates than their peers outside the military— whereas males divorce at lower rates than civilians. According to Department of Veterans Affairs and National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics (2017) reported that 84% of military women married compared to civilians at 72%; while the divorce rate for women veterans is approximately 23% compared to civilian women at approximately 12%.

Wang et al. (2015) reported that divorce has been linked to mental and physical health disorders such as depression, elevated resting blood pressure, seasonal affective disorder, social phobias, bipolar disorder, and PTSD in civilians. In comparing recently divorced veterans to that of married veterans, divorced veterans experienced similar mental and physical health disorders that of divorced civilians but had additional concerns around smoking, binge drinking, alcohol-related problems, and moderate weight gain. These symptoms appear to coincide with the previously mentioned mental and physical concerns that affect veterans. With these higher divorce rates for women veterans, it puts them at higher risk for homelessness later (Hefling, 2011). One could also speculate that this might contribute to women not feeling supported through their transition, especially if they do not have a spouse in which they were accustomed to having that marital support.

Parenting problems. In terms of families learning how to transition, the concept of parenting is one that comes up repeatedly. Military culture often results in the service

member being away from the family for long periods of time due to missions and deployments. During this time, the family attempts to learn how to adjust by assigning different roles within the family to keep it running and operating smoothly until the service member returns. In addition, the spouse or non-military parent is a single parent until the deployed service member returns. The spouse or non-military parent has gained new roles as well, including juggling the house, children, working outside the home, and much more. In the case of both service members deploying, the family care plan is activated, generally with the grandparent(s) taking care of the children. However, once the service member is back, the family usually attempts to revert to previous roles, which creates disruption within the household because the family has been running without the service member for an extended period. Tom and Glynn (2016) talked about how the "in and out" impacts the family, affecting the parent's connection with the spouse and children, which governs how they guide their children. The spouse or non-military parent reverts back from being a single parent into having another parent in the home to assist. This changing of roles in the families, often at frequent rates, creates chaos within the families. The parental system usually needs to adjust to who has what role and discuss how they want to parent, as their views on parenting may be different.

Increase in domestic intimate partner violence and family violence. Domestic violence, more specifically intimate partner violence (IPV), happens between heterosexual and homosexual couples, married, divorced, cohabitating, and so forth. In the 1970s, battering became the term used when discussing relationships in which one person was abused by the other person, often the spouse or intimate partner. Later, the term battering shifted to more common terms such as domestic violence, domestic

assault, and domestic abuse, especially in statutory language (Tinney & Dichter, 2015). It was the military service that began using the term IPV to exclude violence outside of adult intimate or romantic relationships.

There are many risk factors associated with IPV. Often, exposure to trauma builds up over time, impacting the individual's health and well-being, with an increase in mood disorders, PTSD, alcohol or drug dependence, smoking, chronic pain, sleep problems, infectious diseases, digestive system disorders, and lower overall self-rated health (Tinney & Dichter, 2015). "Women are more likely than men to experience IPV and more likely to suffer negative consequences of IPV" (Tinney & Dichter, 2015, p. 268). However, some studies concluded that active duty women were less likely to report IPV and stalking compared to their civilian counterparts. Moreover, there are higher levels of IPV and sexual violence for members who deploy. According to Bradley (2007), neither men or women demonstrated a significant increase in domestic violence after serving in a combat environment or after obtaining veteran status. This finding establishes that domestic violence may be more common in active duty couples but is less common upon transition. Yet, in Dichter's unpublished research (2013), women veterans experienced higher rates of IPV upon leaving military service (as cited in Tinney & Dichter, 2015). Clearly, the literature is unclear about IPV and how it relates to veterans.

Lehr (1999) explained that domestic violence in military families is double that of civilian families. One possible reason for the increase of domestic violence in military families is the "[difficulty] for spouses of military members to assert themselves against domestic violence in an environment where many aspects of their lives are controlled by their husband's employer" [implying the husband is the abuser in this case] (Lehr, 1999,

p. 125). Likewise, children are the ones that suffer as well. According to Deleon, Brown, and Convoy (2016),

> Perhaps most tragic is the realization that today there are approximately 1.9 million military children, more than 1.3 million of who are school age. Approximately 225,000 have a parent who is deployed, and more than 700,000 children have experienced the deployment of one or more parents since 2001. Military children who are particularly impacted include those in dual-military families (95,000), those in single-parent households (74,000), and those who have special health care needs (102,000). These deployments and frequent moves contribute to increased rates of substantiated abuse and neglect; more alarming, rates of abuse and neglect increase by 42% immediately after the military parent leaves for deployment and immediately after he or she returns from overseas. Nearly 35% of military children are considered "high risk" for psychosocial morbidity, and nearly 20% are considered "at risk" for maltreatment. (pp. 369-370)

These numbers are alarming when we are talking about child abuse. The numbers become even more alarming when we think of the military population only being approximately 17-20% of the United States population. This is yet another example of how the military encourages violence on the battlefield, while removing the moral component of violence, which can impact children and families.

Legal Problems

Currently, the number of veterans struggling with legal problems upon transition back into civilian life is on the rise. Patel et al. (2016) reported that incidents requiring

law enforcement to respond are higher in cases with veterans with mental health concerns. For example, Elbogen (2012) found that 9% of veterans who served in Iraq and/or Afghanistan who report concerns around anger, irritability, PTSD, and TBI had increased troubles with the law. With rising encounters between veterans and law enforcement, the creation of several programs to assist law enforcement with the needs of veterans and how they might not respond the same way a civilian would in particulate situations are in effect. There has even been an increase in veteran courts, created specifically for veterans to assist with the growing problem of veterans ending up in jail or prison (White, Mulvey, Fox, & Choate, 2012).

Even with these programs in place, veterans' legal problems have not reduced or declined. Though there might be a variety of legal problems a veteran can experience, this recap of the literature will focus on the rise of veterans going to jail and/or prison due to their transitional experience, as "Those veterans who experience more difficulty reintegrating back into the civilian culture are at higher risk to experience criminal justice system entanglements" (Brown, 2011, p. 4).

White et al. (2012) reported that 6.3% of the arrestee population is veterans, with more than 50% suffering from some sort of combat-related problem, such as physical injury, PTSD, and other mental health problems, including substance abuse, which draws the attention of police. However, Tsai, Rosenheck, Kasprow, and McGuire (2013) found that veterans from Operations Enduring Freedom (OEF), Operations Iraqi Freedom (OIF), and Operations New Dawn (OND) appeared to be at a lower risk for incarceration compared to veterans of other service eras, yet, for the incarcerated ones, they had higher rates of PTSD. Additionally, a preliminary review of the literature determined

Striking similarities and overlapping characteristics link the data on veteran suicide, inmate suicide, and incarcerated veterans, suggesting that the veteran in jail or prison faces a level of suicide risk beyond that conferred by either veteran status or incarceration alone. (Wortzel, Binswanger, Anderson, & Adler, 2009, p. 81)

Brown (2011) found that most of the veterans charged with crimes in this study had minimal or non-existent civilian criminal histories before joining the military and no disciplinary military histories. In other words, the veterans he studied had no prior history of criminal activity or disciplinary actions while serving in the military. Of the 162 veteran participants, 28 were female. Similar to the beliefs of postmodern MFTs, Brown (2011), a sociologist, believed context, including military service in a military total institution, affects the behaviors and situations of the veteran.

Summary

Serving in the military is both an honor and a privilege. Many women have come before to make changes in policies which affect society, the military, and most importantly, women. Some might even argue that those women making changes are feminists. These feminists began to change how the world viewed women through the various periods known as waves. During these waves of feminism, a variety of changes occurred, including the right for women to vote and serve in the military. It was within these changes that the military women serving recently added another victory—the right of women to serve in all military roles, especially combat.

However, these changes did not come easily for women in the military. Even with all the changes brought on by the feminists, women serving in the military today are still

standing up against traditional military culture and challenging notions of equality verses equity. There is more literature on military women than on women veterans that have transitioned. With this lack of literature on transition comes limited literature on potential problems after transitioning into civilian life. Those problems include mental and physical health concerns, unemployment, educational development, homelessness, legal problems, and family/relational issues. Even with all the combined literature on transition and potential problems veterans face after transition, the lack of literature is still alarming. The gap in literature provides an important reason for conducting this study. Chapter III contains more on the methodology of this study.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Research Question

Every branch of the United States military stresses the importance of equality and equity. However, in my experience as a woman who has served in the military, the practice of equality and equity across genders is not identical. Much of the literature focuses on men and their experiences. Yet there is not only a male focus within the literature, there is also something that plays out within the military culture. For example, when attending the Veterans Affairs (VA), I have seen male veterans ask, "Where is the service member?" to women veterans. This is one example that demonstrates that even though women have served in the military for over 70 years, the idea that women can serve equally to their male counterparts does not exist. By studying the experiences of women, I hope to start closing the gap between research on genders, while also providing a voice to women in an effort to further demonstrate equality and equity. Particularly, in this study I want to explore the research question: "What are the lived experiences of women veterans transitioning back into civilian life?"

Qualitative Quality

Smith (2003) describes qualitative research as a "collection of data from naturalistic verbal reports, in the form of written accounts or interview transcripts, with a textual analysis of the content, instead of a numerical analysis" (p. 2). An important aspect of qualitative research includes the importance of human connection and communication using language (Smith, 2003). As a researcher in an MFT program, these ideas and concepts align with my personal epistemology because I believe they affect how people interact with each other and on the level they do so. By studying these

experiences, I can better understand how the lived experiences affect all relational aspects.

Crotty (1998) conveyed that qualitative research contains four elements—methods, methodology, theoretical perspective, and epistemology by asking the following four questions: (a) What methods do we propose to use?, (b) What methodology governs our choice and use of methods?, (c) What theoretical perspective lies behind the methodology in question?, and (d) What epistemology informs this theoretical perspective? (pp. 2-3). One could see these questions as ways to better understand that in order to get to where they are going, they first must understand where they have been. For example, when choosing a method for research, being able to trace the method of choice back to its origins for a deeper understanding of the selected method helps the researcher to know where the method is taking them, while also helping them to discover how past elements enhance the method's qualities.

In this study, I explored the lived experiences of women veterans who have transitioned back into civilian life. I did this by conducting a study using the method of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), which originates from phenomenology and double hermeneutics, with underpinnings traced back to constructionism (Crotty, 1998; Smith et al., 2009& Larkin, 2009). To better understand the method, I start by explaining the epistemology and work my way through the elements until I arrive at the method. I, too, must first explore where this method came from before I can better understand where it is going.

Epistemology

Constructionism is "meaning is not discovered but constructed" (Crotty, 1998, p. 9). What this means is that people construct their own meanings from their experiences and apply it to what they know as the truth. Truth is an idea that someone creates based on the meaning they apply from their experiences to their reality and world (Crotty, 1998). Under constructionism, truth is relative, based on an individual's experience instead of being absolute. Creswell and Poth (2017) refer to this concept as addressing the processes of interaction among individuals, where the researcher focuses on specific contexts to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants (p. 24). As a researcher, having the ability to focus on context instead of content also aligns with my epistemology. Being able to focus on context versus content allows for more room to discover how someone is interpreting what they are experiencing. One goal of a researcher following constructionist ideas is to understand the world in which participants live, based on the meanings as understood by the participant and interpreted by the researcher (Creswell & Poth, 2017).

Theoretical Underpinnings of Phenomenology and Double Hermeneutics

Moving toward understanding the IPA method, constructionist ideas lead to the theoretical underpinnings of phenomenology and double hermeneutics. For clarification purposes, I will begin with phenomenology.

Phenomenology

There are several types of phenomenological study designs, broken down into two main phenomenological approaches—descriptive and interpretative (or hermeneutic). Heidegger created the interpretative approach, while Husserl created the descriptive

approach (Connelly, 2010; Creswell & Poth, 2017). Even though IPA falls under the interpretative approach, concepts from Husserl are present within the IPA method discussed later. Using descriptive phenomenology, the researcher strips away all prior personal knowledge to grasp the studied lived experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Lopez & Willis, 2004). In contrast, researchers using interpretative phenomenology look for meaning embedded in common life practices and are "lifeworld"—meaning that the influence of the researcher comes from the world in which they live (Creswell & Poth, 2017; Lopez & Willis, 2004). Similarly, Crotty (1998) describes it as "look[ing] for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world" (p. 67). In an interpretative approach, researchers are accounting for their own personal lived experiences. They are not disregarding or pretending they do not have lived experiences, nor are they attempting to go into the research as a blank slate.

When using the descriptive approach, the researcher's experience is taken away, allowing the participants to be the expert of their own lives in search of a generalized description. Conversely, the interpretative approach utilizes the researcher's experiences as part of the experiences of the participants in the study. The descriptive approach operates on the understanding of "radical autonomy;" on the other hand, the interpretative approach operates on the understanding of "situated freedom" (Lopez & Willis, 2004). It is beyond the scope of this study to discuss in more detail the differences and sub-categories of these phenomenological approaches.

The creator of IPA, Jonathan Smith of Birkbeck University of London, has given underpinning credit to the philosophers Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre (Smith et al., 2009). These different theorists have different emphases in which they

focused their attention. In summary, Husserl focused on experience and perceptions, while Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre expanded the concepts of experience to include relationships, language, culture, and concerns, to name a few (Smith et al., 2009). Beginning with Husserl, Ashworth (2003) contended that Husserl proposed the method of phenomenology with the idea of "returning to the things themselves." Husserl believed that in order to return to the things themselves, it was best to return to the experience and the processing of that particular experience. Husserl determined that the perception of that experience was as vital as the experience itself.

The philosopher Heidegger was a student of Husserl. Since Heidegger believed this work with Husserl was too theoretical, he began to branch off and became an influence for both phenomenology and hermeneutics. It was in this major work, *Being and Time*, that Heidegger used the word *Dasein* [emphasis added] to understand the uniquely situated quality of human being (Smith et al., 2009). In this work, Heidegger focuses attention on existence itself, instead of individual psychological processes such as perception and consciousness, like Husserl did. Through this use of Dasein, Heidegger believed there is no separation between people and experiences, resulting in "person-in-context," better known as "intersubjectivity referring to the shared, overlapping, and relational nature of our engagement in the world" (as cited in Smith et al., 2009 Larkin, 2009, pp. 16-17). In this work, Heidegger focused on the morality, worldly, and nature of being.

Even though Merleau-Ponty shared the world views of Husserl and Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty believed there was a "*worldliness* [italics in original]" to our existence (as cited in Smith et al., 2009, p 18). This worldliness embodied relationships with nature,

through which we would develop our own perceptions of the world. Since the body was no longer an object of the world, but more of a vessel we use to communicate with the world, Merleau-Ponty provided a different perspective on embodiment and point of view than the previous philosophers.

Lastly, Sartre expanded the works of Heidegger and became a product of existential phenomenology. Sartre's famous expression "existence comes before essence" discusses how as human beings, we are not a discovery of a pre-existing unity, but rather a developing ongoing project (as cited in Smith et al., 2009, p. 19). This is an example of how Sartre focused on the interpersonal aspects of human beings. Sartre expanded Merleau-Ponty's concept on worldliness, but also included the relationships and how people perceive their experiences based on the presence and absence of our relationships within other people.

Feminist Phenomenology

Many would argue that feminism and phenomenology come from and are different ideas. However, the relationship between feminism and phenomenology are intermingled together as an interdisciplinary theory in support of the lived experiences of people. It was not until recently, approximately beginning in the 1950s, this relationship was explored in further detail (Ryman & Fulfer, 2016).

As previous mentioned, feminism as a basic understanding, works toward equality of the sexes. As where phenomenology, also previously mentioned, in its basic understanding, is the common life practices in which the world people live. According to Simms and Stawarska (2013), phenomenology is the process to "describe concrete, lived human experience in its richness and complexity" (p. 6). Feminists believe this includes

the equal experiences of all sexes and genders, which later is expanded to include culture, race, religion, ethnicity, dis/ability, and so forth (Ryman & Fulfer, 2016). Feminists would argue the original concepts and theory around phenomenology were from the viewpoint of White men, excluding women and their experiences (Ryman & Fulfer, 2016). From the view point of a feminist, it is through sex and gender in which an experience is fully measured in richness and complexity (Langellier, 1994). "Feminist phenomenology clarifies how sex and gender impacts one's experiences and understandings of the world, broadening to explore the social political consequences" (The PhilPapers Foundation, n.d., para 1). Through this understanding *feminist phenomenology* was born. "Phenomenology is *feminist* [italics in original] as long as it includes questions related to gendered experience and sexual difference within its field of study" (Simms & Stawarska, 2013 p. 6). In this study, it is through the lens of feminist phenomenology, that I will further explore the lived experiences of women, learning how sex and gender may or may not have contributed to their military experiences including their transition experience as a veteran.

Hermeneutics

Another theoretical underpinning for the method IPA is double hermeneutics, which stems from phenomenology. Smith, et al. (2009) describe hermeneutics as an interpretation. Double hermeneutics involves a two-stage interpretative process, creating an active role for the researcher, where they attempt to make sense of the participant, who in turn is also trying to make sense of what is going on for them (Smith et al., 2009). In essence, the researcher and the participant are performing the same skill, interpreting what is happening at the same time. This is the essential element for double hermeneutics

and the meaning making process. When comparing this concept to cybernetics first and second order change, participants' meaning making is first-order and the researcher's meaning making is second-order. However, the researcher is employing this order in a more self-conscious and systematic way, by attempting to perceive the clients as they perceive their understandings (Smith et al., 2009).

As previously mentioned, the works of Heidegger are in phenomenology and hermeneutics, which helps to create an overlap between the two theoretical underpinnings. Other relevant philosophers include the works of Schleiermacher and Gadamer for understanding double hermeneutics as it relates to IPA. To start off, Schleiermacher's main contribution is the view that interpretation is not a matter of following mechanical skills, but instead as a craft or art that includes skills and intuition (Smith et al., 2009). By understanding interpretation in this fashion, both the writer and the reader are connected on another level of post modernism in which neither the participant, writer, or reader hold the value of *truth* [emphasis added], but rather the value that each individual has by way of making meaning out of what they are experiencing. This provides the context in which they are expressing that meaning, whether through lived experiences (participants), writing about the perceptions of those lived experiences (writer), or internalizing and processing the words written of the experience (reader).

Next comes Heidegger and his use of Dasein. It is through this understanding of Dasein that Heidegger better understands interpretation. Under the double hermeneutics theoretical underpinnings, Heidegger also focuses the theory on appearance, which has two meanings. For Heidegger, appearance is both the visible meaning and the concealed meaning (Smith et al., 2009). This concept is highly important in IPA due to the

understanding of the underlying message or meaning. An example of this is the ability to read between the lines, or observe that as someone says they are fine, their body language says something else.

Lastly, Gadamer was highly influential in promoting the belief that the "phenomenon, the thing itself, influences the interpretation which in turn can influence the fore-structure, which can then itself influence the interpretation" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 26). In other words, no individual meaning becomes the ultimate truth. If each part of the process has influence on the next part of the process, this results in the double hermeneutics aspect, as the researcher is attempting to make sense of the participant making sense. For example, one student might read an article and come to a different conclusion about the article than the next student. Yet neither of these students are wrong. Gadamer allows for the interpretation process to flow without searching for the ultimate truth.

In accordance to Ricoeur (1970), another way IPA employs the double hermeneutics theory is by adopting the positions of hermeneutics of empathy and hermeneutics of suspicion (as cited in Smith et al., 2009). Hermeneutics of empathy helps to reconstruct the original experience in its own terms, while hermeneutics of suspicion employs theoretical perspectives to shed light on the phenomenon from an outside perspective. Smith et al. (2009) describe suspicion as questioning, which better aligns with the theoretical underpinnings of IPA.

Bracketing

One aspect of IPA is bracketing. Creswell and Poth (2017) defines bracketing as grouping your biases and personal views into a bracket and putting them aside for the

research to be neutral. They also refer to Moustakas (1994) understanding of bracketing or epoche, which describes bracketing as the procedure of researchers putting their perspectives and experiences aside to gain a fresh perspective on the studied phenomenon (as cited in Creswell & Poth, 2017). Even though the researcher has an active role within the research process, the practice of bracketing their own experiences still takes place. For example, if someone is studying trauma, but has their own personal trauma, the researcher would want to bracket, or put aside, their personal thoughts, meanings, etc., about their experience with trauma. This allows for the exploration of the interpretation of the participant's lived experience as the participant views it, without the lens of the researcher. During the discussion section, if the researcher determines that the bracketed information would be useful, they can include it in that section. (J. Smith, personal communication, January 12, 2018). As a researcher trying to ensure the research is not influenced by my personal experiences and meaning, I bracketed my own personal experiences, putting them aside. I did this by journaling. After conducting the research, I returned to those journals for use as part of the discussion in Chapter V.

Methodology

IPA is a phenomenological methodology. However, even though it is a type of phenomenology, the understandings of the word are relatively different. Previously, phenomenology was more focused on the philosophers and how they viewed the world. As a methodology, phenomenology concentrates on the experience in the human realm, turning the abstract thought into applied concepts. Ashworth (2003) states that "[T]he human realm essentially entails embodied, conscious relatedness to a personal world of experience" (pp. 12-13). According to Creswell and Poth (2017), phenomenological

methodology "describes the common meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a concept or a phenomenon" (p. 75). Phenomenology started as a philosophical movement that focuses on the person experiencing the phenomenon, or lived experience, through consciousness and the context of conscious experience. Conscious experiences could include judgments, perceptions, and emotions (Connelly, 2010). In other words, phenomenologists appreciate how lived experiences make people whole, and want to understand people's lived experiences through their physical bodies.

When it comes to phenomenological research, there are several thoughts, which leaves room for discussion. Crotty (1998) describes the implications of phenomenology as not only social inquiry rooted in social experience, but also the methodology that returns to that experience many times. Finlay (2011) argues that phenomenological research assists in bridging the gap between researchers and therapists by addressing issues important to therapists and the profession, without all the academic jargon of traditional research. Giorgi and Giorgi (2003) specified that to in order to study a particular phenomenon, "a situation is sought in which individuals have firsthand experiences that they can describe as they actually took place in their life" (pp. 26-27). Whether you believe that studying phenomenology is done to better understand social experience, bridge the gaps, or get firsthand experience, ultimately, the aim for a phenomenological study is to closely capture the experience within the context of everyday life.

Method

For this study, the chosen qualitative method was IPA. Smith and Osborn (2007) discuss IPA by defining it as: "meanings, particular experiences, events, states held for

participants" (p. 53). Smith et al. (2009) further explain IPA as the research approach committed to the "examination of how people make sense of their *major life experiences* [emphasis added]" (p. 1). In turn, IPA is a method that is concerned with personal lived experiences that are close and far, meaning the experiences as it pertains to the participant, and how the participant makes sense of their experience. What makes IPA different from other methods is that it includes in-depth qualitative analysis, no predetermined hypothesis, and focuses on everyday lived experiences (Smith & Osborn, 2007). Elements which make IPA unique include parts and whole, and idiography.

Parts and Whole

In order to understand the participant's meaning, the researcher has to be able to understand the parts and the whole and how these parts work together to establish meaning. Smith et al. (2009) refer to this as the *hermeneutic circle*, due to the circularity in which the understanding for one cannot be complete without the understanding of the other. According to Smith et al. (2009), "The parts are separated in time by [being] 'linked with a common meaning', and the aim of the interview would be to recall the parts and their connections and discover this common meaning" (p. 2). There cannot be one without the other; for example, there cannot be a yin without a yang.

One example of the parts and the whole is when participants have an experience (parts) and later reflect on the meaning of that experience, possibly through thoughts, feelings, and emotions (whole) (Smith et al., 2009). In another example, the part would be the word and the whole would be the sentence. The meaning of a word becomes clear within the context of the sentence, and the sentence meaning is then determined through the use of the individualized words (Smith et al., 2009). Since the hermeneutic circle

continues to work on different levels, the established meaning in relationship to the parts and whole is vital to understanding each level as recognized by the participant and the researcher.

Idiography

Another aspect of IPA is the *idiography*, which means being concerned with the "particular" (Smith et al., 2009). This is something that separates IPA from other models in phenomenology because IPA is committed to operating at two levels. The first level seeks to understand the *particular*, also known as the sense of detail. The second level is the analysis, which is thorough and systematic (Smith et al., 2009). These two levels allow for IPA to become immerged and embedded into the world and relationships. Idiography within IPA is similar to Heidegger's understanding of Dasein, where it is in-relation-to, instead of being property-of, the individual. Smith et al. (2009) assert that one of the situations one may use IPA for is life transitions. Therefore, the use of IPA for this study makes sense, since the purpose is to explore the lived experiences of women veterans transitioning back into civilian life.

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Participant Selection

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Sampling

After the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved this study, I interviewed participants on their lived experiences of their transition from military service to civilian life. The study contains a "homogeneous, purposeful sampling" for up to eight participants or until the study reached a degree of saturation (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p. 56). The importance of purposeful sampling is to select participants who can give the researcher insight into a particular experience. In other words, participants are

selected to represent a particular perspective instead of a population. Due to this purposeful sampling, I determined the criteria listed later to have been a requirement for participation in this study to enlighten the researcher to their personal experience.

Inclusion criteria required that participants (a) were heterosexual, (b) biologically assigned female, (c) identified as a woman, (d) served on active duty, (e) were veterans transitioned from military service back into civilian life, and (f) fluent in English. The previously mentioned criteria for this study was chosen specifically as a result of the literature and personal military experience of the researcher. These areas cover gaps in the literature, while helping to enhance the understanding and experiences of the individual that meet the criteria listed previously. For example, women were chosen because the military is male dominated, and the literature supports this domination by only discussing men instead of women. As for sexual orientation, the literature continues to highlight the assumption that heterosexual women cannot or do not serve in the military due the association around sexuality as it pertains to feminism and masculinism. Current society often confuses sex with gender, thus the inclusion criteria of gender was included to highlight the importance between these distinctions, as transgenders are fighting to serve in the military.

When comparing the service of active duty versus national guard or the reserves, these service types are similar yet different. National guard and reserves live a double life and are part time military and part time civilian, often resulting in multiple transitions throughout their service. As a result, these transitions may or may not demonstrate the transitions of active duty. The veteran status criteria excluded anyone still in the military in order to capture the lived experiences of transition amongst the veteran population. By

identifying these characteristics of the participants, the goal is to make the sample groups as uniform as possible, including social factors that are relevant to the study. This will allow me, the researcher, to analyze patterns of convergence and divergence (Smith et al., 2009). Due to the research inclusion criteria previously, this study is limited to understanding the lived experiences of women (sex and gender) veteran's that served on active duty in the United States military, that have transitioned back into civilian life. If the participants did not meet the inclusion criteria, they were automatically excluded from the study. There was no exclusion criteria for this study.

Recruitment

At the start of this study, proposed recruitment locations for participants included the local Veteran Affairs (VA) offices, a university in the southern United States' Veteran Association, local veteran associations and/or organizations, and social media such as Facebook and LinkedIn. These location sites were chosen to allow maximum purposeful sampling to occur for this study. These are locations in which the woman veteran could possibly frequent or utilize during their transition. For example, my health insurance coverage is through the VA. Literature has shown that women more frequently utilize the VA for their physical and mental health concerns after transitioning compared to men. Another benefit most military, especially women, are utilizing is going back for their education, which makes a university in the southern United States' Veteran Association a location which will have women veteran involvement. With having previous military experience, social media is a way to reach the target population and expand the search as veterans can share and refer to other veterans. However, some proposed locations were not able to fulfill the IRB requirements, which resulted in recruitment from a university

in the southern United States' Veteran Resource Center (VRC), and social media outlets such as Facebook and LinkedIn. As a result, this crated a reduction in recruitment locations and will be further addressed in the limitation section on this study.

Once the IRB process was completed, I began to recruit participants for this study, looking for women veterans that met the participant criteria. A total of eight participants reached out to the researcher with interest in learning more about the study and possibly becoming a participant. Of those eight interested individuals, one did not meet the requirements for the study; one was unable to schedule time for the interview process; one did not respond to follow up email communications; and one reached out to me after saturation for this study was met and the study was closed for additional participants. The remaining four women met the criteria and completed the interview process. Each participant received compensation for their time in the form of a $50.00 Visa/Mastercard/American Express gift card upon completion of interview. An additional $50.00 gift card was available for participants who completed a follow-up interview; however, no additional follow up interviews were needed. Participants were given the gift card for the interview regardless of whether they completed the interview.

<div align="center">**Ethical Considerations**</div>

Following Ethical Standards

The ensuring and monitoring of all ethical standards throughout the entire research process were in place. Initially, this study was approved through the school affiliated IRB. I continued to follow and adhere to the ethical considerations, policies, and procedures throughout the completion of the study to protect all participants. The first ethical consideration included the avoidance of harm. I did this by evaluating if the

discussion of sensitive issues caused actual harm to an individual or group (Smith et al., 2009). One way I did this was by exploring the information that a participant might share about their experience and how it would affect them, working to reduce the risk of harm to the participants.

Consent Form

The next step required the participants to sign a written consent form before conducting the interview. In this consent form, I laid out all the elements of the research, including, but not limited to, the risk of harm and the time-limited availability to withdraw from the research—up to one month after the interview (Smith et al., 2009). At the start of the interview, I revisited the consent form orally and went over the form before they signed, to also get oral consent. During that time, I again discussed compensation and the entitlement of compensation. Both written and oral consent covered the topic of confidentiality versus anonymity. During the consent process, I informed the participants that I am under the role of the researcher and not a therapist. I orally discussed this with them during the start of the interview and before signing of the consent form. If need be, I continued to remind them of my role throughout the interview process to ensure my researcher persona is at the forefront of this process. The IRB approved consent form can be found in Appendix B.

Protection of Participants

Smith et al. (2009) established the difference between confidentiality and anonymity within research studies. Confidential or confidentiality of the participant would mean that no one would be seeing it. However, anonymity means that the participant agrees to having excerpts from their transcript used, with the identifying

information changed to protect their identity and keep their information as private as possible. This allows the participant to remain anonymous through the process, yet have their story represented in the study (Smith et al., 2009). Thus, I protected confidentiality and increased anonymity of the participant by asking the participant to randomly assign a participant number, conducted interviews in a private office with no open windows, and changed all identifying information in the analysis and write up sections of this study. When transcribing, I used pseudonyms in conjunction with the participant number. During the writing of the analysis, I used the pseudonym associated with the participant number to aid in the process of remaining anonymous.

In an effort to safeguard the participants emotionally, I formulated the interview questions in a manner that was geared towards being less, if not at all, triggering for the participants. However, if at any time the interview became too difficult for the participant to complete, they had the option to stop the interview or continue at another time. In order to ensure I did not change roles from researcher to therapist, I continued to monitor the interview and stop the interview if necessary. Some tools implemented included noticing when the participant became uncomfortable in the interview through their verbal response or non-verbal cues such as laughing, crying, significant pauses, hesitations, and body language. When this happened, I either disengaged from the currently discussed topic, reworded my question to change directions, or discontinued that line of questioning all together (Smith et al., 2009).

Throughout the interview I also checked in with the participant to allow the participant to tell me if they had reached a point where they wanted to stop to help eliminate assumptions. At the end of the interview, I did a final check in with the

participant to ask how they are doing, along with asking if they would like to withdraw from the study at this time. I provided additional resources to the participant and the participant could determine if they needed additional services after the interview. A list of resources can be found in Appendix E. If the participant was not comfortable or required different services from the ones I provided, they were asked to let me know or follow up after the interview, in order to provide local services to the participant at a sliding scale fee. No participant requested additional resource referrals.

Self-Care

During my military service, I was taught such things as: "mission first," "pain is weakness leaving the body," "allow your mind to be stronger than your body," "drink water and drive on" to name a few. However, once I was out of the military, especially in the family therapy programs in which I studied, I learned the importance of self-care. As a woman veteran, there was a possibility that I could be triggered during the interview process due to the subject of this study. In the event I was triggered, I would have excused myself from the interview to take a moment to regain composure to complete the interview. After the interview was complete, I did a mental check in the same way I did for my participants to see if anything came up during the interview process. If something were to have triggered me, I would have sought out my own therapy to protect my safety and wellbeing.

Although some of the participants knew about my military experience, I did not directly disclose or discuss my military experience with participants anytime during the interview process in order to eliminate competitive, comparative, or response biases between myself as the researcher and participant (Smith et al., 2009). By choosing not to

discuss my experiences, I attuned the focus to the participants and their perspectives instead of my own experiences, making the research about them instead of myself and my individual experiences. Even though I have served in the military and have my own military experience regarding transition, I continued to bracket my experiences by journaling to protect the participant's experience. I journaled through the entire process. Anytime a thought or idea came to mind I would take note of it. As a result of the bracketing process through the journaling, I often found myself comparing the participants stories with my own. It was during the interviews and the analysis in which the journal entries were the most frequent. These journal entries will be discussed further in Chapter V.

Step-by-Step Data Collection

Interview Procedures

In reference to data collection, IPA is best suited to offering participants a rich, first-person, detailed account of their experience through in-depth interviews (Smith et al., 2009). The data collection consisted of two sections. In the first section, I collected demographic information by asking closed-ended questions presented in the form of a questionnaire. The use of this additional collected data in the questionnaire contextualized the interview material (Smith et al., 2009). I used this later to help the development of the analysis by further exploring culture and to aid in the understanding the topic in greater detail. The questionnaire can be found in Appendix C.

For the second section of data collection, I conducted in person, face-to-face, one-on-one interviews with the participants, where I asked open-ended questions and/or used prompts in a semi-structured interview style (Smith et al., 2009). These in-depth

interviews, also known as a conversation with a purpose, allowed for the researcher and participant to engage in dialogue about the lived experiences of the participant. The modification of these initial questions occurred, depending on the participant's answers. This modification gave me the ability to further explore any interesting areas which may arise through the interview process and responses of the participants.

As the researcher, I had an interview schedule to assist with the structure of the interview (Smith et al., 2009). This allowed me to ensure that I covered all areas I wanted like to address, along with the questions I wanted to ask from those areas. These interviews generated data through the questions. Some of the sample areas I investigated included: identity, military experience, transition experience, and civilian experience. Below are the questions included in the interview schedule. In keeping with the constructionist underpinnings, as the researcher, I am not searching for a "true" account of the experience, but more of a personal account of the participant's experience as they perceive it (Smith et al., 2009). The interview questions can be found in Appendix D.

Interviews were scheduled over email. The language of the interviews was in English, and the interviews took place at a university in the southern United States' Brief Therapy Institute-Family Clinic, with just the interviewee and the interviewer to allow for minimal distractions and to reduce the risk for participants. The participants were familiar with the interview location, reducing additional concerns and increasing comfortability of the participants. Upon returning to the interview room, I provided a copy of the consent form to the participant along with therapeutic services recommendations if the interview becomes triggering.

It was allotted of a minimum of one hour with a maximum of three hours for each participant's interview. The interviews did not last more than an hour and half. If a follow up interview was needed to gather additional information or for clarification of previously provided information, I would have asked the participant to return for another semi-structured interview. After listening to the recorded interview, I decided whether to request a follow up interview. The first criteria for needing a follow up interview was the quality of the recording, including if the participant's voice was audible, if the participant was understandable, and if transcribing the recording was doable. The second criteria included the completion of the interview and if I believed that I had enough information to present the participant's lived experience of transitioning. However, no follow up interviews were required for this study. After a month from the interview date, each participant was sent, by mail, their research study compensation.

Transcription Process

Each interview was audio-recorded to allow for the most accurate transcription. I completed the transcribing of the audio-recorded interview manually with a computer and a foot pedal. I used a simple analysis to transcribe the interviews (Dresing & Thorsten-Schmieder, 2015). In the simple analysis of the transcription, I included semantic records, which includes every spoken word by each person as part of the transcription (Smith et al., 2009). The transcripts included notes about significant non-verbal utterances such as laughter, significant pauses, and hesitations, instead of a coded representation.

While completing the transcriptions, I reviewed the assigned participant numbers. I noticed three of the four women utilized the number "four" within their participant number. Without exploring more about the numbers with the participants, I wondered the

significance in the number and how they chose a participant number for themselves. Even if this is not significant to the study, I found this an interesting comparison between the participants. For the remainder of the study, a pseudonym was used in place of the participant number to reduce confusion and personalize their stories—they are not just a number.

Data Management

In accordance with the policies and procedures of the university and IRB protocols, I stored the audio recordings of the interviews, along with the transcriptions and any additional journals, notes, and writings in a locked box that only I could access. When using the computer to transcribe, I wore headphones so no one could hear the recordings. My computer was password protected with the protection of a security system—firewall—to decrease the chances of access. I backed up my files on an encrypted thumb drive. I was the only one to have access to all materials, reducing the risk of exposure of participants' information. I will destroy all materials associated with the study 36 months after the completion of the study. At that time, I will shred any paper and/or erase all electronic copies.

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Data Analysis

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The assumption of IPA analysis is to understand the complexity, content, and context of the meanings for the participants instead of measuring the frequency (Smith & Osborn, 2007). According to Smith et al. (2009), there is no right or wrong way to conduct this research because the process of understanding the data is not linear. As a beginning IPA researcher, I used the guidelines from Smith et al. (2009) and Smith and Osborn (2007), in a step-by-step interpretive analysis.

The first step is to become familiar with the data and allow for the participant to become the focus of the research (Smith et al., 2009). In other words, I read and re-read the transcripts and listened to the audio recordings while reading the transcripts. If I developed any notable feelings or biases, I made note of them, as these notes may be helpful during the discussion of the study. I wrote them down in my journal and continued to bracket those feelings and thoughts separately.

The second step includes initial noting through the exploration of semantic context and language (Smith et al., 2009). Smith and Osborn (2007) describe this process as noting the interesting or significant aspects of what the participant has said. As I read over the transcripts, I made notes on the right-hand margin about descriptive comments, linguistic comments, and conceptual comments. Smith et al. (2009) describe these comments as:

- Descriptive comments focused on describing the context of what the participant has said, the subject of the talk within the transcript (normal text).

- Linguistic comments focused upon exploring the specific use of language by the participant (italic).

- Conceptual comments focused on engaging at a more interrogative and conceptual level (underlined) (p. 84).

The third step involves developing emergent themes (Smith et al., 2009). I used the left-hand margin of the paper to take notes about emerging theme titles. Smith and Osborn (2007) understand this step to represent "finding expressions which are high level enough to allow theoretical connections within and across cases, but which are still

grounded in the particularity of the specific thing said" (p. 68). Once again, the completion of this was done throughout the entire length of the transcript.

The fourth step of the analysis is connecting the themes (Smith et al., 2009). A review of the themes allowed me to see if there were any emerging themes or connections between themes (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2007). The first list of themes was chronologically based on the order the themes appeared in the transcripts. In this phase of the process, the themes could result in more of an analytical or theoretical ordering, as I attempted to make understandings of the themes and their connections. As clusters of themes began to emerge, I went back and ensured it matched with the primary source material, also known as a transcript. This allowed for me to make interpretations about what the participants said, while still ensuring accuracy of the transcript.

The next stage of this step is to put the themes into an ordered coherent table (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2007). I created a table with themes, superordinate themes (clustered), and identifiers (Smith & Osborn, 2007). The use of identifiers was for labeling where the themes' locations were within the transcript, for easy identification later. These identifiers included key words from the transcript, along with the page number within the transcript. As that process continued, certain themes were dropped because they no longer fit or were irrelevant to the themes overall. Smith et al. (2009) describe this process of looking for patterns and connections between emergent themes through strategies known as abstraction, subsumption, polarization, contextualization, numeration, and function. According to Smith et al. (2009) the previously mentioned strategies are used for a deeper analysis. However, not all of them need to be used or will be used through the process.

Deeper Analysis: Development of Super-Ordinate Themes

Abstraction and Subsumption

In order to start developing super-ordinate themes, I first began the abstraction process. In the abstraction process I identify the patterns between emergent themes, clustering themes together, and ultimately give these clusters a super-ordinate theme name (Smith et al., 2009). In the subsumption procession, a super-ordinate theme emerges and helps to bring together related themes. While analyzing for the abstraction, gender was a main element which affected who they were and how they operated. For instance, a cluster around gender included discussions around gender roles, gender differences, gender biases, gender challenges, and gender triumphs. It is through their women perspective and lens in which their lived experiences were told and which the feminist elements appear the strongest. More on feminism is discussed in Chapter V. Although there are elements around gender in all the super-ordinate themes, through some of the other analyzing steps, division of the concept of gender created seven super-ordinate themes.

Polarization

Polarization is the process of looking for opposites within the transcript (Smith et al., 2009). One major opposite was the difference between men and women, again this is an element around gender as previously noted. Another polarization included how they were discharged from service. In this regard choices were a common theme for these women. However, it was these choices which resulted in the idea around opportunities lost and gained. Another example of the polarization was with the family support before joining and after separating.

Contextualization

Contextualization is a way of looking at the connections between themes in an effort to understand the narrative being told within the interview (Smith et al., 2009). In other words, these women had several critical events which had taken place, while they served and outside of the service which highlighted their individual experiences. As I examined these various events which were significant for these participants, these events stand out within the themes in which the event had impacted them.

Numeration

During the numeration process, the researcher is taking note of the frequency of the event or representation of the theme through the interviews (Smith et al., 2009). However, this should not be used as an indication of how "important or significant" the theme would be. Even if one participant had an experience which was not represented by the majority of the participants, this experience could still be a theme. This is an important element to remember during the analysis process because again it keeps within IPAs exploring the lived experiences with indication of their relative importance and relevance to the participant. It also demonstrates, the researcher is not in search of a specific answer from the participant.

Function

Function serves as a way to deeper analyze the transcripts by understanding their specific function. It is through this element of analysis in which the researcher further explores the use of language and what meaning can be understood based on their word choice (Smith et al., 2009). Through this element, the researcher utilizes the double hermeneutic circle, as they attempt to understand the participant, as the participant

attempts to understand their own lived experiences. As a postmodern thinker and MFT, this was the one in which made the most sense for me as I conducted the analysis. Throughout the transcripts, I was attempting to find meaning in their words. These meanings were interwoven throughout the super-ordinate themes. However, it is within the service theme, especially the lessons learned in which this element was demonstrated with such a high concentration.
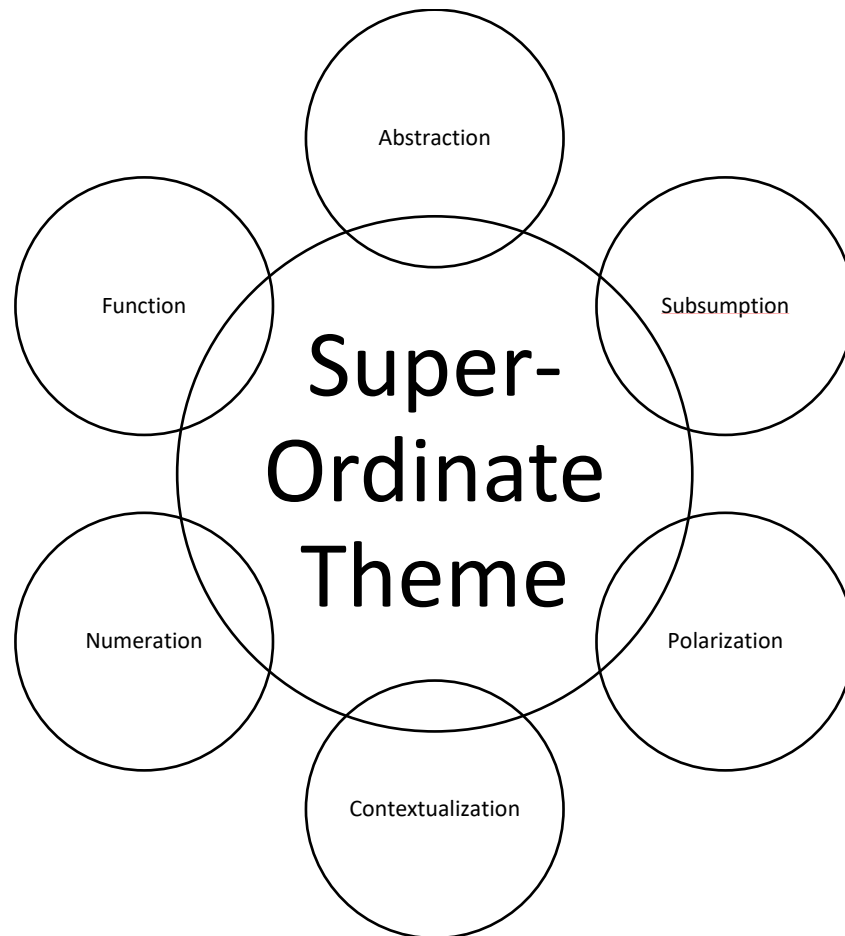
Figure 1. Analyzing strategies and super-ordinate themes.

Bringing it all Together

As previously mentioned in Chapter III, not all these strategies are required for a thorough analysis process. However, all these strategies were used in the analysis process for this study. Each strategy was thoroughly evaluated, resulting in deeper application of the hermeneutic circle—I began to understand what the participants were saying, while they were also understanding what they were saying. As I utilized each of these strategies, I discovered layers and patterns which later was used to develop super-ordinate themes.

In some instances, a single case is written up on its own, making this the final (fifth) step of IPA data analysis. Yet, in other cases, this step is where the researcher will continue analyzing the remaining participants (Smith et al., 2009; Smith & Osborn, 2007). For this study, I continued the analysis with other participants. There are two ways to add additional participants. One way is to analyze the next participant the same way, using the aforementioned steps of the IPA analysis process. The other way is to use the themes created in the first transcript and compare them to see if the same themes emerge within the second transcript.

I completed steps one through five, then compared transcripts to see if common themes emerge. I compared common themes across cases until they reached saturation, resulting in no more than four participants. I determined saturation was met, when I no longer was hearing new information while conducting the interviews. Even though all participants had their unique experiences, I was almost able to predict what they were going to say next and how it related to their transition. As the interviewer it felt like déjà vu or as she was watching reruns on television. This also was apparent during the

analysis portion when no new themes developed after cross examination of transcripts. I composed another table identifying all superordinate themes. Through this table, I began to prioritize the data to reduce them. In other words, if these superordinate themes articulated and produced enough supportive evidence, they stayed in the table for use within the study. More on super-ordinate themes in Chapter IV.

Assessing Validity

Smith et al. (2009) address the growing concern around validity in qualitative research by stating that "qualitative research [is sometimes] evaluated according to the criteria for validity and reliability which are applied to quantitative research" (p. 180). However, the quantitative assessment for validity does not meet the qualitative research designs, causing confusing and inaccurate reflections of validity for a qualitative study. According to Smith et al. (2009), the style to check for validity that best works for IPA was created by Lucy Yardley. In Yardley's (2000) assessment for validity of qualitative research, the researcher found four broad principles: sensitivity to context, commitment and rigor, transparency and coherence, and impact and importance. Throughout this study, I applied those four principles to check for validity.

The first principle, sensitivity to context, was understood to be demonstrated in a variety of ways, for example: socio-cultural milieu, existing literature on the topic, and material obtained from the participants (Yardley, 2000). In IPA, the engagement of idiographic and the particular was just one example of where I was sensitive to context. This sensitivity to context was done all the way from the participation selection to the interviews and through the analysis portion of the study. Sensitivity to context was

reviewed indirectly, as a result of outlining details within the raw data and the interpretation of the participants' lived experiences.

Next, was the commitment and rigor portion of the assessment on validity. For IPA to be carried out well, it required considerable personal commitment and investment from me as the researcher to ensure that participants were comfortable while also attending closely to what was said by participants. Although this was revealed throughout the entire study, the main section of this was demonstrated during the interview process. Throughout the interview I checked in with the participant to ensure the participant's ability and willingness to continue. At the conclusion of the interview I did a final check in with the participant and asked a follow up question if they would at this time like to withdraw from the study. All participants reported no negative sentiments after the interview and did not require additional referrals at the conclusion of the interview. None of the participants asked to withdraw from the study.

Regarding rigor, Smith et al. (2009) state that "in terms of the appropriateness of the sample to the question in hand, the quality of the interview and the completeness of the analysis" (p. 181) are examples in which rigor was examined in this study. Since the sample was purposely selected, the questions were designed to match the sample, which in turn ensures that the data collected from the in-depth interviews matches the sample. I conducted the data analysis thoroughly and systemically, sufficiently interpreting the participants' understanding of their lived experiences, thus leading to corroboration of the validity of the study.

Transparency and coherence assessments were determined by the write-up of the study, ensuring that the stages were clearly defined, and the process was carried out.

Coherence is often determined by the reader as they consider if the study makes sense and is easy to follow and understand. According to Yardley (2000), coherence is also measured by the degree of fit between the research and the underlying theoretical assumptions. As previously mentioned, IPA's theoretical assumptions align with phenomenology and hermeneutics and should be present in the results of the study, further demonstrating transparency and coherence.

In the final assessment principle of validity, Yardley (2000) believes that the study should be impactful and have importance. During this assessment, the reader should find something interesting, important, or useful. If the reader is able to find the study to be interesting, important, or useful, this would corroborate that the study has met this criterion for validity. However, these principles of validity should be assessed as a collaboration effort instead of individually, even though each principle has the ability to stand on its own. Validity will be further discussed in Chapter V.

Summary

Through the IPA method, I studied the lived experiences of women veterans on their transition from the military. This study contained purposefully selected participants who met the criteria requirements. The participants were part of a semi-structured interview that I transcribed. Upon completion of the transcription, I analyzed the data, looking for themes. The results of this study appear in Chapter IV.

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

Participant Demographic Information

The demographic information collected during the interview process consisted of two United States Army and two United States Air Force women veterans—all with an Honorable Discharge. The women reported their race as being Black (two), White/African (one), and White (one). They identified their ethnicity as Latina (one), Black (one), White (one), and no response (one). Their mean age was 46.5 years old, while their military separation date ranged from 1983 to 2015, resulting in a mean date of separation from the military service as 19.5 years. The mean average for length of service was approximately seven years. Their military grade included two Enlisted, one Officer, and one not reported.

All four women reported being married: one participant before joining the military and three participants married after joining the military. Of the four women's martial relationships, three participants' marriages resulted in divorce in which two of them occurred after military separation. All four women reported having a child or children at this point in their life, with three having children after joining the military. All women reported having a minimum of a bachelor's degree; some were working on completing their master's degree and some were completing or have completed their doctoral degree. All women studied at a university in the southern United States. This element around education will be further explored in the discussion section.

Super-Ordinate, Sub-Ordinate and Sub-Themes

I looked for super-ordinate themes across the individual interviews. A super-ordinate theme is the act of looking for basic patterns between themes, to group

them together (Smith et al., 2009). Through the grouping process, sub-themes also arose under super-ordinate themes. This analytic process is repeated for each interview. Then the super-ordinate themes are compared between transcripts to identify if there are similarities between the participants and their experiences. This process resulted in the seven following super-ordinate themes: (a) family support, (b) mandatory conformity, (c) identity, (d) service, (e) gender inequality, (f) symptoms, and (g) opportunities. These super-ordinate themes also resulted in 15 sub-ordinate themes: (a) before joining in the military, (b) after separating from the military, (c) family conformity, (d) military conformity, (e) loss of identity, (f) gaining of identity, (g) service after service, (h) lessons learned, (i) race intersection, (j) disability intersection, (k) pregnancy intersection, (l) physical, (m) emotional, (n) lost opportunities, and (o) gained opportunities. One of the sub-ordinate themes, resulted in four sub-themes: (a) take your time, plan, and educate, (b) ask for assistance (help), (c) get professional help (therapy), and (d) check in and find support. See Table 1 for the super-ordinate, sub-ordinate, and sub-themes chart.

Later in this chapter, I review the themes by providing examples from the transcripts and a deeper analysis of the participants lived experiences. For the sake of expediency, to reduce redundancy, and to demonstrate saturation requirements of this study, I grouped similar experiences together throughout the results. IPA allows for an individual experience to be included in the themes even if not all experiences reflect the theme. This will be demonstrated throughout the results later. A full list of examples for the individual themes can be found in Appendix F.

Table 1

Super-Ordinate, Sub- Ordinate, and Sub-Themes

Super-Ordinate Themes	Sub-Ordinate Themes	Sub-Themes
1. Family Support	Before Joining in the Military After Separating from the Military	
2. Mandatory Conformity	Family Conformity Military Conformity	
3. Identity	Loss of Identity Gaining of Identity	
4. Service	Service After Service Lessons Learned	Take your time, plan, and educate Ask for assistance (help) Get professional help (therapy) Check in and find support
5. Gender Inequality	Race Intersection Disability Intersection Pregnancy Intersection	
6. Symptoms	Physical Emotional	
7. Opportunities	Lost Opportunities Gained Opportunities	

1. Family Support

According to Merriam-Webster dictionary (n.d.), *support* is defined as follows:

"to uphold (a person, cause, policy, etc.) by aid, countenance, one's vote, etc.; back;

second" (Support, n.d.). Traditionally when speaking of family, most people believe or

operate on the assumption that it refers to a nuclear family consisting of parents and

siblings. For the purpose of this study, family is not specific to a nuclear family. Family

was individually defined by each participant. In this theme, family support combines family as described by the participants and support in which they felt or did not feel this backing from their family. There was a mixture of family experiences before and after military transition. This resulted in two sub-ordinate themes: before joining in the military and after separating from the military. These sub-ordinate themes are described next.

Before Joining in the Military

Two out of four women's families were not supportive or had reservations about them joining the military; one woman's family was mixed around support, and one appeared to be neutral. Blaire reported being 17 years old and requiring her parent's signature to join. Even though the parents were not excited about this choice their daughter was making, they signed anyway, relinquishing parental authority over their daughter. Blaire remarked, "But then it was to the point I was doing it. So, they, well, she signed and crying, but she signed" (p. 1).

Kelly reported a similar story to Blaire's story. "I had no family support (laughs heartily, loud)" (pp. 1-2). Kelly continues to express why she believed her family did not support her: in between laughs, "Ummm… Gosh! Because no one has ever done it [referring to her family serving in the military]" (pp. 1-2). Since no one in her family had ever joined the military, this was something she felt they could not support.

Nicole's family was mixed around the idea. She reported her family and friends supported her joining the military. The family support stopped with the grandmother and husband. Both appeared to be upset with her joining, but for seemingly different reasons;

it went against the grandmother's religion and her husband now had extra family responsibilities.

> She [grandmother] just broke down when I left, and, ummm, my other family was just very supportive because we have military people in my family and friends. So everyone else was supportive, but my grandmother just took it extremely hard. My husband at the time, he was kind of supportive, but he was also a little upset because I was leaving him to take care of the girls while I was attending basic training and OCS [military officer school]. He had issue with it but at the same time he was being taken care of, so I guess he didn't care too much about it. But he was still able to do his own thing. Ummm, yeah, for the vast majority of my family and friends, everyone was supportive and proud and happy I was doing it.
>
> (p. 2)

During the analysis process I realized I did not know enough about Jehovah's Witnesses. I wondered if men were allowed to join the military but not women or if they believed no one should join the military. In hindsight, I would have liked to follow up more about the religion to understand how this affected the grandmother. When thinking about the husband, I also wondered about his extra family responsibilities. Was this due to gender roles and what he believed he should have been doing as a man?

Morgan, on the other hand, was the exception in this group as she reported her family supported her decision. Partly because her brother had joined approximately two years before she did, and her sisters were living their lives raising their children. She expressed that her mother "was used to the idea; mom was a widow. She was used to the idea. She could tell I wasn't ready and wasn't going to college. So, she was fine with it,

so it was a career" (p. 2). In some regards it almost appears the family was neither

supportive nor against her joining the military. They appeared to be more neutral around

the whole thing, each doing their own thing and responsible for their own decisions.

All the participants reported that once they decided, they followed through with

joining the service, no matter what support they did or did not receive. They reported

determination and independence, which were and continue to be part of who they are as

individuals. More information about the parts that make up these women is included in

the identity theme section.

After Separating from the Military

I wondered how the family support was for these women after their military

transition, and what had changed, if anything, regarding how the families felt. For the

women in which their families had demonstrated support and/or were neutral before

joining the military, these families continued their support or remained neutral with no

significant changes. Nicole reported her family was the same—supportive of her choice

to join the military and to leave the military. She elaborated:

> They all knew some of the issues I was dealing with while being in the military. It
>
> was the same issues from before I joined the military. But they understood that
>
> you know it was a sacrifice to be in the military and do the things that I was
>
> doing. At that point I have become a single parent while I was in the military. So,
>
> getting out was a good choice. They supported that. (p. 3)

Similarly, Morgan recalled her experience with her family after transition as

supportive because they were happy that she had served because it provided her with

direction in her life. She believed that direction came in the form of a career after she left

the military service, especially since there are military jobs which result in not being able to find relatable civilian jobs. She later referenced how when her mother came to watch her graduate with her Ph.D. that her mother noticed both her brother and her stood a little taller, which later Morgan attributed to their military service.

> Ummm, they were fine with it. They, ummm, they were happy that I had a career, and they were happy that I had some direction. Because the military grows you up. So, if you can come out of the military with a career, that is great! I mean, if your, there are so many jobs that military that don't give you a career. And went in, I wanted to make sure. Something told me that high tech was coming. The information age. So that is why I chose telecom. (p. 3)

Later, Morgan described an event in the symptoms section where her mom was there for her supporting her through it. She also provided another example when her husband had to be sent back to the States while she was serving in Greece. Her family continued to show their support by assisting her via helping her husband back in the United States while she was still serving in Greece.

Blaire and Kelly's families were not supportive at the time of enlistment but had a change of heart after they transitioned back to civilian life. Blaire discussed how she was not exactly close with her nuclear family. Once she joined the military and her family relocated, the distance was felt and appreciated on her side. She recalled being closer to her godmother and her godmother's children, whom she referred to as aunts. She expressed, "They thought it was great after the fact. They respected me. They were proud of me, and they had positive things to say about my decision after the fact" (p. 3). However, they had "mixed feelings" about her transition due to the process, which is

explained in another section. Her godmother and aunts were the ones to tell her husband that something is "not right" with Blaire once she transitioned out of the military, and he needed to help her figure out how to fix it.

Before serving, Kelly's family was not supportive at all. Kelly's mother was concerned that she would not return due to death and the rest of her family just was unsure what it meant to support Kelly during this part of her life. Yet after serving, Kelly's family had a complete change of heart regarding her military service. Kelly discussed how she was not able to tell her mother about her orders, reiterating her mother's fear of losing another child. Then she goes on to talk about how proud her father is that she served.

> I actually almost got deployed. Umm. And I couldn't tell her [mother] about it, but… coming out she was very happy. My dad now have bragging rights. He still have a pair of my BDU's [military uniform], and a hat, and my dog tags. And he wears the dog tags. You know ummm… recently my nieces told me how proud they were of me and that they look up to me and I'm always doing what I say I'm going to do. So, it was (laughs) it was a celebration when I got out. FOR THEM! (p. 2)

Kelly's emphasis on a celebration for her family is later explored in the identity section. When talking with veterans, this sample is a typical response of family support before and after military service. I often hear families are less supportive of their family members joining but are more supportive after they are out. As Kelly described, the support is expressed more as a sense of pride and honor. I would speculate that honor and pride felt by the families has transferred from the service members themselves.

2. Mandatory Conformity

Merriam-Webster dictionary (n.d.) defines conformity as: "compliance or acquiescence; obedience" (Conformity, n.d.). In this theme, mandatory conformity is the required compliance and/or obedience for these participants. Throughout their interviews, they described how they were controlled by these various mandatory conformity situations either through their families and/or the military. Conformity comes in all shapes and sizes. In this study, two forms were discovered—family and military. These women talked about their experiences around conformity and how they handled these situations. Under this mandatory conformity super-ordinate theme came two sub-ordinate themes: family conformity and military conformity. These sub-ordinate themes are discussed next.

Family Conformity

All four women expressed being the first woman in their families to serve in the military. Two of the women reported having either a brother, cousins (male), or (step)father serve in the military before them. This was acceptable to the families. These male family members received support from their families regarding their military service. Specifically, in Blaire's culture, she explains how her family responded to her joining the service reinforcing the stereotypical gender roles.

> They were surprised and not happy. Ummm, first of all, in my culture, women tend to stay home. Get married. Have what they would call the typical female type of profession. Military was not one of them. We were not a big military family. There were 2 male cousins ahead of me that went into the army. I was the 3rd one and being a female, it was a bit of a shock. (p. 2)

Blaire was not the only woman that received a reaction like this. As Kelly saw it:

> I'm the rebel of the family. I don't know if they see me or saw me then as being a
> rebel. I'm only a rebel because of the culture. Like I go against everything that
> they believe in. And… I do things outside of their comfort. (Kelly, p. 3)

As the rebel of the family, of course joining the military would go against the family and the culture. Kelly's implication that she was going against what they believed in also implies she was further enforcing her own independence against the family conformity. But it could be argued that the parents and families of these women were not trying to enforce conformity for their daughters, rather they were worried about their safety and the experiences women would have in the military. I believe parents typically have concern for their children and their safety. For example, Kelly stated,

> I know for my mom specifically she had lost several children. Most recent one
> was a brother of mine. Maybe four years before I said I was going into the
> military. And she was afraid of me going into war. So, you know for her to lose a
> child. (Kelly, p. 2)

Parents want the best for their children which includes wanting them to be safe. Safety and the fear of losing a child is a major concern for families when joining the military. I wondered if this loss of a child expanded to other careers such as police and firefighters? Is there less concern for a child losing their life for professions like lawyers and doctors? What about professions such as race car drivers? How do these compare with military?

This idea about losing a child was evident with Morgan as well when it came to her own child. Even though Morgan had served in the military, she had a different idea when it came to her son serving. She talked about her time in the service was not during

a time of war. When her son wanted to join and serve, he would be going in a time of war. He also wanted to do an extremely challenging position within the military by wanting to become a United States Navy Seal. She recalled her thoughts regarding his wanting to join, stating,

> But my son, I wanted him to know he had an option. He had some choices he could make, and he didn't have to go fight a war. And you know when I was going in there was no war going on. I knew, it's always a possibility. But there wasn't one going on. (Morgan, p. 10)

I interpreted this statement as someone saying it was okay "for someone else's child, but not my child, not my precious baby." Yet Kelly had a different idea around serving. She said she would support her son if he wanted to go into the military. Even though the other two women had children, discussion around their children serving did not come up in the interview. However, Nicole mentioned that one of her children had seizures. This medical condition would eliminate the possibility of entering the military for that child. The concept about daughters in the military will further be explored in the theme section gender inequality. In hearing their stories, these women fought against mandatory conformity from their families, especially around joining the military.

Military Conformity

Another aspect of mandatory conformity was demonstrated by the military onto service members. Nicole highlighted this perfectly by giving examples of the ways in which she was required to conform to the military, which included what you can do and when you can do it, such as your dress/attire. In this excerpt, she touched on the little things where service members are regulated by the military because they must follow

every rule and regulation. The military has a regulation and/or standard operation

procedure (SOP) for every possible situation.

> Easy in that I was excited to get out. But hard in that it was weird being a civilian
>
> again. Because I was so stuck in military roles. That like you know it's raining
>
> outside, oh, I can use an umbrella now. You know. Like I don't have to stand out
>
> in the pouring rain in the middle of a formation [military gathering] with no
>
> umbrella. You know and, ohhh…. I can wear what I want to be warm without
>
> someone saying: "Why you wearing that, *[Rank and last name]?" You know it's
>
> just like …. It was just weird that I couldn't make more choices for myself. You
>
> know where my hair out. I wasn't trying to stuff all of this into a bun every day.
>
> Ummm, it just took a lot of getting used to. Because you take for granted a lot of
>
> things that you learned in the military as right [emphasized] and then you realize,
>
> nah, I don't really have to do that anymore. You know! I can walk across the
>
> grass and no one is going to yell at me (laughs). It is little things like that, where it
>
> is like you just have to reprogram your mind and almost to fit back in with regular
>
> everyday civilians. And you know not, not the whole military mindset. (Nicole,
>
> pp. 6-7)

Blaire and Nicole discussed another level around mandatory conformity. They

both referred to the rulings the military has when determining if you continue to serve or

not serve. In Blaire's case, she was medically separated, which means they determined

after her injury she was no longer fit for duty. "At the moment, that I wasn't good enough

for them, and they had to get rid of me. That was where my mind was" (Blaire, p. 6). This

statement appeared to be filled with underlying emotions. Without clarifying with Blaire,

it seemed as if she might have felt rejected and sad about the military's decision and her loss opportunity to make the military a career. It can also be inferred that Blaire's underlying emotions brought on by her loss opportunity might have negatively impacted her identity and even possibly her transition.

Similarly, Nicole also experienced a career loss opportunity. The military determined she was part of the drawdown of troops, once again an example of the military determining who serves and under what conditions. According to Guina (2019), drawdown means the active duty military goes through a process to downsize personnel to reduce the numbers and balance the budget. Other terms for drawdown include: Force Shaping or Reduction in Force (RIF). More on this form of control is included in the opportunities theme section.

3. Identity

Identity is understood to mean "condition or character as to who a person or what a thing is; the qualities, beliefs, etc., that distinguish or identify a person or thing" (Identity, n.d.). In other words, identity as a theme explores the participants' recollections of the parts versus the whole in whom they were and currently believe themselves to be. When discussing their identity as veterans, these women not only discussed who they were as veterans but the other aspects of their lives as well. Some of these parts were characteristics they always had, and other parts were characteristics that were brought out because of their military service. Blaire summed up what her identity means for her in whole, "For me, that all these little parts make up who I am" (Blaire, p. 9).

All four of these women, reported that being a veteran was a part of who they are. The acknowledgement provided them with a sense of pride, and they were honored to

have served in the military. Yet it is not the complete, whole person. In other words, as

they transitioned out of the military, they needed to rediscover who they were while

removing the active duty service member identity and adding veteran identity to that list.

They ultimately accepted all parts of themselves, such as being a mother, wife, student,

worker, veteran, and so on. As a result of the super-ordinate theme identity, two

additional sub-ordinate themes emerged: loss of identity and gaining of identity. These

sub-ordinate themes are explored in greater detail next.

Loss of Identity

Kelly described how she felt about her military service and identity. She became a

mother at a young age, and it went against her plan of having children in her 30s. She was

not sure who she was or how the military affected her identity. She expressed she never

took the time to think about it until recently. While thinking about it, she found out that

she still had some discovering to do and this whole experience felt like something from

out of space. She continued to be on a mission, without taking the time to smell the roses,

as they say.

> … somewhere out in space like ,"Who am I?" What is going on? And where did I
>
> need to be right now? Like what is this? Did I really just get married? Did I have
>
> me right now? It was like having an out of body experience. I think about it now.
>
> I wonder what happened. That wasn't a go (laughs), that wasn't the mission. It
>
> was totally different, totally different. Like having an out of body experience. (p.
>
> 9-10)

Blaire also felt like she had some loss in identity after she transitioned. She

described how she had lost herself, mainly because the loss of her identity was due to the

loss of her military identity, indicating "that was the big part that was lost in the transition for a while." When I asked her to elaborate on this, she said:

> …ummm, I, I, I didn't know who I was. Like for me being in the [branch of service] was a big part of who I was. I didn't have that, you know, yes, I was a mom and wife. I wasn't content with that. To me, in my mind, that was not what I fully signed up for. These are things that I choose to do, but it was like, "Where do I go from here?" (p. 9)

Nicole touched on the status of being on active duty in uniform in comparison to being a veteran. She recollected on how her uniform would identify her, however, she no longer has the uniform to "out" her.

> You are kind of like elevated to this high level [on active duty]. People recognize you because they see you in uniform. They are constantly saying good things like: "Thank you for your service. And blah, blah, blah." But when you get out, you are just you. You are not getting all that praise anymore. You are not getting that same constant approval of society. (p. 11)

Even though she also explained that she is grateful that she is no longer "outed" by her uniform, due to being introverted and preference to keep to herself, some might suggest this is a loss of identity. This is a change within itself and required the service member to make the adjustment to veteran.

Gaining of Identity

All four of these women recounted how they were always independent and determined people even before the military. Morgan stated, "I think it showed me what I already knew was in me" (p. 3). Confidence is one of those characteristics she always

knew was in her before the military. Blaire, Morgan, and Nicole talked about the discovery of who they were through the military. Blaire stated, "Because I went in at 17. I was still very young. I was trying to find myself while being in the military…" (p. 4). Morgan expressed something comparable recalling, "You know when you are 21 you are thinking, 'This is great; we are living in Greece now. What are we going to do next year?'" (p. 5). Nicole credited the military for giving her a voice so she could be heard, allowing her to be more outspoken while also being more open to new people and different experiences. Blaire determined that the military helped her to become even more assertive. Blaire and Nicole talked about gaining strength as a result of being in the military. Kelly discussed how she enjoyed the structure and stability the military gave her and concluded: "It meant being part of something bigger than myself" (p. 1).

4. Service

According to Merriam-Webster dictionary (n.d.) service is defined as: "an act of helpful activity; help; aid" (Service, n.d.). As part of the participant criteria, these women have separated from the military. Even though these women are no longer serving in the military in any capacity, that does not mean they stopped helping others. Often you will hear veterans that want to continue to serve even after their service in the military. They find other ways to give back to veterans. This was the case for the women in this study as well. In the super-ordinate theme service, two sub-ordinate themes evolved: service after service, and lessons learned. In the lessons learned sub-ordinate theme, four sub-themes came to light during the analysis portion. Those sub-themes are: take your time, plan, and educate; ask for assistance (help); get professional help (therapy); check in and find support. Both the sub-ordinate and sub-themes are explored next.

Service After Service

Starting with Morgan, she discussed how she is honored to serve the military

population after transitioning out of the military.

I'm started a private practice (therapy) a couple of days ago and I'm going to

focus on women veterans that who are suffering grief and loss. So that I think that

veterans understand veterans. So, I'm honored I can serve in that way. (p. 5)

Not only does she want to serve veterans, she specifically wants to serve women veterans

dealing with grief and loss. One could suggest this was due to the loss of her father when

she was 10 years old, or it could be part of her experiences as a woman veteran, or maybe

it is a combination of a variety of reasons. Later in the interview, she returned to this

theme of service of women veterans describing how she wanted to help women veterans

"… go from surviving to thriving" (p. 12). Her choice of language implies she believes

women veterans [after transition] are barely or only surviving, and she has made it her

mission to provide aid so they can thrive. This is an example of the function strategy,

demonstrating how word choice and language of the participants can be utilized to

provide a deeper analysis—a reading between the lines if you will.

Blaire paralleled this sentiment by stating, "What I noticed is that I'm still

serving, but in a different way" (p. 12). In the excerpt later, she further elaborates on the

ways she serves differently after leaving the military. Blaire has found a way in which

she can utilize her education and training to better serve veterans. She also advocates for

military around issues of mental health.

Serving for my country now serving the community to get themselves in a better

place mentally. And their families. Ummm…I also with this transition, I'm still

an advocate with military for them to get the proper mental health assistance

and—and things like that. That is my passion and where I want to go. (Blaire, p.

12)

Nicole expressed similar ways in which she continues to serve the military

population.

I think, I think, I definitely know that I didn't join right out of high school and I

had a career before. And I looked at and had careers after, even though you know

they all seem to be military related careers afterwards (Researcher: laughs). But,

ummm, I just got a job at SouthCom [military command center]. Why do I keep

getting military jobs? But I want a therapy job. … Exactly. That is what I want to

do. I want to work for the VA. I'm crazy. Yeah, I think that helped having, having

a career before and then going into the military and then getting out. I didn't let

that military culture define me as who I am. (pp. 13-14)

Interestingly, she mentioned that the military culture did not define who she is, yet she

"cannot seem to find jobs" (pp. 13-14) which are not military jobs. Also, once she

becomes licensed, she wants to work for the VA again helping veterans—serving after

service. Morgan also mentioned how she is affected by her service, "I still have a feel for

veterans. Even after all these years. I still when they do the Pledge of Allegiance. I weep"

(p. 5).

As Morgan stated, veterans understand veterans. There is an unspoken bond

which joins them. Kelly talked about this during her interview, where the friends she

made during her military time are still some of her best friends. "I like the friendships

that were formed and friendship (pause) especially when I use that word, friend, ummm,

it means a lot. And I'm still friends with, ummm, some of my buddies" (p. 1). That friendship and comradery was very important to her. This friendship is just another way in which Kelly services this population, by providing support to these friends she has also found a way to provide support for herself. This is another example how veterans continue to serve veterans after their service.

Lessons Learned

In this section, I asked each participant what advice they would give women veterans transitioning out of the military now. Since transition has not been a common part of the literature, exploration in this area will not only help future women veterans, it provides insight into lessons learned from these women veterans which have already gone through the process. After asking each of the participants this question, each one took their time answering. As Nicole stated, "I want to make sure I get this right" (p. 16). By providing advice on what they believe will help women veterans in preparation and through transition, these women continue to pay it forward, providing service after service through assistance and knowledge. I interpreted the underlying message from these four women to mean, learn from my mistakes, do something differently then what I did, do not learn the hard way.

The four of these women all reported that transition is was not an easy task. In other words, the lessons they learned about transition was that it is not easy. Morgan recalled, "It's a big transition. And I think that the experiences that women veterans go through are not the same experiences that someone living in Fort Lauderdale, going to the beach every weekend is going to go through" (p. 11). Blaire stated, "… because it is a difficult transition.…You are dealing with all sorts of things, going from one type of

culture to one that is totally different so it can be shocking" (p. 14). Similarly, Kelly expressed, "Just that this is with anything, but it is what you make [of] it. So, the military can be tough on you but really it is what you make of it (p. 12)" In this example, I understood her use of the word military to mean transition, for the conversation was discussing transition and the advice she would give to other women. Also, in thinking about word choice, her use of the military could be a literal translation about the military being tough of individuals, and the implication is that transition could be just as tough, yet you have the ability to make the most of it.

Nicole had a slightly different answer then the rest of the women. Nicole discussed how she found transition to be both hard and easy. She stated, "It was easy but at the same time, ummm, hard.…Easy in that I was excited to get out. But hard in that it was weird being a civilian [non-military person] again" (p. 6). It would appear the transition was not easy as she claims, the only easy part of the transition was no longer wanting to be in the military. A common thread besides transition is hard, is that this sort of event in a veteran's life is much different than a civilian's and is truly understood by the veteran population regarding to what is needed to complete such a task known as transition.

All participants agreed that transition was difficult, yet they did not all give the same advice to women, which again reflects their individual experiences. For the remainder of the lessons learned sub-theme I have broken down the advice into various reflections on experiences. These reflections included: taking your time, plan, and educate; asking for assistance (help); getting professional help (therapy); and checking in

and find support. Based on the interviews, some of these might appear to overlap due to the nature of the question.

  Take your time, plan, and educate. Kelly, Morgan, and Blaire discussed how women veterans would benefit from taking their time through the process, planning how the process might look like such as understanding the concept of backwards planning, and educating themselves on what is needed and what is out there. Kelly stated, "Give yourself at least two years to plan" (pp. 11-12). In this instance she was referring to the planning process before starting the transition process. She elaborated on the previous expression by reporting, "Give yourself that time to plan. And make sure this is what you want to do. And yes, if you have a family you have to take in consideration of the family. But give yourself time" (pp. 11-12). In a deeper analysis, the way she highlighted about making sure it is something you want to do, might represent how she did not want to get out of the military but made the choice for her family. Maybe she felt obligated to get out of the military based on her situation. The one thing that has stood out in Kelly's interview is her family, particularly her husband and son. She appears to put their considerations ahead of her own, making her family the number one priority. This is again demonstrated, with her voicing her concerns about including the family in this major decision, to not be alone in making this decision.

  Morgan also discussed taking one's time with the transition process. She expressed, "Take your time…I think that… they need time, depending on the person, depending on the experience the variables. I think they need some time to process" (p. 11). The idea of processing, makes me wonder what are they processing, what about transition require processing, and how will time help in the processing? Even though I

did not follow up with the processing, I would suspect that the processing is a part of

going through the motion of the transition process allowing for time to assist in the

transition process.

In Blaire's response, she also discussed how the education on transition process,

is part of the experience. Blaire stated,

I would also say before transition, educate yourself on certain programs and stuff

that will help you and assist you. Ummm, be on top of all that stuff, your medical,

your career, you know all that stuff is extremely important because that can play a

big part on how your transition goes. (p. 14)

Blaire makes a valid point regarding how there are an abundance of programs and

information out there in which it would behoove women veterans to educate themselves

on to further assist in the transition process. She went on to state, "Have a little bit of

patience because it is not going to go as smoothly as sometimes, we imagine. Especially,

when it comes to your benefits and VA part of it" (p. 14). The idea around being patient

is one that hits home, not only as a veteran but in general. According to Blaire, life does

not always go according to plan, which means allow yourself the flexibility to adjust the

plan as needed.

Ask for assistance (help). Blaire discussed that there are many areas in which a

women veteran could use assistance such as help with work, jobs, and other stuff. She

stated, "Ummm, how jobs, work, are different and stuff. So, I would seek help" (p. 14).

This needing assistance and having trouble asking for it was something Blaire had also

mentioned throughout the interview. She talked about how her disabilities limited her

activities and how her husband did not provide much assistance around the house due to

his own military career and gender role expectations regarding house work and taking care of the children.

In Nicole's reflection, she boldly reminded women veterans that they served together as a team, and that team does not end even though they have transitioned. The encouragement to work together as a team, utilizing the skills which they already know, is what Nicole hopes to see women veterans taking part in. She reported,

UMMMMM, not be afraid to ask for help… I think the help would be different depending on the person's situation. Whether it is help from family, help from friends, help from different organizations that are out there. We work as a team in the military. And then when you get out you feel like you don't have that team anymore. But there are so many other groups out there that are willing to help you. And you may feel like you are too proud to ask for that help. I hear about women that get out and they don't have a place to live or they don't you know. And there are so many organizations out there that is going to help if they look and ask for that help. I don't know just don't be afraid to ask for help and… you get the information overload when you are leaving and keep all that paperwork, keep in touch with your friends that maybe still in the military. You are not doing it alone" (p. 16).

Blaire and Nicole implied that women struggle in asking for help. Yet Morgan, on the other hand, believed women are more likely to ask for help compared to men. She even jokingly discussed how men do not stop and ask for directions. She expressed, "Ask for help if they need it. I think women are more apt to do that.…My hope is that women are comfortable asking for help and they have their resources that they need" (p. 11).

Get professional help (therapy). Two of the women thought it would be a good idea to expand their ideas on getting help to include therapy. Morgan flat out stated, "…get therapy" (p. 11). While Blaire eased into the idea a little more. Blaire expressed, "So, I would say seek some therapy some help. Because sometimes things a little rough and you are going from one identity to another" (p. 14). In this example, Blaire touched on the identity piece. This ties back into Blaire's experiences regarding the loss of her own identity.

Check in and find support. Previously, Nicole touched on this getting support in the getting help section. In addition to that part, she added, "I would want them [women veterans] to know that they have support from everyone. That they [women veterans] have support and not be afraid to ask for help" (p. 16). Again, Nicole stresses the importance of asking for help and relying on the support of others to assist with the transition. Blaire also believed in finding a good support system and checking in on themselves. She wanted women veterans to "not [be] so hard on themselves …and seek, you know, your good support system. Have a good system, have a support system. I feel you will need it" (p. 14). Blaire's feelings about the support system not only reflects her own experience but also ties back into the literature. This will be discussed more in Chapter V. Kelly continues to be an advocate for checking in with the family like previously mentioned, however she extended checking in to include oneself.

> To pay attention to how they are feeling. Ummm, and to check in if they have
> children to check in on them as well. They too are transitioning. You know from
> the life style. If they are married check in with your spouse. Check in. Make sure

that you are ok mentally, emotionally, and physically. That would be my advice.

Check in. (pp. 11-12)

Later, you will see how Kelly was so focused on the mission of transition, that she either forgot or did not realize it was important to check in on herself.

Collectively, these women not only agreed the transition process was difficult, but they continued to serve by providing advice to women veterans in hopes to make their transition process a little bit easier. By conducting a more in-depth analysis, and reading between the lines, this advice became lessons learned by the participants based on their own experiences. Some of these lessons might have been things they themselves attempted, and since it worked for them, they wanted other women veterans to be aware of what worked. Or some lessons might have been things they wish they knew when they were transitioning and knowing then what they know now to help make their process smoother.

5. Gender Inequality

Throughout the interviews, the participants discussed their concerns around gender and the inequalities they experienced during and after their service. Inequality as defined by Merriam-Webster dictionary (n.d.) states: "(a) social or economic disparity, (b) unequal opportunity or treatment resulting from this disparity" (Inequality, n.d.). By way of explanation, gender has greatly impacted their military service which resulted in inequalities within their service and how they served. These women served at different times in the military, at different lengths of time, in different jobs, and positions. Yet there were similarities in their descriptions when discussing gender inequalities and discrimination of their lived experiences.

Morgan expressed, "I turned 21 in bootcamp. So, there were some gender things. But at 21 you are going to see some things that surprise you" (p. 1). She did not further elaborate on what "gender things" she experienced; in hindsight, I would have liked to explore this further. Throughout the interview, she continued to make dismissive comments such as "it was whatever" or involuntary body functions such as coughing whenever gender came up. It was through these different comments and involuntary body functions which lead me to arrive at the conclusion that on some level she was bothered by these "gender things." Even though a deeper analysis did not reveal what those "gender things" happen to be, I interpreted it to mean the differences between genders and the harassment which is experienced by women often by men. After this comment was made by the participant, she began to laugh. I laughed along with the participant because I was attempting to mirror the participant in order to join with her so she would be comfortable. However, in hindsight, I may have reinforced that this behavior from men was okay and acceptable because she was a young woman in the military. Morgan provided several more examples of experiences around gender inequality and what she faced being in the military. In one example, after she had left the military, she recalled:

I'm trying to remember (saying to herself). I think that there were a couple of guys that weren't post military. And they viewed me different. But the guys that had been in the military, I was one of the guys. Like I said, the guys that were not post military, they would tease me and pick on me and stuff. Because I was in an all-male field. But. Whatever. (coughing). (p. 6)

In the analysis, I explored the coughing more. I could not help but wonder if the coughing was an involuntary response to cope with discomfort. I wondered what meaning this had

in response to her explaining what it was like to be female in a male dominated field. She was a pioneer in the telecommunication field, yet men did not find this to be the case. Instead of helping her to advance and seeing her as a pioneer, they found ways to harass her and to keep her oppressed.

Blaire also recalled her military experience being plagued with gender inequality. "Umm, overall, I…I…I believe it was a good one, except for certain sexual harassment and inequalities for being a female. But overall, I would say it was a good experience" (p. 1). She further elaborated on how gender was an encompassing part of her military experience.

> With my experience and talking to other colleagues, we [referring to women] tended to have to work more to… get the acknowledgement or the respect that a male would automatically get sometimes just for being a male. Ummm, there were many times they were questioned, we didn't know what we were talking about. And that I didn't see very much sometimes. Even as I went up the ranks it was less, but there were still certain people that tend to question me with certain decisions that I made, due to my job. (p.1)

The simple fact that she was a woman serving in the military resulted in having to work harder to prove her worth as a service member, while doing the job under constant scrutiny of being a woman in a "man's world." These experiences continued even through the discharge process, although she stated it lessened as she was elevated in rank. Similar to the other super-ordinate themes, gender inequality also resulted in sub-ordinate themes. These themes include race intersection; disability intersection; and pregnancy intersection. These sub-ordinate themes are covered in more detail next.

Race Intersection

Nicole talked about being a woman in the male dominated military population. She recollected her experiences, which included the intersection of race.

UMMM…well not only was I an officer and a female, so that had a lot to do with it. But I was a Black female too. So, there were not a lot of Black female officers. So, you kind of like become close to the other Black female officers, but at the same time, ummm, say you're in a meeting. You might say something, and it gets overlooked. Then a White male might say the exact same thing that you said and all of a sudden it is the best thing ever. And you're kinda' looking like, "Did I not just say that?" You know, so, yeah you do deal with that. But I think that is pretty much everywhere. But, ummm, it is very pronounced because the military is like a male dominated profession. You kind of have to prove your worth when you are female in that profession, always. Ummm. Let's see anything else about that (asking to herself). That is pretty much it about that I noticed the most. Ummm, whether I'm in a meeting for work or whether it was in school. Because we do the different army schools. It was the same thing. Making sure your voice is heard. You have to make sure you speak up. (p. 1)

For Nicole, she not only experienced being a woman, but attributed some of her experience to being a Black woman. In Blaire's interview, she also referenced being a minority woman which she also believed added another dimension to her experience of being a woman in the military. She stated, "Yes! And then being a minority woman. That was another difference too" (p. 1). At the time of the interview I did not follow up with Blaire regarding her experiences being a minority woman in the military. In hindsight, I

can see it was an important element to her military experience and could have been explored in more detail.

Disability Intersection

As previously mentioned, Blaire was medically separated, no longer meeting the medical requirements to serve. As she was responding to the question about her family as she transitioned, she had interwoven her experience with the military and how they determined her physical injury was all in her head instead of being hurt.

> … And the transition for me was extremely hard because I went from a very physically active, healthy person, to a person that was not walking. I didn't know my left leg was paralyzed. I didn't know if I could even walk again. Ummm… very defeated and disappointed because, at that point, I was medically discharged. But even before that process, they [the military] kept wanting to send me to mental health, saying that was more mental than physical. When it was obviously some physical stuff that they did to me to cause me more damage. So, that was very frustrating. Then having young kids, at 4 and 5 years old. Not being able to physically do the things that I did with them was extremely hard. I did become very depressive. It was a very hard transition. (pp. 4-5)

As a result of the interwoven military experience and thinking about the literature, I asked a follow up- clarifying question. In response to the question, "Would you say that your experience would have been different based on your gender?" (p. 5) Blaire stated,

> I think a little bit because, while I was going through the medical discharge there were some male colleagues that, due to some injuries, they were also going through it, but their [military] persistence of me going to mental health because

there was something wrong with me, due to PTSD. And there was nothing wrong

with my hip because, people at their level couldn't find what was wrong with

me—physically. They [military] automatically assumed it was more mental. And

none of the other ones had to deal with that [referring to male colleagues]. (p. 5)

For Blaire, this was an example of how the military determined physical and emotional

symptoms based on gender. She continued to express, "Yeah more emotional, like how

they would tag those type of characteristics to us females" (p. 5) regarding the

researcher's prompt for clarity around being mentally unstable and pain.

Pregnancy Intersection

Once Kelly became pregnant in the military, she too faced a comparable

experience to Blaire's—one of discrimination based on gender. She began by describing

her feelings of being "torn" between her loyalties of motherhood and her military career.

After discussing her feelings, she further explains how due to her pregnancy, the military

looked down upon her because she was pregnant and the opportunities, she lost out on

due to carrying a child.

> I was TORN. I was torn. … Umm…because I wanted to retire. I wanted to
>
> continue. And I … I knew I couldn't be the best soldier, the best mom, and the
>
> best wife. Because mission first. They say mission first—family always. Mission
>
> is first! And at that time, I was very black and white. And it was like … my heart
>
> was in the army. Or the army had my heart. And comes this little person. (laughs)
>
> That I could not let anything take me away from taking care of this little person,
>
> that I was not looking for. (p. 2)

This might better explain her surprise regarding the change in plans for the military. She discussed how the military was going to be her career and she had not planned on getting pregnant before she turned 30 years old.

She further explained that once she had become pregnant, a Warrant Officer "pulled her aside in a pow-wow" expressing: "you got complacent" (p. 10). She explained before getting pregnant she got promoted quickly. Yet once pregnant she was unable to continue moving up in rank. She recalled "but what stopped me [from] getting promoted was not going to PLDC [military leadership school] because I was pregnant" (p. 10). This is perhaps an example of how pregnant women are perceived in the military and goes back to gender inequality for women in the military. It is also an example of how pregnancy delays military schools, allowing to further discriminate against women due to pregnancy.

Women have always had the option of getting an honorable discharge from the military if they were to become pregnant. Morgan confirmed this was an option for women during her service (approximately 25 years before Kelly had served). In contrast, this separation option is not available for men serving in the military. However, pregnancy often results in "pow-wow's" from the chain of command regarding performance and standards. This is one example of gender inequality in the military because men are not required to have conversations around pregnancy or performance as a result of pregnancy.

Nicole did not directly state how the chain of command made the decision to separate her, only that she was separated due to the drawdown. She did mention that other service members were separated due to misbehaviors and/or not meeting standards.

Nicole did not specifically state that she was discriminated due to her pregnancy or even implied this was the case. Yet I wondered since Nicole was pregnant at the time she was separating from the military, did her pregnancy influence the decision of the military to remove her from service. By the time she legally was separated from service, she was nine months pregnant. Nicole did mention that if it had not been for her severance pay, she was not sure what she was going to do in the civilian world as a result of being pregnant and far along. This is an example of how pregnant women might be affected in the civilian world, not just the military.

These women all experienced some form of gender inequality, both while serving in the military and after transition. In some instances, these women experienced sexual harassment, other instances involved not being heard because they were women, while in other instances they were discriminated against due to pregnancy. The final form of discrimination included disability, and beliefs around women concerning disabilities. Even though these women, served at different times, different locations, worked under different ranks, and jobs, and so forth they all had the similar experiences which included receiving distinct treatment based on their gender. Not only was this treatment altered, but it was a demonstration of inequality of the genders.

6. Symptoms

Merriam-Webster dictionary (n.d.) describes symptoms as "any phenomenon or circumstance accompanying something and serving as evidence of it" (Symptoms, n.d.). In these interviews, the participants discussed a variety of symptoms they experienced while in the military and when they were transitioning out of the military, both physical and emotional. Some of these symptoms were circular in nature where one might have

affected the other and vice versa. Under the symptoms super-ordinate theme comes two sub-ordinate themes of physical and emotional, covered next.

Physical

Service members typically separate from the military either through expiration term of service (ETS) or retirement, and not through the medical evaluation board (MEB). Even though the MEB is not a typical experience, it was Blaire's experience. Ultimately it means she was injured while serving in the military. She discussed how her injuries resulted in several physical and emotional concerns during and after service.

> And the transition for me was extremely hard because, I went from a very physically active, healthy person to a person that was not walking. I didn't know my left leg was paralyzed. I didn't know if I could even walk again. Ummm… very defeated and disappointed because, at that point, I was medically discharged. But even before that process they [military] kept wanting to send me to mental health saying, that was more mental than physical. When it was obviously some physical stuff that they did to me to cause me more damage. So that was very frustrating. Then having young kids, at 4 and 5 years old. Not being able to physically do the things that I did with them was extremely hard. I did become very depressive. It was a very hard transition. (pp. 4-5)

Imagine being young and physically active, with young children at home, then getting hurt to the point you will not even be able to walk again. Then on top of it, being ignored because as a woman, these symptoms must be in your head instead of suffering from an injury. Blaire continued to talk about the frustration she had with the military as she continued to fight to gain acknowledgement that her injuries were service connected. She

recounts her pain, physical and emotional, in which she suffered. She discussed how she went to [talk] therapy and how it took her several times to get help. These therapists did not join with her, or to join with her, they often stated, "I know how you feel." Comments like these would infuriate her instead of feeling connected with her therapist. She would stop going and it would take all her energy to go back and try therapy again.

Kelly also experienced some physical symptoms, as she recalled: stress, sleep disturbances, loss of appetite, irregular menstrual cycles, weight loss, loss of sexual desire, to name a few (p. 7). She later described how she believed these symptoms were a result of depression, which is classified in the emotional section later.

Emotional

After transition, Kelly already felt torn between needing to choose between her son and the military. However, torn was not the only emotion she remembered undergoing, "I have to overcome what I was feeling.… Yeah it was tough. Umm… and it meant me tapping back into 'suck it up and drive on.' You gotta do it, so do it!" (p. 5). She knew something was not right with her, but she was attempting to handle it on her own. It was not until approximately two years later that she was reading an article on depression and talked to her doctor about her symptoms. He confirmed at that time she had probably suffered from depression.

Right before getting out of the military, Morgan discussed an incident involving her husband, which she asked me not to mention the specifics wanting to respect his privacy. As a result of what happened the decision was made for her husband to return to the states, while she finished her time up in Greece. Upon getting out Morgan refreshed her memory and informed me of an incident where she had a breakdown while shopping.

Like I said, it wasn't war time so, there wasn't a lot of PTSD, or things like that. I

did have a touch of it when I came back from D.C. My mom said let's go

shopping and I kinda' had a meltdown in a dressing room. It was just too much

for me. But other than that, she just picked me up and took me back to her place.

Then I was fine.

Researcher: So, just slightly trying to adjust back to civilian life.

Morgan: Yes! Yeah because, I was coming from Greece. And I was going to D.C.

Big shopping. You know. And I was in Greece, you know, that was 30 years ago,

it was '83. That was a long time ago (saying to herself in almost disbelief). (pp. 4-

5)

Morgan expressed, she suffered from a touch of PTSD. According to her description, she

had just gotten in from Greece and this big shopping created a situation in which she had

a meltdown. It appears she became overwhelmed by the amount of people and everything

just became too much for her to handle at that moment. In hearing from veterans, this is a

common experience—whether they had been to war or not. Adjusting to the culture of

large cities, people, goods and services is a change for many veterans transitioning to

civilian life. Adjustment and transition are not turning on or off a switch, but a process

which requires constant monitoring and effort. One might also speculate that the incident

involving her husband might have contributed to her feelings of being overwhelmed and

having a temporary breakdown.

Nicole was excited to be part of the drawdown and to get out of the military. She

was appreciative of the severance pay especially since she was nine-months pregnant at

the time of separation. However, while serving she felt extreme anxiety with her daughter

being sick and was uneasy about what the transition was going to look like. She recalled the situation and the emotions throughout the transition process.

> It was a relief for me because, I had been thinking about it for so long. It was an anxiety when my daughter when into the ICU for that month. It was anxiety provoking because, I was like, how do I transition with her being sick, not having anything else lined up. It was just bad all around. I was … even though the thought of transition had been on my mind for long; I just didn't know the process of going about it—and what would happen if I did. But then the way that I ended up transitioning when they had drawdown, I think it was just like: Thank God. Phew… it was like a relief. Ummm… it just went from being very scary to being just very comforting, in a way. I felt taken care of. (p. 9)

Nicole's experience is not one that is typical of most veterans. Even though it was not a typical experience she still had to process feelings of anxiety and concern about what was going to happen during the transition process. She worried about her daughter's health even before the separation while still being in the military.

Previously, Blaire discussed serving the community (or other veterans) differently in which she advocates for military specifically about mental health issues. Some of this passion is a direct result of her individual experiences with the medical process and how she transitioned. Even though both women and men can suffer from mental health diagnoses, Blaire's lived experience demonstrated how gender impacts diagnoses.

7. Opportunities

Opportunities is understood to mean: "an appropriate or favorable time or occasion" (Opportunities, n.d.). In the interviews the participants discussed choices that

were made throughout their service—the choice in joining the military, the choice to leave the military, and how these choices were either their own or imposed on them by the military. It is through these choices which lead to opportunities—gained or lost. As people, we can make choices based on the information provided about a situation, idea, thought, or process, to name a few. These choices can be seen as opportunities gained or lost. These women provided examples in the gained or lost opportunities they received. As a result of the participants describing their opportunities as gained or lost, this resulted in two sub-ordinate themes of gained opportunities, and lost opportunities.

Gained Opportunities

Three of the four women saw the military as an opportunity to pay for or attend college, or how the military was a career in place of college. For example, Blaire reported she chose the military because she wanted to be able to pay for college and travel, which is another opportunity offered by the military. She joined the Air Force because she always loved planes and jets, and "things like that."

The fourth woman mentioned the military tuition discount in her current college program and was appreciative of how her service helped her further her education at a reduced rate. Morgan talked about her opportunity to gain a career in the technology field as a result of joining the military.

> So, if you can come out of the military with a career, that is great! I mean if your… there are so many jobs that military, that don't give you a career. And went in, I wanted to make sure. Something told me that high tech was coming— the information age. So, that is why I chose telecom. (p. 3)

Morgan previously talked about how she was a waitress and her older sisters had gone on to college and have families. However, this was not something she was interested in at the time. She wanted to take advantage of the opportunities the military could provide in getting a career. She was a forerunner in the field of telecommunication and not many women had decided to join this field. She expressed how she just knew telecommunication was going to take off and expand. Her thinking proved to be right with the advancement of technology, the Internet, Wi-Fi, and so on.

When it came to separation from the military, the opportunities varied between the women. Morgan decided to extend until she was comfortable in finding a job and was sure she was prepared to leave the military. In Kelly's situation, she was able to choose to stay in after pregnancy or get out. She recalled how she made the choice to get out because she wanted to focus her energy on her son instead of putting him second to a military career and life.

> Go in umm… I had a mission, you know. I was gonna go do this and get my education paid for. And ummm… once I got in after basic training, I loved it so, I'm gonna retire. I can do this. Ummm… yeah… I met my then boyfriend, and then became my husband. Had a child and was like, I don't think I can do this. I don't think I can do this… like as a PARENT. As a parent, I couldn't do it. So, that was too was unexpected because, my mind was made up to make this a career. But (laughs) having a child changed that. (p. 1)

In some regards this choice was a lost opportunity (discussed later) because she had to give up her military career to be the mother she wanted to be. Yet it could also be viewed as a gained opportunity because she focused her energy on being a wife and mother.

Part of the transition process is the decision on where to live once you are not being ordered to live somewhere. In Blaire's case, her then husband was still serving, so she followed him where he was in his military career. Once Blaire's daughter got accepted to a college in the southern region of the United States, she followed her here from across the country. Kelly talked about moving to the southern region of the United States because her husband had family here and it reminded her of her homeland. Nicole talked about moving around within the military as a result of military service. She had to turn down orders due to her family situation with her daughter's illness. Nevertheless, once out, she had the choice of where she could go and moved to the southern region of the United States to attend school. Morgan grew up in the southern region of the United States and wanted to return after leaving the military. She moved around the state doing a variety of jobs, then ended up in the southern part of the state.

All women accepted the opportunity to attend a university in the southern United States, coincidently in the same academic program. It is hard to say if their relocation was to attend college or college was an afterthought once they were here and they realized the caliber of the program. Either way, they made the choice to apply and all were accepted into the program. This choice was a gained opportunity for these women.

Lost Opportunities

Nicole and Blaire experienced opportunities lost when the military made the decision they could no longer serve in the military. As part of the military drawdown, Nicole was released from military service. Comparatively, the military had determined Blaire no longer was fit for duty, resulting in medical separation from the military. She indicated, "there was mixed feelings, because when I transitioned out. It wasn't by

choice" (Blaire, p. 3). Due to Blaire's injuries, the military could no longer provide the opportunity for Blaire to stay in and retire with a career in the military.

In Nicole's situation, she too was not able to personally make the choice whether to stay in or get out due to the drawdown. However, she was extremely grateful for the opportunity to leave the military, especially with a severance pay. Nicole did talk about her choice to discuss her veteran status, instead of being "outed" by her uniform.

> Ummmm… I guess it depends on the situation. (cross talk, inaudible). I have been places where someone else will say they were in the military and I think, I can say something to them and then I won't. I can could be like I'm a veteran too, but then I won't say it. I don't know what it is that stops me from doing that. I don't know. I just don't feel like putting a spotlight on myself. I might be like talk about their service; and they are bringing it up, and they are talking about it, and never say anything about my own. Just to talk to them and keep them in the spot light, without talking about myself. Then, there are other times where someone will say something, and I would be like, oh yeah, I was stationed there too. And then we will bring it up and talk about things. It is just a day to day, like, how I'm feeling that day if I want to bring it up or not. (pp. 12-13)

Summary

Throughout this Chapter, I discussed the themed results from the four participant interviews after careful analysis. There was a total of seven super-ordinate themes— family support, mandatory conformity, identity, service, gender inequality, symptoms, and opportunities. Within those themes, I explored how these themes made sense to the participant, while getting a better understanding of the lived experiences of these women

veterans. Through the IPA analysis, I discovered that their stories were both similar and different at the same time. Once I concluded I had met saturation requirements, I halted further interviews for this study.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

In this Chapter, I will further discuss the results of this study. In keeping with the themes from Chapter IV, I will draw upon my journal notes for the themes while also comparing the literature to the lived experiences of the women in this study. A comparable chart can be found in Appendix G. In addition to reflecting on the themes, I will address potential transition factors, strengths and limitations of the study, and future implications for the MFT field, to veterans in general and to women veterans specifically.

Bracketing: Personal Reflections

Throughout this process, I pondered about each area I read, studied, or learned. I continued to bracket through journaling to keep track of all that was running through my mind during this process. Some of the journal notes are based on anything and everything I was wondering about or having reactions to. In addition, I also took notes on my biases or anything that came up for me as I worked through this research study. I found most of my journaling was done through the analysis portion. Often, what came up was how my story was similar or different from the experiences of the participants. These journal entries are interwoven throughout this chapter.

Literature and Themes: What is the Same and What is Different

In Chapter I and Chapter II, I focused on the military culture and literature around women veterans and transition. In keeping with the super-ordinate themes from Chapter IV and to understand how these themes are the same or different from the literature, I organized the sections in accordance to the super-ordinate themes. I incorporated the literature as it applies to the themes. Throughout these sections, I conversed on how this study worked towards closing the gaps in the literature, compared the differences

between women and men veterans, and followed any trends found within the data. To better understand how the literature, themes, participants, and researcher interact see the Comparison Chart in Appendix G.

Family Support

Interestingly, the literature does not specifically discuss family support of women veterans before joining the military. In comparison to the ideas that women should not serve, I would make the educated guess that women do not receive support from their families for serving, especially when considering the fear of the loss of a child and socially constructed gender roles. Gender appears to be a factor in received support. Canuso (2015) discussed how the family structure changes when women become the primary service member, changing the traditional family structure. Structures in which gender is a part factors into how they are determined.

Three of the four women in this study did not receive family support from all family members. For example, Nicole reported that her grandmother was a Jehovah Witness and joining the military went against that religion. Nicole's husband was "kind of supportive" until he realized he was left to raise the children while she was in basic training. The lack of complete family support could be concluded as a result of their gender or reverse gender roles: when the husband took on the traditional woman roles of maintaining the house and children. Harrison and Laliberté (1997) and Lehr (1999) both discussed how family members' roles were often determined by gender and work was distributed within the family as a reflect of those gender roles.

The mother that was supportive of Morgan joining, had lost her husband— Morgan's dad—when Morgan was 10 years old, which might have impacted her support

since she was the last child to leave the house. The mother had sold the family home and was moving to D.C. for a job working for someone in Congress. In analyzing this, it would appear the mother perceived that she had done her job as a mother, and it was up to the daughter to make her own decisions regarding her future. This could have influenced the mother to support Morgan joining the military.

Once again, there is no literature on family support as it pertains to transition. Remarkably, the support changed after separating from the military. All women reported feeling support or a sense of pride that they had served. It would appear that gender no longer played a part in their service once their service was completed. Another factor might be perceived that all service members did not die in the line of duty, meaning that even though they might not have been the same or had some sort of experiences they did not die. They returned "safely."

Kelly and Morgan had different opinions regarding their children serving in the military. Both have male children. I wondered if this was a result of their own military service or if the gender of their children would have changed their opinions. I wondered if this had to do with the safety of the child or the gender of the child and how their personal military experience would affect their view around the military. Even though Morgan later expressed she would have supported her son if he decided to join the military, she would not have been happy with his decision.

Yet after separating, one of the large concerns for women veterans is they do not feel supported. This ostracizing support could be from their family, friends, or even the community (Ross et al., 2015). It is estimated that as high as 20% of veteran women have no one to depend on during times of crisis, especially when they are not talking with

partners, parents, and/or children (Cotten, Skinner, & Sullivan, 2000). This lack of support has many suspected ideas of how it came to be. As previously mentioned, the military was so good at creating a sense of other for these women, and the increase hypermasculinity, that they often did not socialize with other women in the military. Katzenstein (1998) discussed gatekeeping as another way for the military to keep women in line but ensuring they did not align with other women to rally against the military. As a result of this gatekeeping, women discussed how they do not feel supported by their fellow counterparts, male or female.

In this study, all four women reported being married, three of whom were married while in service and one before joining. Two of the service members acknowledged they were dual military [both spouses are in the military at the same time]. This contradicts what Canuso (2015) reported, that unmarried women entering service tend to not marry. Yet when it came to divorce, three of the four women reported divorces either while serving or after. Interestingly, the one that was married before serving got divorced while serving. None of the women reported being remarried, which aligns with what Ross et al. (2015) stated regarding divorce: that women veterans tend to stay single after a divorce compared to male veterans. An assumption would be that divorce affects the experience of feeling supported. Although this might not have any relevance to this study, I wondered what brought on the divorces and who initiated the divorce.

Another area which was not brought up by my participants was around domestic violence and IPV. Hunter (2007) reported that service members experience domestic violence at higher rates than civilians as a result of military culture and acceptance of violence. What is not clear is whether this pertains to all service members or if this is

specific to men. For example, are both women and men preparators of this violence or recipients of this violence? Even though it was not discussed in this study, it was not directly asked. It could be assumed that since it was not asked, there might not have been an opportunity to discuss it or the participants did not feel comfortable enough to discuss it, especially in a research study. On the flip side, another assumption might be if women were recipients of domestic violence or IPV, this might play a role in why they do not feel supported after transitioning out of the military. Domestic violence and IPV often create limited access to support.

Similar to the women in the study, I too did not have much family support and in some ways was the rebel of the family for joining the military. I was also the first woman in my family to serve even though other males in my family had been serving in the military for generations. I wondered how much gender had to do with this lack of support for the women participants and myself. If gender was a factor, where did these ideas come from: culture or societal norms? My mother and older brother shared the fears of Kelly's mother about concerns around death and war. After serving, my family was proud that I had served, like the participants' families.

Mandatory Conformity

Military mandatory conformity of service members is common of military culture and the effects of total institution. Ensign (2004) discussed how there are three features to conformity: total control, no individual identities, and harsh treatment. This concept aligns with the military belief around discipline in order to prepare service members for war. For example, how they dress or the use of the umbrella, goes with the understanding if service members cannot follow simple rules, they will not be able to follow leaders

under stressful situations (Brim, 2016). I still remember the first time I put my hands in my pocket as I was walking on the grass, no less. The mixed feelings of joy and confusion ran through my body. Having the freedom to do as I wanted without repercussions, while also missing what I had grown accustomed to doing.

Not only did the individual service member have to transform to the military mandatory conformity, but the families also had to conform. Lehr (1999) discussed how spouses and families also must adhere to military traditions and regulations. Families are required to move around with the service member. Nicole talked about how her children grew accustomed to moving and making new friends. She even discussed how her husband had to take on different family roles when she joined and attended basic training and OCS [military officer school]. Blaire discussed how once she separated her husband, at the time, was still in the military and the family followed him around in his military career. Kelly explained that they were dual military and her husband had gotten out a year earlier than she did. These are examples which further demonstrate how not only the service member has to comply with the mandatory conformity within the military, but the families do as well. As a result of military mandatory conformity, there often is no civilian roots, which increases the difficulty of transition while also explaining the complication of not feeling supported in the civilian world.

When I first transitioned out of the military, I often found myself trying to control my family and friends like the military had forced me to conform. I wanted to tell them how to spend their money and on what, what was the best thing for them to do was in a given situation, and so on and so forth. Even though I do not have any children, I still knew the best way in every situation. My way was the only way. It took me a long time

to realize that I was attempting to control them, and even a longer time to stop myself from attempting to control them. As an example of this progress, my friend's daughter turned 18 years old recently and she is about to finish high school. Her mother was trying to convince her to join the military and called to ask me to do the same. The three of us have a conversation about the military. Instead of trying to make a choice for her and control her decisions, I helped her weigh the pros and cons of the military. I told her I would support whatever decision she made. This is where Kelly and I are on the same level regarding children.

My military experience was similar to Blaire's regarding being medically separated. It was during her interview that I had the most difficult time maintaining my role as researcher and not transitioning into therapist. It was also the interview in which I was the most emotionally involved because I had similar feelings about being forced out of the military. It was both a loss and a gained opportunity in my case. Lost in the sense I did not have control over my future and the decision was not mine. Gained in the understanding that I could move on and pursue my dreams and passions.

Identity

Burkett and Brunell (2018) discussed how the third wave of feminism worked to change the identities of women redefining what it meant to be a woman. Similarly, the way feminism becomes part of someone's identity, so does the military. As previously mentioned, the military culture worked to change the identity for service members ensuring they had no individual identities. Yet the military created a contradiction within its own culture. Even though there could be no individual identities within the military, the military still created an individual identity for women service members by identifying

them as Other, furthering the gender divide (Weinstein & White, 1997). Within defining women as Other, this too became a part of their identity (Humm, 1990).

These were not the only identities these women took on. They talked about other identities in which were either enhanced through the military or how they developed new identities. The WAVES women from the Navy expressed something similar and described how the military helped them to be mature and self-confident women. At the same time after transition, their identities were called into question. Likewise, Demers (2013) discussed women veterans' identities after transition which include themes around mourning who I was, questioning who I am, and composing who I will become.

I think everyone and everything is made up of parts which make up the whole. I was different from most because being in the military did not consume my identity. I was who I was with an additional layer. This is where Nicole and I had parallel experiences. I often hear from veterans, especially veterans which joined at a young age and stayed in long enough for retirement, that the military life is all they know, So they are not sure who they are without the military. As Nicole said, the glory is no longer there unless you tell someone.

In my personal experience, the military will always be a part of who I am, but it does not define who I am. I make this distinction because I agree with Nicole in that I appreciate the opportunity to "out" myself instead of being "outed." Even though I presume I joined at a younger age than Nicole, I was closer in age to Morgan and was older than Kelly and Blaire when I joined. Maybe it was my age or my personality, or maybe a combination of both, which allowed me to not fully accept the military as the

only part of my identity. I can recall feeling as if I did not completely fit into the military, and maybe that influenced me and how I assumed my military identity.

Service

When Morgan talked about weeping during the Pledge of Allegiance, I could relate because I often weep during the Star-Spangled Banner, remembering what I sacrificed for this country. As participants mentioned, service does not stop at separation or as other veterans have put it, they are learning to serve differently. Veterans find other ways to serve the community in which they have grown accustomed to living. This reminds me of the Brooks and Dunn song, *You Can't Take the Honky Tonk Out of the Girl.* Paraphrasing the song lyrics to:

> *That woman's been around the world*
>
> *You can take that girl out of the military*
>
> *But you can't take the military, can't take the military*
>
> *Oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh, oh*
>
> *Out of that girl*

This is a superficial, yet poignant example of how once you join the military, even after you separate, you do not leave the military behind. The military becomes part of your identity along with serving differently. Often speaking to veterans, I hear about the ways they continue to serve the military population after serving. There is a draw or connection in which the military population continues to honor the comradery they experienced in the military. Even as Nicole recalled, she just cannot seem to find jobs which are not military affiliated. Morgan and Blaire also discussed how they want to continue to serve

the military population. In other words, "You just can't take the military out of the girl."

They will continue to serve even after separation.

Recently, I heard a retired Command Sergeant Major (CSM), the highest-ranking enlisted member of the Army, give a speech about finding himself after the military. After he transitioned, he got divorced, and was unable to find a job. He was often over qualified, and in his experience, employers were concerned about his "mental stability," referring to PTSD and how he adjusted to civilian life. He eventually found a job at Mission First-United Way, where he continued to serve helping our military and veteran populations in Broward County.

I would agree with Morgan and Kelly and felt that Morgan hit the nail on the head by highlighting how veterans understand veterans. I also agree with Kelly and felt she was spot on by understanding how important military friendships are to anyone that serves. I would compare these friendships to sororities or fraternities, sport teams, and so on. Most of my closest friendships are from the military. Sometimes, we call each other on a hunch, and it was just what the other needed. Often, when I need support, I call my "battle buddies" and they help me through it. So many times, I call them to help explain what these civilians are talking about, or acting like, and so forth.

Originally, the advice question was not on the interview guide list. However, it was during the first interview that something told me to ask this question. I jotted it down and asked it at the very end of the interview as my last question. The question was received well. I decided to carry this question over to every interview based on the idea this is something that was missing in the literature. In my search of the literature, this

question has not been asked before. The literature has attempted to get stories, not advice, from women veterans. Yet these stories only highlight the problems, not solutions.

At first, I struggled with how to add this into the study; for it only presented as a question and not a theme. At the surface level, this was just another question in which they provided advice to other women veterans about transition. Going back to the understandings of IPA and analysis, Smith et al. (2009) discuss the levels of interpretation. Upon further analysis, utilizing an IPA understanding of level interpretation and a search for a deeper level of interpretation, this question demonstrated the lessons learned from these women veterans. The way I understand this deeper interpretation, is the concept of reading between the lines. In doing so, I understood this said advice, was a snap shot of what they had learned from their own experiences.

It would not be a far leap to say maybe this was advice they wish they had heard before or during transition for themselves. It was also another way for them to continue their service after service by helping other women veterans through transition, providing information in which they thought would be helpful, while, in some ways hoping to prevent other women veterans from the struggles in which they endured through their transition. This is almost saying something like, "Look, this is what I went through. Do not do what I did; learn from my experiences." This was a question which allowed for further analysis between what was being said and the underlying meaning of what was being spoken by these women.

To sum up their examples in lessons learned, the women veterans in this study expressed the following.

- Make sure to check in with your spouse or significant other.

- Ask for help.

- Find and utilize that support system.

- There is no need to go about it alone.

- It is okay to not only acknowledge there is something different or wrong, but also to seek help.

The courage it took these women to internally explore their experiences to provide advice to assist other women veterans is no simple feat. Each of the participants took their time contemplating an answer in which they thought would be the best. Nicole even commented on how she wanted to be sure to "get it right."

By providing answers, these women are helping to launch change amongst women veterans. They provide some ideas to a problem in which the literature, thus far, has been unable to do. Kelly had mentioned she knew something was wrong, but wanted to figure it out on her own. Blaire had mentioned it was so difficult and challenging for her to ask for help and depend on others when she had so long depended on herself. Kelly also talked about in how making the move from New York to Florida, she lost her family support because they were not local. Morgan's mother was there to help her when she needed it—at the critical time when she was having a meltdown. Even as common sensical as this advice might appear, the ability to act upon it takes this population a tremendous amount of courage: to be able to fight the ingrained ideas around mental health stigma from the military and overcome becoming another statistic.

Gender Inequality

Sharp (2009) expressed how power and privilege comes with gender—with the assumption that this applies to men instead of women. Throughout these lived

experiences, the women in this study discuss how many times and in what ways gender played a part in experiencing unequal treatment just because they were women. Sadler (1999) discussed the belief male service members carry with them regarding women service members receiving preferential treatment and benefitting from dual standards—especially with pregnancy, physical fitness standards, and sexual harassment.

Henderson (2015) and Hunter (2007) discussed how both men and women experience sexual harassment and/or assault while serving in the military, yet reports are higher for women compared to men. Recently, at the Council of College and Military Educators (CCME) conference (2019) in a workshop about women veterans, I heard a woman sum up her 30 years and one day military experience. She talked about her father not being supportive of her joining and how her mother said she better do something with her life; there was a bigger life out there, outside of their little town. She recounted how she was young and had a smart mouth. Within several months of getting to her first duty station, she had gotten three strikes against her, one of which was from refusing to have sex with the NCO "because he never slept with a black woman before." Not only was she still a minor at 17 years old, but refusing sex resulted in getting in trouble. It was not until the commander took her under this wing, because he saw her potential, where he refused to sign the discharge paperwork (which would have also been a negative discharge at that).

Blaire had reported she was also sexually harassed. In hindsight, this might be worth exploring more for future research, to understand how this sexual harassment might have impacted her military experiences and herself as a woman. After the fact, while doing the analysis, I wondered if she reported this sexual harassment and what

would have impacted her decision to report or not report. Similarly, Morgan had experienced what she called "gender things" and how when you go in at age 21, you see some things that surprise you. Even though I did not follow up on those things, her non-verbal cues marked her discomfort with these events which she experienced. At one point, she began coughing during the conversation around gender. It appeared that she might not have been ready to discuss what she experienced. Although, later in the conversation, she reported that it would depend on her chain of command (both military and civilian), if she felt like something happened and needed to report it. In other words, if she did not trust her chain of command then she would be hesitant to report. It almost appeared that she had thought about reporting, but was worried about the backlash if she reported.

Amara and Krengel (2016) reported that with all the policies and programs in place, the number of women whom were sexually harassed and/or survived MST is on the rise. None of the participants discussed being sexually assaulted; however, this might be the case because I did not specifically ask the participants about this or the participants did not want to share this experience within the study.

Another gender concern is what Solaro (2006) described as the presumption that men make good service members, but women must constantly prove themselves both individually and in groups. Nicole highlighted the same thing when she discussed how she would continually be ignored because she was a woman, but a White man would say the same thing and receive praise and glory. In the example, Nicole also discussed how race played a part in the boys' club. Solaro (2006) explained that it was easier to

overcome race than it was gender. In Nicole's case, she felt like she had to compete with both race and gender while serving in the military.

LaGuardia-Kotite (2012) reported that even though the military had equal pay between genders compared to the civilian workforce, the promotion of women in the military was lower than their male colleagues. Nicole expressed being nine months pregnant when she was released from service. She also expressed finding a civilian job being pregnant. If not for her severance pay, she was not sure what she was going to do. Nicole did not discuss if her pregnancy was part of the decision to release her from service. However, it has been my experience that pregnancy and family care plans are a big part of the military drawdown. Kelly reported that her promotions basically stopped due to having a baby. Not only did she stop getting promoted, she recalled feeling torn between being a mom and serving her country. Canuso (2015) described Kelly's feelings as suffering from cognitive dissonance due to the wanting to be loyal to the military while remaining loyal to their families. Families experience this cognitive dissonance as well. They feel torn because they want their family member to serve but also want them to be home with them in a more traditional role.

Symptoms

Much of the literature revolves around physical and/or emotional symptoms in service members either while serving or after transition. For instance, some of the literature includes: mental health stigma (Ghahramanlou-Holloway et al., 2015); PTSD (National Center for PTSD, 2013); TBI (Tepe & Garcia, 2015); sleep disturbances (Tepe & Garcia, 2015); physical injuries (Naclerio, 2015); disordered eating (Henderson, 2015); weight gain (Koepsell, Littman, & Forsberg, 2012); infertility (Haring, Kirby, Perkins,

Tefera, & Nguyen, 2018); substance use and abuse (Defraites et al., 2015); and suicide (C. S. Bryan, 2016). As much as 20-25% of veterans meet criteria for a mental health or psychiatric condition (C. J. Bryan, 2016). Ghahramanlou-Holloway et al. (2015) discussed this might be the result of the stigma associated with the mental health. Even with this stigma, it does not exclude the fact that mental and physical symptomology occurs and is interconnected. Kemp and Quintana (2013), Prince et al. (2007), and the World Health Organization (2001) indicated there is a link between mental health and physical health issues which work together systemically. The women participants in this study are perfect examples of some of the physical and emotional symptoms experienced by both men and women.

The women in this study were mixed in their experiences of physical and emotional symptoms as they pertain to the duration of symptoms. For example, Kelly and Morgan discussed having some symptoms, but they eventually went away. Nicole on the other hand, discussed how she was worried about transition and everything that would happen, especially being nine months pregnant. Yet once she was provided the opportunity to leave the military before her original time to separate, she was relieved. Blaire continues to suffer from her injuries, and she is constantly working on how her injuries impact her life. She had to learn to ask for help while learning to accept the help that was provided without looking down on herself or feeling guilty. She struggled with losing her independence. In the case of Blaire, her physical pain and injury was viewed by the military as an emotional concern instead of a physical concern. Yet the literature and Blaire's case reinforces how women can have physical pain without it being emotional. Even though there were no reported differences between men and women,

women are two times more likely to obtain a diagnosis of adjustment, anxiety, depressive, and personality disorders when compared to men (Defraites, et al., 2015, pp. 12-15). Humm (1990) believed this is a result of the current medical model allowing men to have control.

Drebing et al. (2016) expressed how the families are not exactly prepared to handle veterans with their disabilities. For example, if a veteran loses a limb during service, the veteran and the family requires additional assistance on how to care for the veteran, while requiring additional adjustment from everyone. In Blaire's case, she explained how she was paralyzed and thought she would never walk again. This was a double whammy for her because she not only was forced to continue to fulfil her gender roles of being a woman and mother, but also, she and her family were not prepared for what services and adjustment Blaire would need.

As previously mentioned, Blaire's story is like mine. I felt touched by her story and was reminded of my own story. Even though I was able to separate her story from my own without being triggered, I felt connected to her story. While I was going through the medical evaluation board (MEB) process, the Army released results of an investigation where the Forensic Psychology department was diagnosing service members with personality disorders instead of PTSD because a medical commander wrote a memo which "reminded" providers of the cost of PTSD as one million dollars per case. However, a diagnosis of personality disorder is perceived to be an inborn trait of the individual, releasing the military from responsibility to treat. The diagnosis of PTSD is often given to men instead of women—for military and veterans (as cited in Garrick, 2015).

I was part of this investigation, in which I, too, had to fight for my diagnosis, not only for PTSD—for my combat tours and military sexual trauma (MST)—instead of a personality disorder, but also to prove that my physical back pain was a problem and not just something I made up in my head. On top of gender inequality of my symptoms, I also often heard that because of my military occupational specialty (MOS), there was no way that I could have back pain or any of the other injuries I faced, even though I had two combat tours under my belt. To this day, I believe I only received the diagnosis of PTSD due to my MST and not my combat tours.

Opportunities

In the literature, the military is defined as a total institution in which the individual members are not able to make decisions for themselves and all choices are made for them (Ensign, 2004). Nicole touched on this mandatory conformity about not walking on the grass or how to wear her hair as examples. I am curious how the adaption to these rules went when thinking about the determination and independence of these women. It would appear they know how to be flexible while still maintaining their independence.

Due to the structure of the military, individual choices are few and far between. It can be perceived that the military's main objective is to do what is best for the military at the cost of the individual service member. This element of the military is one I personally found difficult adjusting to since I had been so independent. Through the analysis, I wondered if these women also found it difficult not to have a say in their own lives, especially since they all reported enjoying their military experience and described themselves as independent. In this instance I am reminded of the family therapy concept,

both/and: how they enjoyed the military structure and guidance and they valued the ability to make choices for themselves. Instead, they discussed how they gained and lost opportunities within the military. They were able to gain experiences, such as being able to travel, go to college, start a family, and so forth. Yet they lost opportunities to continue in the military to make it a life-long career.

In reference to opportunities, either gained or lost, these four participants did not discuss military deployment. As previously mentioned, not everyone that serves will go on a deployment, and many will go on more than one deployment during their service. In this instance, I am referring to combat deployments instead of Outside [the] contiguous United States (OCONUS) assignments [see glossary for definition]. In this regard, it could be assumed that these women did not see combat during their service. It does lead to the question: Would a combat deployment have changed their transition? If so, then how? Also, would they have seen this military mandatory conformity as an opportunity gained or lost?

Having the ability to choose has been a personal interest of mine. It is something that when I cannot make a choice for myself, impacts me negatively. This is another area in which Blaire and I have similar situations. I, too, was medically separated and was not provided the opportunity to stay in. While I was finishing up my bachelor's degree, I provided myself an opportunity in deciding which schools I wanted to apply. I, too, accepted a great opportunity for advancement and ended up in a family therapy program.

Potential Transition Factors

Both the literature and the participants expressed that transition is difficult. For illustration, Kintzle et al. (2016) reported that 61% of post-9/11 veterans had difficulty

adjusting back to civilian life. When comparing this to the women in this study, 100% of the participants expressed that transition was difficult and hard. Morin (2011) discovered 18 factors that make it easier or harder to transition. The six factors that made it more difficult to transition were: experienced a traumatic event; seriously injured; post 9/11 veteran who was married while serving; post 9/11 veteran; served in combat; and knew someone killed/injured. The four factors which increased successful transition included: college graduate; understood missions; officer [referring to rank of service member]; and religious post 9/11 veteran. According to Morin, women that had college education were more successful in their transition process. It is my understanding that three of four participants in this study did not have higher education before joining the military due to their age and their interest in not attending college. Since one of the women was an officer, it could be presumed she had at least a bachelor's degree before joining based on the military rank structure. However, one could argue that since the women in this study had received some form of higher education after transitioning, that it would be another reason of their successful transition.

Burkhart and Hogan (2014) found that women not only felt unprepared for civilian life, they also struggled with feelings of being treated unequally during and after military service and living two separate lives. Even though there is not much literature which focuses on transition, there are plenty of editorials or women sharing their stories. It would be an assumption that based on these shared stories, the newly implemented TAP program is being used to combat the concerns around transition, such as homelessness and unemployment, by providing additional education and understanding to benefits, including financial planning, disability, housing loans, and education

(Department of Defense Transition Assistance Program, 2017; Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration, VA Benefit Briefers Transition Assistance Program, 2017).

Garrick (2015) reported that more than 80% of women veterans are taking full advantage of their education benefits. But Szelwach et al. (2011) reported that women typically have higher unemployment rates than male veterans and higher rates of unemployment than their civilian counter parts. Having a college education meant these women will have been employed or will be employed once completing their postsecondary education. Women with higher education are more likely to find jobs compared to women without higher education (Ainspan & Smith-Osborne, 2016). The exception might be women with disabilities; women veterans with disabilities are less likely to maintain employment across their lifespan compared to non-disabled veterans and the civilian counterparts.

In this regard, the women in this study would not have been subjected to other struggles, such as not being employed or homeless, increasing their chances of a more successful transition, compared to those that did not have a higher level of education. In this study, none of the participants discussed being unemployed, nor did they discuss being homeless. Yet it could be argued this might be a result from the sample, especially since they are highly educated individuals, which reduces the rate of unemployment and/or homelessness. Washington et al. (2010) attributed factors that decrease homelessness as being a college graduate and being married, in which all four of the participants were both college graduates and were married (at one point).

Feminist Perspective

Fenner (2001) referred to how easy it is to forget about marginalized groups because no one addressed their fundamental issue involving their participation. As previously mentioned, the idea around feminism is to create equality and equity for everyone. Originally, feminism focused on genders, primarily concentrating on women's rights and equality/equity fighting biological determinism (Humm, 1990). In other words, what Herbert (1998) declared as the belief that gendered behavior of man or woman is a natural extension of one's sex according to societal beliefs. However, feminism was expanded to include "isms" such as sex, race, differently abled, culture, religion, and so forth. Hekman (1999) expressed how Other went from oppression to a form of empowerment, when Other was changed to difference. Gerhard (2001) debated the difference between "Truth" and "truth." It is through these conditions which determine equality.

Sjoberg (2014) discussed how women tell their experiences from their perspective as women because that is the only experience they have, is that as a woman. The women in this study can also, only tell their experiences as women from the woman perspective. Gender is the fundamental element which binds all the themes together. In this study, I found the central theme was gender. For instance, gender discussions included collections around gender roles, gender differences, gender biases, gender challenges, and gender triumphs. These different discussions were further broken down into themes all with the underlying message referring to gender. Under the theme gender inequality, gender clusters were the most prevalent, focusing on inequalities and discrimination of genders. These women faced discrimination both in and out of service, just for the simple fact that

they are women. Some of the women in this study, felt like being a minority was also a factor in the discrimination.

Interestingly, this discrimination did not stop after service for these women, indicating this is not solely a military concern, but a societal concern as well. This begs the question, how did this hypermasculinity develop and what purpose does it serve besides attempting to keep women as unequal to men? Since hypermasculinity is not solely a military concern, this further demonstrates Harrison and Laliberté's (1997) argument that the military did not create this environment, but only used it to further their individual agendas. As women continue to live under a microscope in and out of the military, they continue to face challenges around their ability to do their job, sexuality, and their right to work, especially in the military (Herbert, 1998).

Validity of the Study

In accordance with Yardley's (2000) assessment for validity of qualitative research, I followed the four broad principles—sensitivity to context, commitment and rigor, transparency and coherence, and impact and importance. This validity was done to certify accuracy of the study while safeguarding the researcher from not staying close to the research and not answering the research question. Although these principles can stand on their own as it relates to validity, for the purpose of this study and to increase accuracy, all four principles were adhered to within this qualitative, IPA study. In Chapter III, I gave a general overview of these areas and how the study adhered to the four broad principles. In the following sections, I will discuss in greater detail how validity was performed throughout this study.

Sensitivity to Context

Sensitivity to context was reviewed indirectly. This was completed through exploring as much literature as I could locate pertaining to women veterans and transition. Since there is limited research on this topic, I expanded my literature search to focus on subcategories of transition, such as medical concerns, unemployment, and homelessness, to name a few. This exhaustive search was used to better understand military culture and identity, and feminism as it relates to women veterans. It was through this extensive research, that culture was brought to the forefront to be studied. In this particular case, culture was explored in the literature and within the participants experiences.

Commitment and Rigor

This component of validity required personal commitment and investment from myself, the researcher, to closely attend to what was being said by the researcher and to ensure their comfort throughout the entire process. Most of this was demonstrated through the interview process. I continually checked in multiple times with each participant during the interview. I would mirror or reflect back to the participant their words for clarity and comfortability. Whenever I noticed the participant needed a moment, I would pause to allow the participant space as they processed. I did not push or pry to get additional information. As a safety measure, I provided each participant three referral sources, and they could ask for up to three additional referral sources which were in proximity to their location on a sliding scale (see Appendix E).

Rigor was another element in which I dedicated effort for this study. As mentioned previously, rigor involves the appropriateness of the population in accordance

to the study questions while adhering to the quality of the interview and analysis. I wanted to research the lived experiences of women veterans that have transitioned back into civilian life. In order to study this population, I chose a sample which reflected this population. I carefully created questions which would continue to enhance the research by exploring their lived experiences. During the analysis portion of the study, I rigorously operated to hear each individual voice and experience, while simultaneously also hearing the collective voices merging into themes. During this validity component of the study, I stayed close to the interviewees talk as much as possible.

Transparency and Coherence

For the duration of this entire research process, I remained transparent in clearly defining how the study would take place and the process in which I conducted my analysis. I not only walked my participants through the process, but the readers as well. In this regard, through transparency, I also addressed coherence. By being transparent, I systematically also wrote up the results of this study with the reader in mind. I wanted this study to be understood by all readers. By ensuring I kept within the IPA protocols, I also stayed true to the underpinnings which direct how the study is further analyzed. For instance, by adhering to IPA's use of double hermeneutics, I continually was in the hermeneutic circle of processing. I observed the participant trying to make sense of what they were saying, as then I, in turn, was trying to make sense of what they were making sense of as it related to the study. In keeping with the idiography, I narrowed down on the particular, without losing site of the obscured nature of what the participants were saying.

Impact and Importance

I started this study by showing there is a gap in the literature when it comes to transition, especially affecting women veterans. By conducting this study, I further established the importance of this topic. First, I described how it impacted the participants of the study to have their voices heard. It quickly became apparent these women had not communicated about their transition experience; maybe elements of their experience, but not the entirety. This alone was impactful to the four women in the study. However, the impact of this study did not stop with these four women and the researcher. At the conclusion of this study, I establish how this study also impacts the research community; therapists working with military and veterans in general, and with women military and veterans; and the military and the VA population (explored in greater detail in upcoming sections). As evidenced in this study, the gaps in literature are addressed here since the study places emphasis on genders specifically within the military/veteran population as it compares to their lived experiences of transition.

Strengths and Limitations of the Study

One might suggest that highlighting the strengths and limitations of a study further contributes to the validity of a study. In this section, I discuss several strengths and limitations which are prevalent to the study and how it might have impacted the study. A strength and limitation of this study is it is gender specific, only focusing on women. It is a strength because the literature mainly focuses on men, so being able to focus on women provides a space for women to be included in the literature. As a result of focusing on women instead of men, this limits the research to the inclusion of women and leaves out men. Relatedly, this study focused on heterosexual (sexual orientation)

women (gender), which necessarily excludes other sexual orientations. Often, the literature does not focus on sexual orientation, which does not allow for separation between different orientations and their experiences. As a strength, this separation allows for heterosexual women the opportunity to not be classified with other sexual orientations. As part of the military culture, sexual orientations are often perceived differently compared to civilian culture. As a result, there is a strong gender bias and inequalities around sexual orientation.

In terms of education, another strength and limitation would be the participants' area of study. Their programs of study required a minimum of a bachelor's degree, meaning these women had successfully completed four years of education before entering their program. Their programs also focused on concepts such as self-care, and were designed for continual self-evaluation throughout the program, emphasizing open and honest communication while attempting to better understand yourself. In this regard, these women had training and expertise in self-reflexivity, learning to listen to and adhere to any biases that might arise for them. It could be argued the responses given had been crafted or inspired through participants' training lens instead of women veterans that had not received this intense interpersonal training.

A limitation of this study is the separation between active duty, national guard and reserve components. Since the components all transition differently and in various frequencies, the active duty component was selected to focus on the single transition versus multiple transitions. As a strength, this allows for the study to be centered around the active duty transition experience, highlighting the transition process as a whole instead of segmenting the process into various elements or parts.

Another limitation of this study was the restricted number of recruitment locations. In the original proposal, I had planned to extend recruitment to local VA's hospitals, local veteran organization, and local vet centers, to name a few. Since the previous locations did not meet the university's IRB requirements, this reduced the number of recruitment sites to a university in the southern United States community and social media. As a result of limited number of recruitment sites, this study contained a less diverse sample in terms of military branches and all participants are students at a university in the southern United States.

Implications for Future Research

According to McDermott's (2007) dissertation, it is not only important to focus on failed transition experiences but successful ones as well. I did not ask the participants if they felt like their transition was successful, or even how do they define success. In hindsight, this might be something to explore in future research. Future research could include having a variety of recruitment sites among a variety of places such as cities or states to better understand the lived experiences of women veterans. In this study, it did not appear significant differences occurred for these women when comparing for rank and branch. However, future researchers might consider not meeting saturation until all branches have been included in the study to compare the difference between the branches along with rank as a result of transition. A more thorough demographic collection of information might be helpful to explore how these different areas affect women veterans' transition. Additionally, future research might benefit from exploring and expanding on the literature of women veterans in general, while also contrasting it to the literature as it relates to men veterans.

General Implications for Therapists Working with Military and Veterans

Throughout this study, active military service and veteran experiences have been interwoven. One might suspect this to be the case because these experiences cannot be separated. However, experiences are often a cause and effect or continuous in nature. In other words, one experience in the military might have affected another experience after transition while being a veteran. Instead of separating these experiences into active military and transitioned veteran, I will talk about these two categories together. For the purpose of this section and this section only in the study, military and veteran represent the same population and will be referred to as one population as interchanging terms.

As previously mentioned, MFTs are late comers to serving the military population. This was not due to a lack of interest, but due to a deficiency of legislation and proactive initiatives into this culture. Now that MFTs have broken that barrier and are currently able to serve this population, I will describe suggestions for working with military and veterans.

Embrace a Non-Expert Stance

Even though it is a common belief that only military understands military, it is a misconception in this population. The same way a neurologist does not need to have had brain surgery to perform brain surgery or someone to have an eating disorder to know about eating disorders or being a sexual assault survivor to know and understand about sexual assault. Likewise, MFTs do not need to be military to serve military. This study provided examples to the contrary, making statements about only veterans understand veterans. I do agree with these statements and understanding of these veteran experiences. However, this does not exclude MFTs and their work with military. MFTs

are trained to honor their client's experiences and see their clients as the experts in their own lives.

Some of the ways in which MFTs can work with the military population include, but are not limited to: being open to working with this population; being non-judgmental; not making comments such as "I know what that is like for you;" learning and educating yourself about military culture; being there when the military ask for help; and allowing the clients to be the expert in their lives making room for the client to tell you about their experience without assumptions, to name a few. This population comes with a whole set of rules, languages, branches, rank, and other parts. It is not expected for therapists to know it all. Be humble and ask for clarity about things you do not know. It would also behoove MFTs to learn about the culture in which they are providing services. It might not be expected to know everything, nonetheless, there is some expectation that therapists do not go into treatment without any knowledge. Take some courses about military culture and try to learn some of the basics around rank and MOS's (jobs), and so forth.

Everything Makes Sense in Context

MFTs are trained to understand people and situations in context. For this population, context is important. One way this could be achieved is by understanding the context without learning all the details. As an example, the women veterans in this study talked about how hard it was for them to seek help. They wanted to figure it out on their own. Some of them were able to figure it out on their own, but for the ones that could not, help was better received when the helpers did not attempt to minimize their experience(s). The participants were open and honest in sharing their experiences, yet, that is not always the case. Allow space for them to share what they want without prying.

I Got Your Six

It might take some patience as the military population takes time to warm up to the therapist. It is important to remember that the joining process continues all throughout therapy and is not limited to only the first couple of sessions. Trust with non-judgment is essential to the military. In the military culture, service members are trained that someone "has your six" and you always have a battle buddy, meaning someone is watching your back and you are not alone. Once outside the military, it can be hard to trust that this still exists, especially with someone that is not military. I have often heard, it feels as if you are alone throughout this process and in the world. By being able to show the military that you too, have their six and they are not alone in this process is an element which is vital to working with this population. In the military, trust is earned not just given. Some ways trust is earned is through actions.

Implications for Therapists Working with Women Military and Veterans

Katzenstein (1998) expanded on the notion of interest-groups working in the military on behalf of women for equality and equity within the service. However, working with or for veterans is not limited to interest groups. Or maybe it is understood that MFTs help make up those interest groups better serving women veterans. The previously mentioned implications are general principles to guide therapists in working with military and veterans no matter the gender. Furey (1999) expressed that the services required, and the issues women veterans face are different from their men counterparts. Cox and Gearhart (2011) identified five issues on the horizon pertaining to women in the military: (a) lower rates of marriage than male counterparts, (b) much higher rates of dual-military marriages, (c) higher rates of divorce, (d) much higher rates of single

parenthood and physical custody, and (e) the needs of male spouses will also become more important. Hence, when working with women veterans, other implications should be utilized in addition to the general implications. These implications highlight the recommendations from the women participants in this study and also demonstrate what the literature recognizes for women veterans.

As expressed in Chapter IV in the lessons learned subsection under the theme service, the participants expressed the importance of finding a support system, asking for help, and reminding women veterans they are not alone during this process. These participants understood the value in not attempting to do this major life event alone, contrary to what the military attempted to instill in them during their service. Mcgraw (2015) expressed these feelings of not having support potentially could result in mental health disorders and/or physical consequences. Therapists are encouraged to rule out medical conditions when conducting evaluations, which is important to consider when working with women veterans. It is also important to remember that our minds and our bodies are tightly interconnected and need to work as one system even though they are different parts. Everything makes sense in context. In other words, Becvar and Becvar (1999) understood this to be the individual within the relationships and how the relationships relate.

Relationships are a vital aspect of working with women veterans. Not only do they need to find support after service, but their families also need the support. As previously demonstrated, families play an integrate part of the service members, especially for women veterans. These families have been part of the military as well, and are also going through transition. As previously mentioned, there is limited to almost no

literature on women and transition; there is even less on families and how they are impacted by transition. For instance, all the women in this study have children, and at one point were all married. That means the spouses and the children would have been impacted by their transition. Nicole discussed how her children now appreciate the quality time they spend together. Blaire discussed how her injuries affected her as a mother, and even though the children were young they still recall how she would stay in her room only doing the necessarily requirements to keep them fed and maintained. Kelly discussed how her friend stepped up and watched her son while they would attend school, or they (she and her husband) would take turns watching their son, so each could attend school or work. They figured out a plan that would work for them. In Kelly's case, she vividly recalls having a conversation with her husband, trying to explain her lack of sexual desire and how it was not anything he had done to cause it. These are only some examples of how the families are impacted when it comes to transition. It is within these relationships which MFTs could further help the system as they go through transition.

These relationships are not limited to the individual and their families; they include the community and society stakeholders for women veterans. As the women in this study referenced, there are lots of agencies and people that want to help them. MFTs are part of that as well. Therapy was one of the suggestions from these participants to better assist women veterans, however, assistance for women veterans is not limited to therapy. They can assist women veterans by providing therapy and helping them find resources within the community. Even though the study participants did not express experiences of domestic violence or IPV, unemployment, or homelessness to name a few, this does not mean that women veterans do not experience these things. In this study, all

women were college educated. But that does not mean all women will know how to utilize their benefits or find educational programs. Another way to assist women veterans would be for society to recognize them as veterans and treat them accordingly. When performing a simple google search, veterans only brings up males instead of combining males and females. Even the literature does this by assuming that veterans refers to male unless otherwise specified. This results in the continuation of the VA considering women veterans to be a "special population." Society would benefit from changing the way they view women veterans, and the way they talk about them. For instance, removing or reducing hypermasculinity from our culture would better serve women veterans, creating a place for equality and equity to reduce the gender gap. Civilian life for women veterans requires adjustment. MFTs can help with this adjustment helping to bridge the gap between military and civilian life.

Implications for the Military

The driving force of military culture, as described by Ensign (2004), is "a group dynamic centered around male perceptions and sensibilities, male psychology and power, male anxieties and the affirmation of masculinity" (p. 136). In other words, the military culture is male dominated, which leads to the question of where do women fit within this culture? It is my understanding that if the military could better figure out how to include women, instead of excluding them or treating them unequally and without equity, maybe there would be a place for both women and men to serve together in the military as one.

Dr. Ronald Chenail gave an example of how after desert storm, the military started to embrace the women serving in the military because they understood the

military would be partly made up of women. If they did not recognize these women, they would not be utilizing their entire workforce, which would hinder them in the end.

> We realized a long time ago that 50% of our work force would be women. All the way of doing things, all the way of knowing were male. And we would not be taking advantage of a really great resource or we would be systematically disabling them [referring to women]. (personal communication, R. Chenail, 3/27/2019)

He continued to discuss how these trainers in the military learned to change the way they were doing things to create different results, which included, instead of disregarded, women. It was this change which further lead to more positive relationships and working differently than they had previously. In other words, once the military trainers were able to get past "maleness" or hypermasculinity, they were able to easier connect with women and accept them as part of the work force instead of dismissing them as people and their ability to work.

Zeigler and Gunderson (2005) mirrored the ideas from the military trainers as portrayed by Chenail (2019), when discussing the limitation of women in military occupations results in the loss of unique skills women have to offer in comparison to their male counterparts. With active duty military currently being approximately 8-15% women (depending on the literature), it would appear to be foolish, in my opinion, to not accept these women and utilize them to their full capacity. From a business standpoint, a manager would not hire someone, pay them, and not expect them to their task. Even though I am positive this situation exists in a civilian world where employees do not perform their jobs, it is not the best management practice of employers. It allows for the

other employees to get additional assigned duties to cover for the employees not working, creates a chain reaction of the employees doing the extra work to become disgruntled in their jobs, and allows the employees not working to continue to get paid without working.

It would appear a similar situation happens within the military. Sjoberg (2014) argued that until women and men are equally utilized within the military, international security becomes threatened. By not fully accepting women in the military and utilizing them at capacity, men in the military are getting forced to carry more of the responsibilities of the mission which causes them to be disgruntled while having a negative view of women. Falk (2009) understood this to reflect gender and hypermasculinity within the military as it pertains to gender harassment. I am sure gender and hypermasculinity is a relevant factor, but from the business lens, could we not also understand it from the perspective of the worker? I personally become annoyed when I end up working harder than others at a job. Because I am a hard worker and am mission focused, I often get more work added to my plate of responsibilities instead of requiring others to complete the task.

Speaking of gender and hypermasculinity, I believe that the method for creating control or mandatory conformity, worked for a while. As is pointed out in the literature, it was used as a way to ensure discipline of service members. However, as the literature and these women participants demonstrated, it does not appear to still be working. Times have changed, not only within the military but the civilian world as well. In my professional opinion, after conducting this study, the military would benefit from reducing and/or eliminating hypermasculinity as a tool towards discipline and find a replacement that focuses on equality and equity of service members in all branches.

Similar to the way the military pays everyone the same, no matter the gender, the same

principles can be established throughout other elements in the military. Previously, I

discussed how the military, currently the Army, is looking at ways to change the gender-

ness of the PT test to not be determined by gender, but mission and/or combat readiness.

This is just one example of how the military is attempting to close the gender gap in the

forces, combating the equality versus equity within the military.

Once the service member transitions, equality and equity helping to close the

gender gap in the military also needs to be addressed. Stern et al. (2000) and Skinner et

al. (1999) reinforced that the demographics of women are changing, and to keep up with

those changes, policy changes are required to better service women veterans especially in

the VA system. Ross et al. (2015) reported that women veterans seek out and utilize their

VA benefits more than men, including their medical benefits. As mentioned previously,

the VA is attempting to solve the problem of women veterans feeling uncomfortable

around men veterans while getting treatment at the VA. Their attempted solution to the

problem is to create women only clinics, with women doctors and staff, in an effort to

reduce women veterans' discomfort (Amara & Krengel, 2016). Instead of addressing the

concerns around hypermasculinity or over sexualizing women veterans by male veterans,

the VA created safe women clinics for these women. However, in hindsight this attempt

further creates a gender divide instead of unifying them as one team, one fight, and

creates additional cost to ensure funding and availability of these clinics to keep running.

It might behoove the United States military and the VA to start brainstorming

about ways in which they could help women feel more included in the military without

hurting women in the process. Luepnitz (1988) expressed that feminism is not only for

women, but that equality of the sexes can be achieved with the help of men, as well. Harding (2004) furthered explained that men are needed to be part of the movements especially in social situations. In this way, the military could be a leader of gender equality and equity, using the unalterable history of hypermasculinity to embody what progress could look like now. As an added benefit, the military would be able to capitalize on its entire workforce, equalizing the distribution of work improving the overall morale of the military's workforce.

In the same regard, the military would not only be sharing the workload between genders, but mental health professions as well. As previously mentioned, MFTs are late comers to the military system. Instead of relying on other mental health professions, the military and VA could continue to equally distribute the workload between professions. For instance, in the study by Hartman, Schuermann, and Kenney (2018) demonstrated that service members select a profession based on how they understand the title of the profession. However, through the use of language and encouraged support of equality of all professions which service the military/VA systems, this would further assist the military in becoming equality leaders not only in gender, but professions as well. The time has come for women's voices to be heard and for society to dump these socially constructed ideas and norms around women both inside the military and outside.

Conclusion

Not only did I interview four women veterans, I am a veteran as well. When I was younger, I was always taught I could be anything I wanted to be. Let us continue this conversation with the next generations to ensure we break the barriers around gender professions and shatter the glass ceilings. These women had moments in which they

struggled while and after serving in the military. Nonetheless, they did not stop fighting, they never lost hope, and they continued even in the face of despair. Some continued for their children, using their children as motivation to keep driving on. No matter the reason they decided to go on, they never quit, nor did they give up the fight—the transition fight. They could have succumbed to the struggles resulting in the negative effects of transition such as being homeless, unemployed, turning to substances to numb their pain, etc., yet the determination they always had in them continued to shine through.

Throughout their experiences, the women in this study had various level of family support; less during the joining process and more after separation. In their experiences, mandatory conformity in their families and the military was evident. As they were working through these roles, they also discovered who they were and who they continue to carry with them in their identity. Service did not stop with transition; they learned and strive to serve differently, going as far as providing advice to better assist women veterans in the transition process. They discussed how gender impacted their experiences and those experiences were plagued with inequalities. Transition for these women did not come easily. They struggled with many symptoms both physical and emotional. Finally, they discussed opportunities in the military either gained or loss and how these opportunities affected their lived experiences.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Glossary

- **Air Force**- provides a rapid, flexible, and when necessary, a lethal air and space capability that can deliver forces anywhere in the world in less than forty-eight hours; it routinely participates in peacekeeping, humanitarian, and aeromedical evacuation missions, and actively patrols the skies above Iraq Bosnia. Air Force crews annually fly missions into all but five nations of the world. (U.S. Department of Defense, 2017).

- **Army**- defends the land mass of the United States, its territories, commonwealths, and possessions; it operates in more than 50 countries (U.S. Department of Defense, 2017).

- **Coast Guard**- provides law and maritime safety enforcement, marine and environmental protection, and military naval support. Prior to the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, the United States Coast Guard was part of the Department of Transportation during peacetime and part of the Navy's force in times of war. However, since the attacks, it has become part of the Department of Homeland Security. The United States Coast Guard provides unique, critical maritime support, patrolling our shores, performing emergency rescue operations, containing and cleaning up oil spills, and keeping billions of dollars' worth of illegal drugs from flooding American communities (U.S. Department of Defense [DOD], 2017).

- **Conus**- continental United States (Per Diem, Travel, and Transportation Allowance Committee, 2017).

- **Equal Opportunity** (EO)- The right of all persons to participate in; and benefit from programs and activities for which they are qualified. These programs and activities shall be free from social, personal, or institutional barriers that prevent people from rising to the highest level of responsibility possible. Persons shall be evaluated on individual merit, fitness, and capability, regardless of race, color, sex, national origin, or religion (Department of Defense Directive, 2003).

- **Genderlect**- a form of discourse, comparable to a dialect, within a larger language system which is identified with a or peculiar to a particular gender. For example, Japanese and Spanish contain genderlects, where English does not (Andermahr, Lovell, & Wolkowitz, 1997).

- **Guard and Reserve**- forces provide wartime military support. They are essential to humanitarian and peacekeeping operations and are integral to the Homeland Security portion of our mission. Our National Guard and Reserve forces are taking on new and more important roles, at home and abroad, as we transform our national military strategy. Their personal ties to local communities are the perfect fit for these emerging missions (U.S. DOD, 2017).

- **Foreign Humanitarian Assistance** (FHA)- consists of Department of Defense (DOD) activities conducted outside the US and its territories to directly relieve or reduce human suffering, disease, hunger, or privation. These activities are governed by various statutes and policies and range from steady-state engagements to limited contingency operations. FHA includes foreign disaster relief (FDR) operations and other activities that directly address a humanitarian need and may also be conducted concurrently with other DOD support missions

and activities such as dislocated civilian support, security operations, and foreign consequence management (FCM). FHA operations (including FDR operations) are normally conducted in support of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) or the Department of State (DOS) (Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff [CJCS], 2017).

- **Marine Corps**- maintains ready expeditionary forces, sea-based and integrated air-ground units for contingency and combat operations, and the means to stabilize or contain international disturbance (U.S. DOD, 2017).

- **Military Service Records** (also known as Official Military Personnel Files or DD214)- primarily administrative records and can contain information such as: enlistment/appointment; duty stations and assignments; training, qualifications, performance; awards and medals; disciplinary actions; insurance; emergency data; administrative remarks; separation/discharge/retirement (including DD Form 214, Report of Separation, or equivalent); and other personnel actions. Detailed information about the veteran's participation in military battles and engagements are NOT contained in the record (U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, 2016).

- **Military Occupation Specialty** (MOS)- job, career path (each military branch determines career paths. See a list of career paths for the Army at https://www.goarmy.com/careers-and-jobs.html; Marines at https://www.marines.com/being-a-marine/roles-in-the-corps.html; Navy at https://www.navy.com/careers.html; Air Force at https://www.airforce.com/careers/browse-careers/; and Coast Guard at

https://www.gocoastguard.com/active-duty-careers or visiting a local recruiting office).

- **Navy**- maintains, trains, and equips combat-ready maritime forces capable of winning wars, deterring aggression, and maintaining freedom of the seas. The United States Navy is America's forward deployed force and is a major deterrent to aggression around the world. Our aircraft carriers, stationed in hotspots that include the Far East, the Persian Gulf, and the Mediterranean Sea, provide a quick response to crises worldwide (U.S. DOD, 2017).

- **Oconus**- outside the continental United States (Per Diem, Travel, and Transportation Allowance Committee, 2017).

- **Office of Diversity Management and Equal Opportunity** (ODMEO)- is an organization aligned under the Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Personnel and Readiness) that develops and executes diversity management and equal opportunity policies and programs affecting active duty and reserve component military personnel, and DOD civilian employees (Department of Defense [DOD], 2017).

- **Sexual assault program**- Sexual Harassment/Assault Response & Prevention (SHARP) for the Army (U.S. Army, n.d.) or Navy, Marine, Airforce, and Coast Guard Sexual Assault Prevention and Response (SAPR) (United States Office of the Chief of Naval Operations, 2015) or DOD Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office (SAPRO), which has oversight of all Department's sexual assault policies (Department of Defense, n.d.)

- **Violence Against Women**- view as male power over and control of women (Andermahr, Lovell, & Wolkowitz, 1997).

- **Voluntary Service**- Enlistment of any person who has the capacity to understand the significance of enlisting in the Armed Forces shall be valid for purposes of jurisdiction under subsection (a) and a change of status from civilian to member of the Armed Forces shall be effective upon the taking of the oath of enlistment (Library of Congress, 2012).

- **War** (as defined by feminist theory)- war is viewed as problematic for feminist theory due to the divide between views of being for or against women in war. The general notion is that women's roles in war are determined by perceptions of gender helped in society in which women belong. Equal rights theory argues women should be equal military partners with men, however men often make these decisions themselves (Humm, 1990).

- **Women in military history**- Lockwood (2012); Lockwood (2014); Women in the United States Army (n.d.); Women & the U. S. Coast Guard (n.d.); Women Marines History (n.d.); Women in the U.S. Navy (n.d.); Holm (1992); and Colonial Williamsberg Foundation (2008).

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

NSU Consent to be in a Research Study Entitled

An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis of Women Veterans Transitioning Back into

Civilian Life

Who is doing this research study?

College: College of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences and Department of Family Therapy

Principal Investigator: Paula Boros, M.S.

Faculty Advisor/Dissertation Chair: Martha Marquez, Ph.D.

Co-Investigator(s): NA

Site Information: Nova Southeastern University, Brief Therapy Institute, 3301 College Ave, Maxwell Maltz Building, Fort Lauderdale, FL, 33314

Funding: Unfunded

What is this study about?

This is a research study, designed to test and create new ideas that other people can use. The purpose of this research study is to explore the lived experiences of women veterans that have transitioned back into civilian life. There is limited research from military transition to civilian life, of that research, most is focused on men instead of women. This study will help to provide insight into the experiences of veteran women, while starting to close the gap of genders for veterans within the literature.

<u>Why are you asking me to be in this research study?</u>

You are being asked to be in this research study because your lived experience as a woman veteran is important to be heard and shared. Your experiences will help researchers to better understand women veterans to better assist women veterans in the process of transition. This study will include about eight people.

<u>What will I be doing if I agree to be in this research study?</u>

While you are taking part in this research study, you will participate in one (1) interview session of no more than three (3) hours long where you will answer questions about your military experience as a woman veteran.

Research Study Procedures - As a participant, this is what you will be doing:
First, you will review and sign the consent form, where the researcher will assign a participant number to your signed consent. Next, the researcher will ask you to fill out a demographic questionnaire containing 15 fill-in the blank questions which will take no more than 30 minutes to complete. Next, you will be called into the interview room with the researcher where once again you will go over the consent form to ensure you understand and ask any additional questions regarding consent. Once completed, the researcher will begin the interview of your lived experiences as a woman veteran that has transitioned into civilian life. This interview will take no more than three (3) hours to complete. Once the interview is complete, the researcher will check the quality of the audio recording to ensure another interview is not required. Participants will be screened using self-identification and reporting.

You may be asked to return for a second interview if (1) the quality of the video does not meet transcription requirements such as inaudible, unable to transcribe, excess background noises blocking participant's voice or (2) the interview becomes too challenging to complete at current time, interview will be stopped and participant will decide if they would like to continue another time or stop the interview process all together, revoking their right to participate in the study.

Are there possible risks and discomforts to me?

This research study involves minimal risk to you. To the best of our knowledge, the things you will be doing have no more risk of harm than you would have in everyday life.

You may find some questions we ask you (or some things we ask you to do) to be upsetting or stressful. If so, we can refer you to someone who may be able to help you with these feelings.

What happens if I do not want to be in this research study?

You have the right to leave this research study up to one month **after** the interview has taken place or choose not to be in the research study. If you do decide to leave or you decide not to be in the study anymore, you will not get any penalty or lose any services you have a right to get. If you choose to stop being in the study, you will forfeit the compensation for participation in the study and any information collected about you **before** the date you leave the study will be kept in the research records for 36 months from the end of the study, but you may submit a written request that it not be used. To leave the study, participant must submit in writing their decision to no longer be a part of

the study to the researcher.

What if there is new information learned during the study that may affect my decision to remain in the study?

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available, which may relate to whether you want to remain in this study, this information will be given to you by the investigators. You may be asked to sign a new Informed Consent Form, if the information is given to you after you have joined the study.

Are there any benefits for taking part in this research study?

There are no direct benefits from being in this research study. We hope the information learned from this study will provide new information about women veterans and transition to gain perspectives on how to better assist with the transition process and provide additional assistance to women veteran during their transition.

Will I be paid or be given compensation for being in the study?

You will be given compensation of $50.00 USD in the form of a Visa, Mastercard, or American Express gift card for being in this research study. Completion of interview and allowed use of interview is required to qualify for compensation. Participant will receive compensation upon completion of research study approximately May 2018.

Will it cost me anything?

There are no costs to you for being in this research study.

How will you keep my information private?

Information we learn about you in this research study will be handled in a confidential manner, within the limits of the law and will be limited to people who have a need to review this information. When transcribing audio recordings, researcher will listen with headphones with no one else present. Transcriptions will take place on a computer which is accessed only by the researcher, is password protected, and has security system, firewall, protection. Backup data will be encrypted. This data will be available to the researcher, the Institutional Review Board and other representatives of this institution, and any regulatory and granting agencies (if applicable). If we publish the results of the study in a scientific journal or book, we will not identify you. All confidential data will be kept securely stored in a locked box in which the researcher is the only one with access. All data will be kept for 36 months from the end of the study and destroyed after that time by fine cross-shredding of paper materials and digital erasing of electronic materials.

Will there be any Audio or Video Recording?

This research study involves audio recording. This recording will be available to the researcher, the Institutional Review Board and other representatives of this institution. The recording will be kept, stored, and destroyed as stated in the section above. Because what is in the recording could be used to find out that it is you, it is not possible to be sure that the recording will always be kept confidential. The researcher will try to keep anyone not working on the research from listening to or viewing the recording.

Whom can I contact if I have questions, concerns, comments, or complaints?

If you have questions now, feel free to ask us. If you have more questions about the research, your research rights, or have a research-related injury, please contact:

Primary contact:
Paula Boros, M.S., can be reached at 352-209-5090

If primary is not available, contact:
Martha Marquez, Ph.D can be reached at 954-262-3056

Research Participants Rights

For questions/concerns regarding your research rights, please contact:

Institutional Review Board
Nova Southeastern University
(954) 262-5369 / Toll Free: 1-866-499-0790
IRB@nova.edu

You may also visit the NSU IRB website at www.nova.edu/irb/information-for-research-participants for further information regarding your rights as a research participant.

All space below was intentionally left blank.

Research Consent & Authorization Signature Section

Voluntary Participation - You are not required to participate in this study. In the event you do participate, you may leave this research study at any time. If you leave this research study before it is completed, you will not be penalized and you will not lose any benefits to which you are entitled.

If you agree to participate in this research study, sign this section. You will be given a signed copy of this form to keep. You do not waive any of your legal rights by signing this form.

SIGN THIS FORM ONLY IF THE STATEMENTS LISTED BELOW ARE TRUE:

- You have read the above information.
- Your questions have been answered to your satisfaction about the research.

Adult Signature Section

I have voluntarily decided to take part in this research study.

Printed Name of Participant	Signature of Participant	Date
Printed Name of Person Obtaining Consent and Authorization	Signature of Person Obtaining Consent & Authorization	Date

Appendix C

Demographic Information

1. Participant Number.

2. Military Service: Branch, Rank, Length of Service, Type of Separation, Character of Separation, Military Specialty (MOS), Deployments- Combat, location(s), and length, Service Connected Disability.

3. Sex.

4. Gender.

5. Sexual Orientation.

6. Age.

7. Relationship status. Before, During service, After service.

8. Race.

9. Ethnicity.

10. Children. If yes, ages and genders.

11. Employment.

12. Highest Education Level.

13. Home of Record.

14. Transition Location.

15. Date of separation.

Appendix D

Interview Questions

1. How would you describe your military experience?

2. What meaning does your military experience have for you?

3. Looking back, how did your family respond when learning you were joining the military? While transitioning?

4. What kind of changes occurred in your family, in yourself while serving? What about after transitioning?

5. What has been your experience thus far with transitioning from the military?

6. What meaning did it have for you to transition?

7. While comparing your identity to serving and now after transition, what would you say you noticed?

8. Does this identity have any meaning for you?

9. What advice they would give women veterans transitioning out of the military now?

Appendix E

Therapeutic Services Referral

1. Nova Southeastern University

   Brief Therapy Institute-Family Clinic (Maxwell Maltz building) *

   3301 College Ave

   Fort Lauderdale, FL 33314

   954-262-3030

2. Stable Place *

   Equine Therapy

   5020 SW 73rd Ave

   Davie FL 33314

   954-790-0270

3. Nova Southeastern University

   Psychology Services Center (Maxwell Maltz building)

   3301 College Ave

   Fort Lauderdale, FL 33314

   954-262-5730

4. Up to 3 additional individual therapists, local to participants location area works

   on a sliding scale. Available upon request.

* = Free therapeutic services to veterans

Appendix F

Individual Theme Examples from Transcripts

Participant Transcript	Page Number
Family Support	
Morgan: well… my younger brother had joined 2 years before I did, I think, and yeah so ummm mom was used to the idea, mom was a widow. She was used to the idea. She could tell I wasn't ready and wasn't going to college. So, she was fine with it, so it was a career.	p. 2
Morgan: They were fine. They were busy with husbands and kids. And things like that. You know they were finished up college. They had their own life.	p. 2
Morgan: Ummm they were fine with it. They ummm they were happy that I had a career and they were happy that I had some direction. Because the military grows you up. So, if you can come out of the military with a career, that is great! I mean if your, there are so many jobs that military that don't give you a career. And went in, I wanted to make sure. Something told me that high tech was coming. The information age. So that is why I chose telecom.	p. 3
Morgan: Yeah, I think so. I think my mother knew that it would grow me up and would give me some direction. Because you know I was just being a waitress. I didn't have any direction, so yeah I think she was good with that.	p. 3
Blaire: They were surprise and not happy. Ummm First of all in my culture, women tend to stay home. Get married. Have what they would call the typical female type of profession. Military was not one of them. We were not a big military family. There were 2 male cousins ahead of me that went into the army. I was the 3rd one and being a female it was a bit of a shock. More of a shock because I wasn't going to move with them because we went from New Jersey to Puerto Rico. I was not going to move with them. I refused! So, I decided to go into the Air Force and then go into college. My plan was originally go to college then the air force, but it didn't work that way. So my mother was very hesitant ummm. My step dad was a little bit more supportive because he was military in Cuba. So he kinda got it a little bit. But then it was to the point I was doing it. So, they, well she signed and crying but she signed. (both laugh).	p. 2
Blaire: They thought it was great after the fact. They respected me. They were proud of me, and they had positive things to say about my decision after the fact. Researcher: Positive things about you transitioning out or positive things about your joining? Blaire: joining. Joining and serving.	p. 3

Researcher: So when you transitioned, what were their feelings about that? Blaire: Out? (clarifying with researcher). Researcher: Umm humm. Like once you were leaving. Blaire: Well there was a mixed feelings because when I transitioned out it wasn't by choice. Because of my injuries. I had to deal with a lot and fight to get acknowledgement they had a lot to do with my injuries. So they were, it is like bitter sweet. They were happy I was getting out to get the medical attention that I needed and the time recover. But they were upset that ummm I couldn't continue because they knew how much I loved it.	
Kelly: I had no family support (laughs hardily, loud). Researcher: AWWW ok. Can you elaborate on that a little bit? (Kelly: continues to laugh, cross talk) Kelly: Ummm… Gosh! Because no one has ever done it.	pp. 1-2
Kelly: (continues to laugh). Ummm… I actually almost got deployed. Umm. And I couldn't tell her about it, but… coming out she was very happy. My dad now have bragging rights. He still have a pair of my BDU's [military uniform], and a hat, and my dog tags. And he wears the dog tags. You know ummm… recently my nieces told me how proud they were of me and that they look up to me and I'm always doing what I say I'm going to do. So, it was (laughs) it was a celebration when I got out. FOR THEM!	p. 2
Kelly: Easy! Easily, because they are good in that aspect. My family is very supportive in that aspect. Like even today my older sister changed her work schedule so she could help out her son and his wife with their baby their infant. So, I know that would have been easy. It would have been easier.	p. 6
Nicole: Originally, I used to be a Jehovah Witness a while back. And my grandmother is a Jehovah Witness and that is how I was introduced to it. Ummm so joining the military is a like a no-no for that religion. Even though I had already left the religion, my grandmother had took it really hard. She just broke down when I left and mummm my other family was just very supportive because we have military people in my family and friends. So everyone else was supportive but my grandmother just took it extremely hard. My husband at the time, he was kind of supportive but he was also a little upset because I was leaving him to take care of the girls while I was attending basic training and OCS [military officer school]. He had issue with it but at the same time he was being taken care of, so I guess he didn't care too much about it. But he was still able to do his own thing. Ummm yeah for the vast majority of my family and friends, everyone was supportive and proud and happy I was doing it.	p. 2
Nicole: The same. Supportive. They all knew some of the issues I was dealing with while being in the military. It was the same issues from before I joined the military. But they understood that you know	p. 3

it was a sacrifice to be in the military and do the things that I was doing. At that point I have become a single parent while I was in the military. So getting out was a good choice. They supported that.	
Mandatory Conformity	
Morgan: So, when I went in my mom was selling the family home and moving to D.C. because she had gotten a job with a Congressman. And the 4 kids had gone their own ways and I could hang out at the beach and serve/ wait tables you know. But my son, I wanted him to know he had an option. He had some choices he could make, and he didn't have to go fight a war. And you know when I was going in there was no war going on. I knew, it's always a possibility. But there wasn't one going on.	p. 10
Researcher: And and I know that you said earlier that it wasn't really your choice to get out. And I know you went through a series of emotions with that. But overall what meaning did it have for you to transition? Blaire: At the moment, that I wasn't good enough for them, and they had to get rid of me. That was where my mind was. Researcher: And now? Blaire: Now, ummm it's a positive thing. You know I served my country. You know honorably and stuff. Yes, I was hurt and stuff like that but I I I moved on from that. I am proud of what I did, and I see things a little bit differently.	p. 6
Kelly: From my family. I know for my mom specifically she had lost several children. Most recent one was a brother of mine. Maybe four (4) years before I said I was going into the military. And she was afraid of me going into war. So, you know for her to lose a child. My dad ummm… I guess was the only person who understood my personality when I say I'm going to do sm	p. 2
Kelly: (pause). There were …. Hummm …. (pause) I'm the rebel of the family. I don't know if they see me or saw me then as being a rebel. I'm only a rebel because of the culture. Like I go against everything that they believe in. And… I do things outside of their comfort (Researcher: and Kelly: laughs). I guess I would have to ask them. I know there are changes now. I mean I'm older. Umm… But I still do things differently than they do and they are more appreciative of it now. I would definitely have to ask them if they noticed any changes. Other than me being married and having a child. But there was still characteristics that I take into parenting or you know being a wife. Yeah.	p. 3
Kelly: chain of command. Chain of command. Un hun. Even though you have a chain of command in the work force as a civilian. It is so different. I feel like where is the respect like don't you not respect this person's title. So, you know that was a… it was kinda weird like wait a minute. And to this day I still feel this way. You know if you own a license, I respect your license. I respect ummm you know age	p. 4

has nothing to do with it but if you work over me, I respect YOU for being in charge of ME. That was … that was .. .. a weird.. yeah transition. (pause). I mentioned before that there was stability when you're in the army. Umm. I. There was stability in my home, but I didn't feel stable outside. Like I count on getting paid and paid on time (laughs). Like that is one thing they don't play with your money. You know. Umm… If there is something that happens it is taken care of right, then and there. I didn't have that stability, so I had to adjust. And moving to Florida it was a huge adjustment. It was a huge transition from being in New York and you know how things are done there and then going into the military and then coming into another state. So a bit different.	
Nicole: Originally, I used to be a Jehovah Witness a while back. And my grandmother is a Jehovah Witness and that is how I was introduced to it. Ummm so joining the military is a like a no-no for that religion. Even though I had already left the religion, my grandmother had took it really hard. She just broke down when I left and mummm my other family was just very supportive because we have military people in my family and friends. So, everyone else was supportive but my grandmother just took it extremely hard. My husband at the time, he was kind of supportive, but he was also a little upset because I was leaving him to take care of the girls while I was attending basic training and OCS [military officer school]. He had issue with it but at the same time he was being taken care of, so I guess he didn't care too much about it. But he was still able to do his own thing. Ummm yeah for the vast majority of my family and friends, everyone was supportive and proud and happy I was doing it.	p. 2
Nicole: Easy in that I was excited to get out. But hard in that it was weird being a civilian [non-military person] again. Because I was so stuck in military roles. That like you know it's raining outside, oh I can use an umbrella now. You know. Like I don't have to stand out in the pouring rain in the middle of a formation [military gathering] with no umbrella. You know and ohhh…. I can wear what I want to be warm without someone saying: "Why you wearing that *[Rank and last name]. You know it's just like …. It was just weird that I couldn't make more choices for myself. You know where my hair out. I wasn't trying to stuff all of this into a bun every day. Ummm it just took a lot of getting used to. Because you take for granted a lot of things that you learned in the military as right [emphasized] and then you realize, nah I don't really have to do that anymore. You know! I can walk across the grass and no one is going to yell at me (laughs). It is little things like that, where it is like you just have to reprogram your mind and almost to fit back in with regular everyday civilians. And you know not not the whole military mindset.	p. 6-7
Identity	

Morgan: I think it showed me what I already knew was in me. Researcher: Such as? Morgan: My confidence. And my independence. My father died when I was 10 and ummm that changes everything. But when you go in the military and then you go into another country. And some of the things that you go through, you have to be very independent. You have to be very independent. But I knew that it was in me. And that just, like I said, confirmed it.	p. 3
Morgan: you know when you are 21 you are thinking this is great, we are living in Greece now what are we going to do next year. (both laugh). And I just thought I would go on with other experiences. And then I was a college student and then you know. It is a big part of me and I feel for veterans. A lot of what they go through.	p. 5
Morgan: I think that growing up I wasn't. I wasn't scared of many things. But the military just enforced that. And I did some things in my life that not many people do. And that was my choice. And I wouldn't have done it the mainstream way. I was just like I'm going to do this. Like when I birth my child, it was a home birth. I was very alternative. And I have met one other person that (laughs) home birth their child, you know. My neighbor just gave birth a month ago with a home birth. But I think think think that because of the military ummm when I want to do something, I just do it. There is not a lot of things that I have fear about. Researcher: So, it is like you make up your mind and you act upon it. Morgan: Yeah. Researcher: So, when your decision is made you go for it. Morgan: Absolutely. Yeah. I have heard other people say, they just get out of my way, once I decide to do something. I just do it.	p. 7
Blaire: Well for me, I was always assertive. I became more assertive. Very independent. Ummm Before I was very ummm…. I was always looking for my mother's approval, due to our relationship which wasn't good. Ummm Once I was in that became less important. I wound up dealing with that.	p. 4
Blaire: Yes. Because I went in at 17. I was still very young. I was trying to find myself while being in the military, being an air force member, being a sergeant, and this and that. When it comes to the military it did play a huge part of my identity, as long with, as long with being a mother and a wife and stuff. Ummm but being able to say I was a military member I'm doing things right along with the male and stuff and then after wards, when that went away. You know I was trying to search you know yes, I had the title of mother and wife, but what about me. Like who am I now? Without this? I had really search hard to find myself. Researcher: And who did you find? Blaire: It took a long time but ummm I found someone that was strong that you know ummm even though I didn't believe it. Ummm I	p. 7-8

had looked down on myself because if I'm not doing this then what am I here for what am I doing? So yes, I take care of my kids you know I'm a good wife in my mind. But what else is there for me? It was a constant search of what in the world was I going to do with myself? Especially, you know being discharged so young. I was in my late 20s. Now what do I do?	
Blaire: For me, being a veteran is not all. For me, I'm *Blaire first, my qualities as *Blaire and part of that is being a veteran. It doesn't take my whole identity or the majority of it as it did when I was in the military. So, I'm proud of being a veteran and stuff. And Yes, it comes with certain struggles and responsibilities where people look at you certain ways. It is not all of me. I have grown and learned that there are many parts of me. That is just a little part.	p. 8
Blaire: yeah, and most importantly me (cross talk). Because that was the big part that was lost in the transition for a while. Researcher: Can you tell me more about that? Blaire: ummm I I I didn't know who I was. Like for me being in the air force was a big part of who I was. I didn't have that you know yes I was a mom and wife. I wasn't content with that. To me in my mind, that was not what I fully signed up for. These are things that I choose to do, but it was like where do I go from here. And then also having so many physical limitations, that was another struggle within the struggle of trying to find myself too. Because ummm I was not physically able to do so many things. I was embarrassed. It bothered me because it also brought a lot of attention to me having to … being in a wheelchair or walking on crutches or certain devices and I didn't like that. Then having to explain myself like people are curious so they ask. And the reminder of stuff that happened. That got me to that place. It wasn't the best for me. Researcher: So that rediscovery that who you were with all that transition, how would you classify it? Challenging? … Blaire: It was very challenging. It was like I was rediscovering myself but I had to go all the way back and re-live stuff all the way back to the current position I was in.	p. 9
Blaire: For me, that all these little parts make up who I am. They have made me stronger. They have educated me in many ways. They have allowed me to grow. Be more patient. That was a big issue (both laugh). And see the whole world and myself in another way. I didn't happen overnight but slowly. Researcher: So, as you learned, not only who you were as a veteran but also as a wife, and mother and all these other parts to you, student, these things … Blaire: yeah, and most importantly me (cross talk). Because that was the big part that was lost in the transition for a while.	p. 9
Blaire: Yeah! It just made me feel like I was weak for asking for help at that time. To ask for help, it's like that was another big thing being	p. 13

independent and having to depend on people so much. That really bothered me.	
Nicole: ummm changes in myself (repeating for herself). I would say determination. Like … Researcher: Like you gained it or like you lost it? Nicole: I gained it. Because things I didn't think I could do. I eventually just continued and continued to be able to get myself to be able to do them. Before I would be like I can't do that, and I would just give up. But then in the military I was like I can do this. I would keep trying and trying until I get it. Another change, I never liked exercising so that was that. That never changed (Researcher: laughing). Changes in myself (repeats for herself). Outspokeness. I became more outspoken. Not that I wasn't before, but I felt like I had to really really really find my voice and make sure I was heard in the military. I was already a parent and I saw something that wasn't right, and I was like YO, this isn't right and this needs to be fixed. That was even in basic training. I was telling the Drill Sergeants this isn't right and we need to fix this. And they are looking at me like "excuse me" "You don't get to tell us what to do" and I was like no we need to change this and make sure this happens. Which is funny because I ended up being the XO [executive officer] for a basic training company later on. So, the roles were reversed.	p. 4
Nicole: When I became an XO? No, because we didn't have that same problem. It was a hygiene problem. They were trying to rush us and rush us, and the girls weren't taking showers and I was like no, this isn't happening. They need their time to take their showers. I don't care if we are all late. They need to be clean. Because you know other things will happen if you know they are not clean. Yeah NO, we are not going to skip showers and then we can go to bed when we are done. Yeah just having a voice and making sure it was heard. What other changes did I notice about myself (repeating to herself)? (pause). I would say, I think I just opened up about… Like I said I was Jehovah witness before and when I was married and just opening up to new things. Like understanding the LBGT community. Understanding you are not a bad person if you do X, Y, Z. Things like that. Even though I was not a homophobic person before and I had family members that were gay and things like that, my daughter now is gay. But just not thinking of other people as other. Thinking of people as people, we are just the same. Not judging not … just that none judgment attitude changed about me as well. Just being around, so many different cultures and different people and you can't hate on people that you love. I mean, even the people that were stanch republicans and they have these ideas. And at the same time, I'm like I still love you because you have your different opinion and I will still love you. I think that that changed me.	p. 4-5

Nicole: identity while serving compared to now that I've transitioned out (repeated to herself). (pause). Like I said before when you are in the military. You are kind of like elevated to this high level. People recognize you because they see you in uniform. They are constantly saying good things like: "thank you for your service. And blah blah blah." But when you get out, you are just you. You are not getting all that praise anymore. You are not getting that same constant approval of society. I won't say that I miss it. I don't think I miss it. Because I don't know, because I guess I'm a humble person. When you go somewhere and people say, oh you know if you are veteran stand up. I hate doing that! I don't want to draw attention to myself. (pause). In a way it is like I feel like I can blend into the background now. I can just be me, I don't have to be *[rank, last name]. Now I can just be *Nicole. I can tell you about my military career or the fact I was in the military because I want to. Not because I'm being outed because what I have on. I don't feel like I needed the praise or anything like that. I know that I have friends that have transitioned, and they don't know how to let go of that that power that they had in the military. You know when you are an officer or higher ranked enlisted person, you have that authority. I noticed that since that just being in this program, I try, and I don't want to have any authority. I don't want to like I took the intro to equine course. And even though my bachelor's was in animal science I worked and my whole focus was on horses, I didn't want to go into that class like I'm the horse expert. I wanted it to be like okay your telling me about something you already know, but I'm going to act like I don't already know it because I don't even want to go through that whole scenario, being the expert. I just want to enjoy myself. I want to be the person who is like everyone else. Enjoying the class and learning something new. Researcher: Do you think if you weren't in this program you still kinda have that same idea that you want to blend into the background instead of being noticed? Nicole: Yes. Yes. Yes. Definitely. I'm an introvert. You probably wouldn't know it by the way I'm like la la la. But I'm an introvert by nature. I don't like to be flashy or you know just like to blend in, like fade to the background. Play with the cat if there is a cat over there. By myself.	p. 11
Nicole: No, I own it. I definitely own it. I just don't feel like I have to share it with everyone. Because I don't think it it doesn't always define me. I think. There may be something else that defining me more in a situation. Maybe it is the fact that I'm a mom that is defining me more in the situation instead of the fact that I'm a veteran. Or maybe it is the fact that I got a special needs child that needs help more than the fact I'm a veteran. Or something like that. It just depends on the situation and scenario. I guess.	p. 13

Researcher: It sounds like, to me, that it is a part of you but not all of you. Nicole: Yes!	
Nicole: It takes a lot of strength, mentally, well not mentally. Well mentally and emotionally to just be mom, takes a lot of strength mentally and emotionally to be in the military, it takes a lot of strength emotionally and mentally to be a single parent or to be the parent of a special needs child. Like if I didn't have that I'm pretty sure that I would be using this list every day (Researcher: laughs). And people have always when I tell them like a little bits and pieces of my life, they are like how did you do it. I think how could I not do it. It's not like… somethings I have a choice about like what job I take or whatever. But I mean, I don't ever think I'm doing something over and beyond. It is just that I just have to have the strength to endure whatever it is I'm going through. And make it to the next level. It can be stress inducing but I just .. soldier on.	p. 14-15
Kelly: I never thought about that. It was just like whatever I had to do I had to do it. I never thought about it. It was maybe a year ago when I started reflecting on… really did that happen (laughs). I just knew stuff needed to get done and I just do it. I was just living. I was 18, 19 you know before my son came around or before I got married. I was just living and being, doing the work. We had training do the training, get it over with. (laughs) R: Okay I like it, I like it. Ummm and you just kind of briefly touched on it, what about after transition your identity? Kelly: (pause) that was somewhere out in space like "who am I". What is going on and where did I need to be right now. Like what is this? Did I really just get married? Did I have me right now? It was like having an out of body experience. I think about it now. I wonder what happened. That wasn't a go (laughs), that wasn't the mission. It was totally different, totally different. Like having an out of body experience.	p. 9-10
Service	
Morgan: That is a big question because I'm 60 years old (laughs). (Researcher: joins in the laughter). (sighs and continues to repeat the question). I still have a feel for veterans. Even after all these years. I still when they do the Pledge of Allegiance. I weep. (laughs). But I'm started a private practice a couple of days ago and I'm going to focus on women veterans that who are suffering grief and loss. So that I think that veterans understand veterans. So, I'm honored I can serve in that way.	p. 5
Researcher: Or you can combine now your therapy and your career you built in the army, I'm sorry in the military. To make it well rounded. Like full circle almost. Morgan: yeah that is what I was saying, and in my practice, I would like to umm that is part of my statement of service is to help women	p. 12

veterans who are suffering from grief and loss. To go from surviving to thriving.	
Blaire: what I noticed is that I'm still serving but in a different way. Researcher: Can you elaborate on that? Blaire: Ummm (cross talk). Serving for my country now serving the community to get themselves in a better place mentally. And their families. Ummm I also with this transition, I'm still an advocate with military for them to get the proper mental health assistance and and things like that. That is my passion and where I want to go. Does that answer your question (to researcher)?	p. 7
Nicole: Exactly (cross talk). I know have friends that when they got out of the military, they didn't know what to do with themselves. Because that had been them for so long and that was all that they knew. I think what helped me the fact that I had a career before I joined the military. Getting out of the mi…. I realized that the military was not everything to me. I didn't join it from high school and that was my own career for 20 years and then I left and now I'm just like what do I do? I realize that there are so many different things that you can do in life. That is just one portion of what I have done. I think I think, I definitely know that I didn't join right out of highschool and I had a career before. And I looked at and had careers after, even though you know they all seem to be military related careers afterwards (Researcher: laughs). But ummm I just got a job at SouthCom [military command center]. Why do I keep getting military jobs? But I want a therapy job. Researcher: You will get there don't worry! Nicole: Eventually. Researcher: Once you get licensed you can work for the VA and then you will still have a military job (both laugh). Nicole: Exactly. That is what I want to do. I want to work for the VA. I'm crazy. Yeah, I think that helped having having a career before and then going into the military and then getting out. I didn't let that military culture define me as who I am.	p. 13-14
Kelly: Ummm …. (pause) the milita… it was a lot ummmm a lot of meanings. Some of which I still live by. I liked being structured. So… that was very much fitting for me. Ummm I like the friendships that were formed and friendship (pause) especially when I use that word friend ummm it means a lot. And I'm still friends with ummm some of my buddies. It …. It was stable. So there was stability. Ummm (pause). It meant being part of something bigger than myself. Yeah. Those are some of the things (slight laugh) that I can think of right now.	p. 1
Gender Inequality	
Morgan: No. I mean I was ummm how old was I? I turned 21 in bootcamp. So, there were some gender things. But at 21 you are going to see somethings that surprise you. (both laugh).	p. 1

Morgan: (pause). I'm trying to remember (saying to herself). I think that there were a couple of guys that weren't post military. And they viewed me different. But the guys that had been in the military, I was one of the guys. Like I said the guys that were not post military they would tease me and pick on me and stuff. Because I was in an all-male field. But. Whatever. (coughing).	p. 6
Morgan: (laughs), yeah. I don't know if that was the military or not, because when you go into the military you are 20 years old. But I think, that was 40 years ago, since I'm 60 now. So, 40 years ago it as pretty unique to go into the military. Researcher: And what was that, what would you say that was compared to maybe going into the military now. Because of the time difference and the… Morgan: I don't know (cross talk). I wonder about the women that go into the military now, what are they doing, and what are they thinking, and why and their motivation to do into the military. For me, I just didn't see me going to college, like I said, and that was my choice. But I'm sure everyone has a different motivation for doing it.	p. 7-8
Morgan: I wasn't in war time. And when I was in the military. If you got pregnant you did have the choice to get out or you could stay in. I talked to women, that once you got married and pregnant you were out. The women that were all with me.	p. 8
Morgan: oh yeah that's right, I was going to say. Women wouldn't go to a war zone really. I don't like what I hear about what happens in ummm what is it called? (saying to herself) places in… Researcher: Like Iraq? Deployment? Morgan: Yeah, yea. And that is who I would like to serve. People that have been in those situations. Researcher: So really helping women as they go through different experiences. But some similar because you are all military.	p. 8
Morgan: What is that? [referring to identity]. I think it gave me a confidence ummm I think the military gave me a confidence and earning a Ph.D. gave me a confidence that there is something in me that is unshakable. I know what I will tolerate and what I won't tolerate. Ummm. But like I said, it gave me a career and ummm… there were some verbal harassments but there was always another guy right there that would ummm…. Speak up for me. Say like hey you know. Cut it out. Researcher: So it sounds like while you were in the military, you had some experiences that were like maybe was based on gender or ummm ? Morgan: Yes! (cross talk). Researcher: But you had enough comrades, I guess, or people that had your back to say hey that is not appropriate.	p. 9

Morgan: Yes! And there were times when it was one on one and and the way I see it you have to handle it face to face. You have take care of it right then. And say what you need to stay to take care of yourself. Researcher: So, don't brush it under the rug, in another words. Morgan: Exactly.	
Morgan: Let's see (whispering to herself). No, I just think I think for people making the decision now a days you know I heard of some young men there are like flailing. Should I go school, or should I do this, or do this, but they are really doing anything. Then maybe that is a good thing for them. It is a good thing for something. It is a good thing for some people. I'm glad I did it. Because you know I had some benefits from it. (Sigh) Wish it would pay for my loans (side conversation). (Researcher: laughs). I had some benefits from it. And like I said I considered it my college to get me in the high-tech field.	p. 10
Blaire: Umm overall I I I believe it was a good one, except for certain sexual harassment and inequalities for being a female. But overall, I would say it was a good experience. Researcher: Okay, you actually answered my next question. You are already so good at this. (both laugh). So, you said about being a female, so do you think based on your gender you had a different experience then men do? Blaire: I believe so. Researcher: Can you tell me a little bit more? Blaire: With my experience and talking to other colleagues, we [referring to women] tended to have to work more to… get the acknowledgement or the respect that a male would automatically get sometimes just for being a male. Ummm there were many times they were questioned, we didn't know what we were talking about. And that I didn't see very much sometimes. Even as I went up the ranks it was less but there were still certain people that tend to question me with certain decisions that I made, due to my job. R: And not only in your experience but in talking to your colleagues, gender was kind of the factor for that? Blaire: Yes! And then being a minority woman. That was another difference too. R: AWWW! Okay, so not on top of being a woman but you had the minority aspect as well. And that added more challenges to your military career. And you said, besides those things that you experienced then overall your military experience was pretty good. Blaire: Yes, when it came to the job aspect and stuff yes. Ummm once I was hurt, that experience was negative. But ummm the other stuff was good.	p. 1
Blaire: They were surprise and not happy. Ummm First of all in my culture, women tend to stay home. Get married. Have what they would call the typical female type of profession. Military was not one	p. 2

of them. We were not a big military family. There were 2 male cousins ahead of me that went into the army. I was the 3rd one and being a female, it was a bit of a shock.	
Blaire: I think a little bit, because while I was going through the medical discharge there were some male colleagues that due to some injuries they were also going through it but their [military] persistence of me going to mental health because there was something wrong with me, due to PTSD and there was nothing wrong with my hip because people at their level couldn't find what was wrong with me physically. They automatically assumed it was more mental. And none of the other ones had to deal with that [referring to male colleagues]. Researcher: So, in your experience, it must be because your mentally unstable, that's why you have this pain. Blaire: Yeah more emotional, like how they would tag those type of characteristics to us females.	p. 5
Blaire: With that yes, because still you know I was hurt, and I was going through stuff. In my household it wasn't like he said you have to do this and stuff but there was that insinuation that you know the woman takes care of the home, both of the children's needs, and stuff like that. So, I was on crutches, in pain, going to physical therapy dealing with depression and stuff and still I was a very hands on person. Doing the bills, cleaning, all those household responsibilities, were always left on me. It was never asked can I take some of this to help you a little bit. It was just assumed that was my role and that was it.	p. 12-13
Kelly: Ummm… I was TORN. I was torn. Researcher: Can you explain a little bit more about that? Kelly: Umm…because I wanted to retire. I wanted to continue. And I … I knew I couldn't be the best soldier, the best mom, and the best wife. Because mission first. They say mission first family always. Mission is first! And at that time, I was very black and white. And it was like … my heart was in the army. Or the army had my heart. And comes this little person. (laughs) That I could not let anything take me away from taking care of this little person that I was not looking for.	p. 2
Kelly: Probably. Probably because it was hard on us financially. It was. And talking with men and just knowing how they feel about money (laughs).	p. 9
Kelly: Two bodies. What ever happen to two soldiers. Work was never done. 75H Admin [MOS], work was never done. So, I would go in on the weekends and do work. And I would actually get caught up, so you know it's like Monday starting again fresh and the work load come back. But ummm I got promoted quickly. But what stopped me getting promoted was not going to PLDC [military leadership school] because I was pregnant. Then after that it was like	p. 10

I'm not going on. One of the Warrant Officers that worked with us gave me a pow-wow like you got complacent. And he was right. He was right. "Because this is not the person I met." Yeah yeah you are right. But I didn't see the need to do more than when my mind was made up. Umm but… I really like it. I didn't have a problem doing PT [physical training]. Like I mentioned it is so structured. I had no problem if it was getting deployed it was like you took an oath. I took that seriously. We gotta do what we gotta do. I still don't remember why I didn't get deployed, but I know I had orders to go to Bosnia. Ummm I like the bond and closeness. You meet new people. I know a lot of stuff doesn't make any sense but that was a nothing. I like being a soldier.	
Nicole: UMMM well not only was I an officer and a female so that had a lot to do with it. But I was a Black female too. So, there were not a lot of Black female officers. So, you kind of like become close to the other Black female officers but at the same time ummm say you're in a meeting. You might say something, and it gets overlooked. Then a White male might say the exact same thing that you said and all of a sudden it is the best thing ever. And your kinda looking like "did I not just say that." You know so yeah you do deal with that. But I think that is pretty much everywhere. But ummm it is very pronounced because the military is like a male dominated profession. You kind of have to prove your worth when you are female in that profession, always. Ummm Let's see anything else about that (asking to herself). That is pretty much it about that I noticed the most. Ummm whether I'm in a meeting for work or whether it was in school. Because we do the different army schools. It was the same thing. Making sure your voice is heard. You have to make sure you speak up.	p. 1
Nicole: Oh yeah! It definitely would have been a different transition. Because not only was I like nine (9) months pregnant. I would have been like… you can't get a job if your pregnant anyways. Yeah and then he was born early. It was just like a whole thing. Ummm but that definitely would have been a different situation if I didn't have the severance pay. I know that for a fact! I would have had to probably like sell my house, move back home. I just don't know. It would have been a bad experience I'm sure.	p. 7
Nicole: ummm in a way because I think people could look at my gender and my situation as a single mom and be more understanding of why I got out compared to someone whose like "why you getting out. You might as well stay in for 20 years." You know. It is more questioned, I think, when you are a male then when you are a female. And you say well I was a single mom, and these were the factors. So people from the outside looking in would give me less of a hard time compared to other guys that were getting out at the same time as me and they were like "what are you doing?" You know they kind of	p. 8

looked at them in a more negative light. Other than that, I think, no. I guess that is probably the only thing I saw different. Researcher: Do you think that might contribute, and I'm just going on a limb here, ummm to the idea that women should not be in the military? And so, with you being a single mom, it was easier for them to say see look this proves our point. Like I'm just curious. Nicole: Ummm I wouldn't say that because there are so many single moms that are rocking it. You know in the military. Ummm I would hope not [emphasis added]. I will say that. But you know how some people are, they are just like you know. The same thing that they are trying to do to transgender soldiers right now. Because that pisses me off because it is like, if you have someone that is willing to to sacrifice their life for this country [United States] give them that opportunity to to be all they can be. Whatever they want to be. Let them do what they want to do. But uuuuhhhh but people are going to have their opinion about women in the military all day long. You know when I was at Benning [military installation] we started having the first females going through Ranger School and join the infantry [military fighting MOS] yyou know you hear all that stuff like "they can never do that stuff." And then they did it! And then they were like "they had to have help, or they had to lower the standards, or you know" you will never please some people. So why even try?! You are going to have your mind set. You continue to keep it, I can't change it, so.	
Nicole: yeah, going back to my own life (laughs) low key. Because when you are in the military and you are a black female officer, you just stand out. So, people are like oh my gosh you're an officer. It's like huuuhhh… especially men. And not necessarily well vast majority of black men. You just become a focus. Like not only is she in the military but she's an officer. Then you have to worry about the whole fraternization thing because they come after you. I'm sure you know. And you are like oh my god why? Leave me alone.	p. 12
Nicole: I I I definitely had it before. Then the military I wouldn't say enhanced it, but it gave me, I want to kinda say it gave me the liberty to be more vocal about it. Or maybe not necessarily vocal but like to exhibit it more. Without feeling like I'm a woman, so I need to sit in the background and not … I feel like it … you have to be a leader. You have to demonstrate that people up under you can follow you and that your gonna do the right things for them. Almost like having kids. I already had kids so, I looked at my soldiers like my kids. I want the best for them. I want to do what is right for them. I'm going to sacrifice for them. It was the same. I think I just transitioned what I did as a mom to being an officer. Does that make sense?	p. 15
Opportunities	

Morgan: Well I didn't want to go to college in that point in my life, and I was either airline stuartist or go into the military. And I was already a waitress, so I chose the military.	p. 1
Morgan: I don't. For me, it wouldn't work to report it to a third party. It was just right there like hey cut it out. Researcher: Would you, if you needed to advance it a third party, because you know you couldn't handle it yourself, would you safe or comfortable enough to do that, while you were serving? Morgan: Oh, it depended on who, you know I have had bosses that I wouldn't have reported it to and then I had bosses that I would be okay. You know it depends on who you are reporting it to.	p. 9
Blaire: Umm overall I I I believe it was a good one, except for certain sexual harassment and inequalities for being a female. But overall, I would say it was a good experience. Researcher: Okay, you actually answered my next question. You are already so good at this. (both laugh). So, you said about being a female, so do you think based on your gender you had a different experience then men do? Blaire: I believe so. Researcher: Can you tell me a little bit more? Blaire: With my experience and talking to other colleagues, we [referring to women] tended to have to work more to… get the acknowledgement or the respect that a male would automatically get sometimes just for being a male. Ummm there were many times they were questioned, we didn't know what we were talking about. And that I didn't see very much sometimes. Even as I went up the ranks it was less but there were still certain people that tend to question me with certain decisions that I made, due to my job.	p. 1
Blaire: For me it meant independence because I enrolled, enlisted at 17. The opportunity to go to college without having to deal with my parents and their rules. (Researcher: laughs). And travel. And just serving my country. I always had a thing for airplanes and jets, so it was just a combination of all of those.	p. 2
Blaire: Well there was a mixed feelings because when I transitioned out it wasn't by choice. Because of my injuries. I had to deal with a lot and fight to get acknowledgement they had a lot to do with my injuries. So they were, it is like bitter sweet. They were happy I was getting out to get the medical attention that I needed, and the time recover. But they were upset that ummm I couldn't continue because they knew how much I loved it.	p. 3
Kelly: go in u mm I had a mission you know. I was gonna go do this and get my education paid for. And ummm once I got in after basic training, I loved it so I'm gonna retire. I can do this. Ummm yeah… I met my then boyfriend and then became my husband. Had a child and was like I don't think I can do this. I don't think I can do this… Researcher: like as a career? (cross talk)	p. 1

Kelly: like as a PARENT. As a parent I couldn't do it. So that was too was unexpected because my mind was made up to make this a career. But (laughs) having a child changed that.	
Kelly: From New York. I was stationed in Fort Drum, New York. So, I just transitioned from there and moved to Florida. Researcher: What was the move factor? Like what made you transition to here? Kelly: So, when we were dating my umm husband. His father and older brother lived in Miami so he wanted to introduce me to them and so we flew into Miami. So, when I got off the airplane it was like "Oh my God! This is like Jamaica!" Researcher: (laughs, cross talk). Kelly: "I have to live here." You know the heat and everything else. So, it was between here [FL] and Pennsylvania. Ok so let's try Florida. So that is how I moved to Florida (laughs). It took a while to adjust, but we have adjusted. (laughs).	p. 4-5
Researcher: So, with getting out because you became a single parent Nicole: No, I'm (cross talk). No, I stayed in for a while after I got divorced. But umm my daughter who is 16 now, when she was 11 months old she started having seizures. So, she had dealt with epilepsy her whole life, but at a certain point in my military career she got really sick with the seizures and ended up in the ICU and like a whole bunch of other stuff. You know it is a lot. You know I knew that my career I was making choices that would not allow me to move forward. I couldn't take command because of her sickness. I couldn't go to certain locations. I was offered Hawaii to take command. But I had to turn it down. And my branch manager was like "what your turning down Hawaii?" And I'm like yes, I have to turn down Hawaii. I need to stay in the south. I need to stay somewhere close to where if there is a situation, my family can get to me quickly and cheaply. And going to Hawaii is not cheap. Researcher: or fast Nicole: Exactly! So, I had to make sure I made steps in the military to take care of her. Because of that, that kind of limited what I could do.	p. 3
Nicole: Ummm it was easy because I was ready for it. Ummm I was waiting for it. I wanted it. Umm I wasn't like depressed about it or anything like that. I was happy. Ummm I think it was easy too because we kind of the kind of separation that I had, I was given, what is it called, where you are given money when you leave (asking herself out loud, then directed towards researcher)? Researcher: Ummm like a severance pay? Nicole: Yeah! Severance pay. So, you know I just had my son. I had my son a month after I got out. So, I was able to relax. You know I wasn't too stressed about finding work right away. Ummm I think that is what made it easy. I was able to just relax into that role of not	p. 7

being in the military. Ummm focusing on the kids and just really enjoying myself without too much stress.	
Researcher: Just to kinda sum up that, ability to go back to being an introvert and then you choosing if you want to share if you are horse expert or veteran or whatever it may be, then that becomes your choice. Nicole: Exactly. Researcher: Where previously, it was never your choice. Well at least if you were in uniform. Nicole: exactly. (cross talk). Researcher: because when you are in civilians. Nicole: which was rare. Maybe on the weekends. (both laughs). Yeah most of the time you are in uniform all day every day. It is exhausting. Researcher: With that, as you are making the choice and the choice is yours, do you ever feel like being a veteran is your secret? Nicole: ummmm….. I guess it depends on the situation. (cross talk, inaudible). I have been places where someone else will say they were in the military and I think I can say something to them. And then I won't. I can could be like I'm a veteran too, but then I won't say it. I don't know what it is that stops me from doing that. I don't know. I just don't feel like putting a spotlight on myself. I might be like talk about their service and they are bringing it up and they are talking about it and never say anything about my own. Just to talk to them and keep them in the spot light without talking about myself. Then there are other times where someone will say something, and I would be like oh yeah, I was stationed there too. And the we will bring it up and talk about things. It is just a day to day, like how I'm feeling that day if I want to bring it up or not.	p. 12-13
Physical and Emotional Symptoms	
Morgan: Like I said, it wasn't war time so there wasn't a lot of PTSD or things like that. I did have a touch of it when I came back from D.C. my mom said let's go shopping and I kinda had a meltdown in a dressing room. It was just too much for me. But other than that, she just picked me up and took me back to her place. Then I was fine. Researcher: So just slightly trying to adjust back to civilian life. Morgan: Yes! Yeah because I was coming from Greece. And I was going to D.C. Big shopping. You know. And I was in Greece, you know that was 30 years ago, it was '83. That was a long time ago (saying to herself in almost disbelief).	p. 4-5
Blaire: Okay. With my family it kind of stayed the same. The the the distance just remained. The relationship with my immediate family wasn't all all that great. I have a better and closer relationship with my Godmother, who I consider more my mother, more than my own mother. And her daughters are like my aunts, so with them, we were always very close. Regardless where I was, we always spoke once a	p. 4-5

week and we visited quite often versus compared to my mother and stuff. It wasn't like that. And the transition for me was extremely hard because I went from a very physically active, healthy person to a person that was not walking. I didn't know, my left leg was paralyzed. I didn't know if I could even walk again. Ummm very defeated and disappointed because at that point I was medically discharged. But even before that process they kept wanting to send me to mental health, saying that was more mental than physical. When it was obviously some physical stuff that they did to me to cause me more damage. So that was very frustrating. Then having young kids at 4 and 5 years old. Not being able to physically do the things that I did with them was extremely hard. I did become very depressive. It was a very hard transition. Ummm beforehand I knew I was getting discharged, so financially we prepared ourselves for that because he was still active duty. But once all of a sudden you get that pay check and it's gone and now you are down to half, that transition is hard too. But ummm he was very supportive so even though I was going through my adjustments, but the transition was a difficult one. Because I was in a position where I didn't want to be depressed, angry, just a little bit of mixed emotions.	
Blaire: It was a slow process. Ummm just you know the physical limitations, surgeries, extreme pain which since my injury I have never lived pain free. So, living with pain [physical] is extremely hard. Ummm Still dealing with depressive issues a lot of anxiety and panic all due to that. I'm not angry anymore. I'm past that point ummm but it was there were still difficulties, because you know I think, what if I could have been still doing something else and stuff. But in a way, I'm also happy because of those situations I'm here where I'm at now. And I'm happy with where I'm at now. Researcher: So, it sounds like those things helped lead you up to where you are.	p. 5-6
Blaire: As before I was more angry. Ummm especially having to fight for benefits and stuff. To me I felt like that was a slap in the face. You know I came in healthy. I was injured but due to their misdiagnosis. They made my injuries even worse. It wasn't they were they played a big part of my you know what was going on with me physically. So, having to get out and physically and fight for so long to get my benefits and acknowledge that yes this was a service-connected disability and stuff. That made me very angry. I did get help and stuff with other agencies and as the time went by, I guess it's like…. I was like okay it happened it wasn't right, but I fought for what I deserved, and I got it eventually. So, you know then I was okay. Then with that tended to help others. Take certain steps that I didn't know, or they wouldn't tell me because it was convenient.	p. 6
Blaire: Oh yea, that was very obvious. I rarely went out. I went out when I had too. When I was at home I was mostly in my room. I slept	p. 11-12

a lot. I did take care of the house and the stuff for them, but it was an extreme struggle. I would snap sometimes. I would cry a lot. I was very too myself. I wouldn't engage with them. Ummm so those things they noticed. My daughters are adults now, but there are times that we speak about it and they saw there was something not right with mom. Mom was always sad. Mom was always in her room. But when they needed me, they knew I would help them. But other than that, I was always too myself. With him, I don't think he understood. I think for him sometimes, he never really said snap out of it, but it was kind of like that mentality a little bit. Researcher: like the implied drink water type of mentality. Blaire: Yeah! Ummm Not really understanding or experiencing what I was going through. Ummm sometimes he felt like I was just being dramatic. Then go get help. Did you take your medicine, pushing medicine because with the VA with you know they push so much medicine. So, I was taking medicine for my anxiety, depression, plus all these … powerful pain pills that sometimes I would be like a zombie, I wouldn't be myself. And then my family, because we were in New Jersey at the time. They were the ones that saw a huge difference in my personality and everything, how I was changing. And took them to tell my husband, something is not right. This is not her. We can't do this, you need to go find out what is wrong with her and start getting some of this fixed.	
Blaire: ummm while in transition, I was also my-self going through therapy. To deal with all that adjustment. You know depression, anxiety, you know that so. That was another part. I knew intellectually therapy was good and that is why I decided to do that. But it was hard because there was always that stigma. So that was always lingering in the back of my head. Researcher: I was just going to ask, how did you, how was it for you to ask for help? Because it sounds like it wasn't fun experience. Blaire: No, it took took a while. Because of that stigma. Especially when I said I had physical issues that they [military] were saying that I was crazy. So, after first to me it was like I was saying yes there something wrong with me. I fought that for a while. But I knew it was going to help me. It wasn't that I was crazy or anything. I had these issues, but because of these issues it was affecting me emotionally and mentally and stuff. So, then I did go. But at first it was hard because, ummm certain therapists that I went to … to me in my mind were not the best. As soon as I would start talking to them, they would say "Oh yeah I understand completely" and stuff. That just totally shut me down. You you you don't have no idea. How you going to know how I'm feeling. It was hard to get there and then when I sit there and get those reactions. Those would be my one and only times and then I would be done. Then it took a few months again and let's give this a try again.	p. 10

Researcher: And how did you know to go back? Blaire: Because just having these conversations within myself, I knew it was going to help me. And trying to do it on my own, I could only get so far. Maybe the next person won't be like that, so let's try this again.	
Kelly: (pause) Hummm… I have do this and I have to overcome what I was feeling. Because if I can think back. Because there was so much done within a year of transitioning and at the age and being a new mom and new wife and moving away from my family. It … it was tough. Yeah it was tough. Umm and it meant me tapping back into "suck it up and drive on." You gotta do it so do it! Researcher: Oh, that old military was back in your head like mission first and this is now the mission. Kelly: Yeah this is the mission. Yeah.	p. 5
Kelly: The overall transition ummm was very stressful. It was HIGHLY stressful. Because I remember ummm my period is not regular to begin with and during that transition I had it every day. Until I was out. Because I had to think about (pause) number 1. making sure all the my gear is turned in and the way it was supposed to be. Umm relocating itself is stressful. Ummm we had to … the apartment we were living in you have to get that "squared away" and it was like with our son we brought him to the city to stay with my family the last five or six months prior to me leaving and then my husband had to fly here, get a place, so can get that address so we know where their sending our furniture. It was highly, highly stressful.	p. 6
Researcher: I know you talked about having some stress of it all caused a lot of physical changes ummm do you feel that you had any additional physical or mental concerns which may have affected the way you transitioned? Kelly: I know I was depressed. I know I was depressed. Ummm when I transitioned I couldn't… I'm lying. Then I did not know. Maybe 2 years after I was reading an article on depression and I was like no, okay I'm going to read more into it. And I'm going to mention it and I mentioned it to my primary doctor. And he was like you know you probably were depressed because I couldn't sleep. Ummm (pause). There were some other things my appetite changed. I could not eat. Ummm I had some weight loss. (pause) I just remember the one thing that kept me going is "this little person need you." This little person need you, because it was like I I I I had no desire to (pause). I wanted to be alone. And ummm I had no sexual desire. No desires other than to take care of this little person.	p. 7
Kelly: yeah suck it up and drive on (cross talk). Researcher: so, I was thinking about suck it up and drink water Kelly: (laughs loudly). Right!	p. 8

Researcher: So as that became your mission. I' wondering because it sounds like you didn't know that you were depressed or that. Did you have any indication that this wasn't normal, that you weren't supposed to feel this way? Kelly: Absolutely! (cross talk) Researcher: or feel this way? Or … Kelly: Absolutely! Because I have a lot of energy. And I'm can't sit still. Ummm so it was like I'm just being here. It's not normal, it's not me. And you know for me not to have that "ok we need to go, we got to do something" (snapping fingers for emphasis). I didn't have that. Researcher: And what think may have stopped you from, since you recognized that it wasn't normal for you, stopped you from going to your primary care or getting assistance, or reaching out to someone and seeing does this seem off? Kelly: I don' know. (pause). What stopped me (asking herself)? (paused). I tried to figure it out on my own. (laughs) Yeah. Trying to figure it out on my own and then I could figure it out. Okay we need to do something about this. And realizing too, that I don't like being in this place, something is not right. Researcher: It didn't feel normal to you or typical of what your used too. Kelly: Yeah.	
Kelly: (pause). Ummm… I told him how I was feeling. He (pause) I mean we were sleeping together so he would know that I'm not sleeping and just checking in "You ok" [husband] "Yeah I just can't sleep" [responding to husband]. Ummm… As far as like the sexual desires it's like I don't know what is wrong with me. I'm like.. "it has nothing to do with you", I remember that reminding him, that it has nothing to do with you, "it has something to do with me and I need to figure it out." So yeah, he noticed.	p. 8-9
Nicole: (pause) It was a relief for me. Because I had been thinking about it for so long. It was an anxiety when my daughter when into the ICU for that month. It was anxiety provoking. Because I was like, how do I transition with her being sick, not having anything else lined up. It was just bad all around. I was … even though the thought of transition had been on my mind for long. I just didn't know the process of going about it. And what would happen if I did. But then the way that I ended up transitioning when they had drawdown. I think it was just like Thank God. Phew… it was like a relief ummm it just went from being very scary to being just very comforting in a way. I felt taken care of. I start talking and I forget what the question was. (laughs).	p. 9
Advice	
Morgan: I will say that my son is now 29 and he was 18 and Iraq was going on. He wanted to go into the military and be a Navy Seal and	p. 9-10

go fight the enemy and all that. I had been in my current job hearing from people that were in the military and I told him you know you might not get killed but there is a real good chance you would wish you were dead. And he didn't. And I'm glad he didn't. (Researcher: laughs). He just took a different path. It's different now a days.	
Morgan: Hummmm (pause). Take your time and get therapy. Definitely. Researcher: Can you… Morgan: It's a big transition (crosstalk). And I think that the experiences that women veterans go through are not the same experiences that someone living in Fort Lauderdale, going to the beach every weekend is going to go through. I think that umm I think they need time, depending on the person, depending on the experience the variables. I think they need some time to process. Researcher: So be ummm to take the time that they need. And also.. maybe ask for help if they need it? Morgan: Yeah! Absolutely! Ask for help if they need it. I think women are more apt to do that. Researcher: What makes you say that? Morgan: Ego. You know the male ego. (Researcher: laughs). You know the whole thing about asking for directions. (both laugh). My hope is that women are comfortable asking for help and they have their resources that they need. I talked to a student yesterday, a psychology student and he is doing telemental health. He is at the VA in Miami and they Skype or I think they use Skype with a guy in Jacksonville that can't get the services because he is in Jacksonville. So that is his practicum. So, he is doing telemental health. It is great. I would love too.	p. 11
Blaire: My advice is to not to be so hard on themselves, because it is a difficult transition. So, I would say seek some therapy some help. Because sometimes things a little rough and you are going from one identity to another. You are dealing with all sorts of things, going from one type of culture to one that is totally different so it can be shocking. Ummm How jobs work are different and stuff. So, I would seek help. I would also say before transition, educate yourself on certain programs and stuff that will help you and assist you. Ummm be on top of all that stuff, your medical, your career, you know all that stuff is extremely important because that can play a big part on how your transition goes. Because in my experience certain things started disappearing and I had to keep adding more stuff and I was like here it is again. So, all of that and ummm have a little bit of patience because it is not going to go as smoothly as sometimes, we imagine. Especially, when it comes to your benefits and VA part of it. And seek you know your good support system. Have a good system, have a support system. I feel you will need it.	p. 14

Researcher: So really start preparing yourself for that transition, and also knowing the difference between expectations versus reality. So being flexible and patient if things don't go according plan. Blaire: Yes! Researcher: And that support system. Blaire: Yes!	
Kelly: Give yourself at least 2 years to plan. Researcher: You mean backwards planning, so if gonna get out today, then they need start planning 2 years ago. Kelly: Absolutely. Give yourself that time to plan. And make sure this is what you want to do. And yes, if you have a family you have to take in consideration of the family. But give yourself time. Researcher: And what about after transition. So, once they plan or not planned, what advice would you give them after they separated at this point? Kelly: To pay attention to how they are feeling. Ummm.. and to check in if they have children to check in on them as well. They too are transitioning. You know from the life style. If they are married check in with your spouse. Check in. Make sure that you are ok mentally, emotionally, and physically. That would be my advice. Check in. Researcher: Not only with themselves but their support and their families. Kelly: Absolutely (cross talk) Researcher: And I'm guessing if they feel that it is not right, or someone says it's not right tell or check in with doctors or someone that can give them the … Kelly: Yeah. Researcher: and it is ok to check in. Kelly: Yeah, it's ok. Researcher: Is there anything you would like to add or clarify as we were talking things came up for you? Kelly: (pause). Just that this is with anything, but it is what you make it. So, the military can be tough on you but really it is what you make of it.	p. 11-12
Nicole: OHHHHH (softly repeats question back to self- inaudible). (long pause). I want to get this right. Researcher: Take your time, no rush. Nicole: UMMMMM not be afraid to ask for help. Researcher: okay, can you tell me what that means. Nicole: I think the help would be different depending on the person's situation. Whether it is help from family, help from friends, help from different organizations that are out there. We work as a team in the military. And then when you get out you feel like you don't have that team anymore. But there are so many other groups out there that are willing to help you. And you may feel like you are too proud to ask	p. 16

| for that help. I hear about women that get out and they don't have a place to live or they don't you know. And there are so many organizations out there that is going to help if they look and ask for that help. I don't know just don't be afraid to ask for help and… you get the information overload when you are leaving and keep all that paperwork, keep in touch with your friends that maybe still in the military. You are not doing it alone. I was fortunate that my situation was fortunate, but I could see how it was not that way, I would have felt very alone and maybe cast aside or something. Or felt like I didn't have support. I would want them to know that they have support from everyone. That they have support and not be afraid to ask for help. | |

Appendix G

Comparison Chart

Literature	Lit.	Themes	Blaire	Kelly	Morgan	Nicole	Researcher
Military Culture and Identity		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Military Total Institution		Yes	Yes	NA	NA	Yes	Yes
Military Hypermasculinity		No	Yes	NA	Yes	Yes	Yes
Military Sexual Harassment, Assault, and Violence		Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Gender Equality and Equity		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Women in Combat		No	NA	NA	No	NA	Yes
Lack of Support		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Family Labor Division		No	Yes	Yes	NA	Yes	No
Family Care Plans for Veterans		No	Yes	NA	NA	NA	Yes
Mental and Physical Health Concerns		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Divorce		No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	NA
Parenting Problems		No	Yes	No	NA	Yes	NA
Unemployment		No	No	No	No	No	No
Educational Development		No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Homelessness		No	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Family/Relational Issues		Yes	Yes	No	NA	NA	Yes
Intimate Partner Violence and Family Violence		No	No	No	No	No	No
Legal Problems		No	No	No	No	No	No

Themes	Lit. Themes		Blaire	Kelly	Morgan	Nicole	Researcher
Family Support: Before Joining the Military	NA		No	No	Yes	Yes	No
Family Support: After Joining the Military	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mandatory Conformity: Family Conformity	NA		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Mandatory Conformity: Military Conformity	Yes		Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Identity: Loss of Identity	Yes		Yes	Yes	NA	Yes	No
Identity: Gaining of Identity	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Service: Service after Service	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Service: Lessons Learned	No		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Gender Inequality	Yes		Yes	NA	Yes	Yes	Yes
Gender Inequality: Race Intersection	No		Yes	No	No	Yes	No
Gender Inequality: Disability Intersection	Yes		Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Gender Inequality: Pregnancy Intersection	Yes		No	Yes	No	No	No
Symptoms: Physical	Yes		Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Symptoms: Emotional	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Opportunities: Gained Opportunities	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Opportunities: Lost Opportunities	No		Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes

Yes= Present or discussed; No= Not Present or discussed; NA= Not Applicable

Biographical Sketch

Paula Boros is currently working on her Ph.D. in Family Therapy. She is a licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT), certified Hypnotherapist, certified equine therapist, American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) Clinical Fellow and Approved Supervisor, and a United States veteran. She received her Master's in Science in Family Therapy and a Bachelor's in Arts in Psychology.

She served in the Army for eight years with two combat deployments to Iraq. During her service, she received over 20 awards and honors to include the Defense Meritorious Service Medal (DMSM) for her work with foreign nationals and foreign militaries during deployments.

With over six years of experience, she has been able to provide therapy to clients with a variety of concerns including military, trauma, anxiety, PTSD, depression, dissolution of relationships, parenting and children struggles, to name a few. She provides therapy to individuals, couples, families, and groups.

Research interest includes military and understanding of systems specifically relationships. This work has led Paula to present internationally and nationally. Some presentations include 25th International Family Therapy Association (IFTA) in Spain-2017; 17th World Summit on Positive Psychology, Psychotherapy & Cogitative Behavioral Sciences in Canada- 2017; and 3rd International Conference on Mental health and Human Resilience in London-2017. Her personal and professional experience has allowed her to become a published author in *The Qualitative Report* and *Journal of Systemic Therapies*. She continues her interest by studying the lived experiences of women veterans during their transition back into civilian life for her dissertation.