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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE PERCEPTIONS OF THE VETERANS

TRANSITION INTO THE CIVILIAN WORKFORCE


A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO

THE GRADUATE SCHOOL IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF

THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE DEGREE

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY


COMMUNITY PSYCHOLOGY DOCTORAL PROGRAM

IN THE COLLEGE OF ARTS AND SCIENCES


BY

TIFFANY ALLEN-HAMPTON

Chicago, Illinois

April 30, 2019

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE PERCEPTIONS OF THE VETERAN
TRANSITION INTO THE CIVILIAN WORKFORCE


VETERAN TRANSITION INTO THE CIVILIAN WORKFORCE: A
PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY



NAME: TIFFANY ALLEN-HAMPTON




CERTIFICATION:    In accordance with the departmental and University policies, this
pilot research is accepted on behalf of Tiffany Allen-Hampton, in
partial fulfillment of Degree requirements for the PhD in
Community Psychology (College of Professional Studies and
Advancement) at National Louis University.



Chair: Dr. Bradley Olson, Ph.D.

Committee Member: Dr. Suzette Fromm-Reed, Ph.D.

Committee Member: Dr. Judah Viola, Ph.D.

A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE PERCEPTIONS OF THE VETERAN
TRANSITION INTO THE CIVILIAN WORKFORCE

Community Psychology Doctoral Program

Dissertation Notification of Completion

Doctoral Candidate: <u>Tiffany Allen-Hampton</u>

Title of Dissertation: <u>The Veteran Transition into the Civilian Workforce: A</u>
<u>Phenomenological Study</u>

Dissertation Advisor:     <u>Dr. Bradley Olson, Ph.D.</u>

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Date of Final Defense Meeting: <u>May 6<sup>th</sup>, 2019</u>

The above-named candidate has satisfactorily completed a dissertation as required for
attaining the Doctor of Philosophy degree in the Community Psychology Doctoral
Program (College of Professional Studies and Advancement) at National Louis
University.

Signature                                                    Date

_____          ____10/10/19____

_____          ____10/10/19____

_____          ____10/10/19____

**Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my son Aiden who put the fire in me to focus on an issue that

may impact the future generation of veterans. His birth did far more than make me a mother to

him, but to the issues of the veteran community and the struggles they may face during

transition. To my partner, for supporting me through this and for allowing me to express my

passions in many of our late-night discussions. To my family, who never doubted my ability to

accomplish this goal and for always believing in me, even when I doubted myself. To the

millions of veterans who are amongst us and who need our support in their transition process.

Lastly, this dissertation is dedicated to me. All of the late nights, early mornings and sacrifices

that were made, were worth it. This research, along with being a veteran and parent are amongst

my greatest accomplishments. Fly strong!

**Acknowledgements**

First and foremost, the acknowledgement goes to my institution, National Louis University for providing me with the support and guidance to accomplish my studies. To my dissertation committee Dr. Olson, Dr. Viola and, Dr. Fromm-Reed who imparted their years of wisdom in the field within me. I would also like to acknowledge all of the researchers who have taken the time to study the veteran population. Lastly, I would like to acknowledge the men and women in uniform both past and present whose sacrifice and selfless service have provided me with the motivation to add to this research.

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A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY ON THE PERCEPTIONS OF THE VETERAN
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**Abstract**

This study evaluated three specific factors affecting Veterans who have separated from military service and transitioned into the civilian workforce. The support and resources offered and received, as well as the participants' adaptability in handling the transition, were examined. Additionally, perceptions of success and transition readiness were studied. Prior research on veterans indicate that many face challenges beyond service, including difficulty in finding employment. The impacts of participating in supportive services and obtaining work, particularly in relation to how respondents perceive the post military experience as either aligned or not with their pre-existing knowledge and skill sets were considered. In Study 1, a quantitative examination of veterans and their soldier identity in their transition from the military to the civilian workforce was examined. Differences were found suggesting that gender differences in attitudes toward being a soldier depended on participants' current employment status. Study 2 uses a qualitative methodology to pursue the perceptions of female veterans to get a broader sense of their success in obtaining employment once separated from service. Using transition theory, identity theory, and the 4S model of transition, the themes that developed could be best represented in a broader three-pronged framework: perceptions of identity during service, motivation behind departure, and transition support. Based on the newly developed model, several possible future directions of research and practice are discussed.

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VETERAN TRANSITION INTO THE CIVILIAN WORKFORCE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

In 2017, 20.4 million men and women were reported as veterans, accounting for approximately eight percent of the civilian non-institutional population over the age of 18 (United States Department of Labor, 2017). Each year roughly 200,000 members transition out of the United States Armed Forces and into civilian life (United States Government Accountability Office, 2014). Many of these former service members have served during the Vietnam War (39%), Gulf Wars I and II (36%) and non-war periods (25%) (DOL, 2017). Ongoing conflicts and repeated duties have occurred since in Afghanistan, Iraq, and throughout the world. Approximately 70% of veterans surveyed who served in war report difficulty in transitioning from military to civilian communities (Schell & Marshal, 2008). Available data found that there are segments of the veteran population that experience barriers to economic competitiveness (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015). These findings bring awareness to the difficulties of reintegration, particularly around employment.

The changeover from veteran to civilian status includes the challenges involved with veterans finding ways to cope within their new role of citizenship and being prepared to part with, regardless of their branch, their long-identified role as a soldier. Overtime, veterans, overall, tend to lag behind compared with non-veterans. For some, the transition is welcomed after long years of service. For others, this can be a time filled with tremendous stress and uncertainty in obtaining normalcy as they navigate personal, mental, and professional disruptions reintegrating back into a non-militaristic society.

Some of the pre and post challenges faced involve the re-entry into a culture different from the one they left behind and the identities they formed in that very unique culture. Longer term obstacles or strengths can occur around the securing of long-term employment and

obtaining adequate and affordable housing. Identities, pre-existing backgrounds, gender

differences and institutional history and current perceptions of gender may all play a part in

different paths to seeking resources and therefore outcomes and experiences in relation to

transition into civilian life and workplaces. Many of these encounters can become difficult to

navigate and add to the stressors of the transition process.

Veterans returning into the workforce are disproportionately at risk for unemployment

within the first 15 months of separation (United States Department of Labor, 2017). During

periods of high national unemployment rates, a high proportion, over 50% of veterans, can

experience unemployment (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015). Studies found veterans who

were unemployed reported more community reintegration difficulties than those who were

employed (Sayer et al., 2011).

Based on a nationwide survey of members from the Iraq and Afghanistan Veteran

Association (2012), veterans reported "employment and jobs" to be the top issue they faced in

their transition. Seventeen percent of members surveyed reported being unemployed, 33% were

seeking alternative employment, and 66% of veterans interviewed believed that their skills were

not being used optimally in their current place of work. This survey, along with others conducted

after these findings were reported, brought awareness to the struggle of veterans transitioning

into civilian employment.

Many veterans struggle to identify how their knowledge and skills gained during military

service translates to civilian life (Kleykamp, 2013; Koenig et al., 2014). Realistically, some of

the skills learned while serving are not as beneficial as many expect and can cause issues with

reintegrating. For instance, at home, there are, ironically, sometimes (a) stricter accountability.

More specifically, some veterans can feel a corporation's need to know where employees are at

all times may be seen as excessively "controlling"; (b) the common cultural and yet individual

norms of stringency and what some might perceive as aggressiveness which are more widely

accepted in the military can be seen in civilian US culture as a complete lack of calm and

aggressive anger; (c) the trained skills to be devoid of emotion or expression do not always

translate well into civilian culture (Danish, 2013).

Female veterans face additional challenges, and because they have received less research

attention, it is consequential that they too often have been seen as an invisible population

(Strong, Crowe, & Lawson, 2017). Veterans faced with the tasks of finding employment after

serving can be a daunting one. The reality of becoming employed in a workforce, when not

having been exposed to work in civilian life, is a challenging one to navigate. A significant gap

is shown between specific skills needed from civilian employers and those that are held by the

job-seeking veteran (Chicas, Maiden, Oh, Young, & Wilcox, 2012). There are government

transition assistance programs designed to help these men and women find employment during

and after their change in status, however, these programs do not guarantee employment. As a

result, some of these veterans risk being unemployed after exiting.

The military culture demonstrates its exclusivity with distinctive uniforms, values, and

rites that promote cohesion and separation from civilian life (Koeszegil et al., 2014). These

factors both protect and create a sense of vulnerability for transitioning soldiers of all ranks. A

soldier is known for many things, one of them being resilience, and being able to recover swiftly

from obstacles faced during crisis. The ability to recover from a traumatic or highly adrenalized

events does not always correlate with the ability to recover from a transition in culture,

environment, or the civilian workforce. In a training environment, soldiers are surrounded by

their peers, or other soldiers working toward the same mission. Post-separation, this sense of

shared mission may not be a reality as soldiers are not always surrounded by those who are

transitioning from service, and they may feel alone in their new quest to adapt. Many times this

sense of disconnect can have a mental and emotional impact on the member and cause a deeper

spiral into a feeling of defeat or low self-worth.

Research supports the dichotomous existence between military life, characterized by

collectivism, social identity, discipline and personal sacrifice and civilian life, which is

characterized by individuality, equality of opportunity and self-gain (Bryan et al., 2012; Szayna

et al., 2007; Toh & Leonardelli, 2013). The dichotomy is important to highlight because it is

important to recognize that a healthy democracy requires a military that is not too far apart from

the society that it defends (Bryan et al., 2012). During reintegration some returning veterans may

experience struggles in getting along with non-veterans and may find it easier to relate to those

who share the experience of serving. They may also find civilian life meaningless relative to

their previous experiences (Bowling & Sherman, 2008).

**Transition Assistance**

The difficulty for veterans to communicate skills and experiences to civilian employers is

often experienced subsequent to the transition process. Career veterans who have devoted a

surplus of 10 years have had the least experience in writing a traditional resume or articulating

accomplishments in a way that translates across all sectors. Exposure to interviews by a hiring

authority and the search for employment itself are also aspects that go without significant

preparation. Transitional services are offered as soon as 24 months prior to separation (USGAO,

2014). The career transition goal is to develop the capability to adjust to the new experience

(Robertson & Brott, 2014). These government transition assistance programs are designed to

help these men and women find employment during and after their change in status, however,

these programs do not guarantee employment. As a result, some of these veterans risk being

unemployed after exiting.

Transition assistance programs typically lasts for a two-week period and is open for

members to attend during the last year of service. Although it is highly recommended to attend

such programs as soon as they are made available, many members tend not to participate until

they are much closer to ending their service (USGAO, 2014).

Transition programs cover a range of topics, including benefits, mental health services,

educational assistance and employment assistance. An average of three days out of the two-week

period are dedicated to the process of obtaining employment, and additional services are offered

for the soldier to independently utilize after the service agreement has been fulfilled. Though the

effectiveness of these services varies based on the assistance provided, they are rarely designed

to fit a particular individual need. This presents a significant challenge for those who actively

seek employment once their service has ended (USGAO, 2014).

## Review of Literature

The review of literature explored the knowledge and skills obtained through studies

within the discipline of community psychology and applied relevant findings into the area of

veterans who endured civilian workforce transition. This section will explore research on veteran

transition into civilian employment and related theories. The conceptual frameworks for this

study include transition theory (Schlossberg, 1991), work-role transition theory (Nicholson,

1984), and the identity control theory (Burke, 2007). This research focused primarily on

empirical studies and the applications of these theories to discover paradigms in the existing

treatment of workforce transition. The review of literature will attempt to draw a bridge to the

existing challenges of supporting military members post-separation.

Bridges and Bridges (2016) described the differences of a person in transition as opposed to a person experiencing change. Whereas change is situational, transition is more psychological. To expand, the transition usually includes a three-phase process people go through as they internalize and come to terms with the situation and the changes taking place as a result. The three-phase process, as depicted in Figure 1, involves: (a) letting go of the old ways and the old identity once held. It is during this initial phase the person will need help coping with the loss; (b) going through the in-between time when the old is gone but the new is not fully operational. During this phase it is essential to ensure the person is psychologically attempting to realign aspects of their lives to adapt to the transition; and (c) coming out of the transition and making a new beginning. This final phase is where the person begins to develop and accept the new identity as a result of accepting the transition (Bridges & Bridges, 2016).
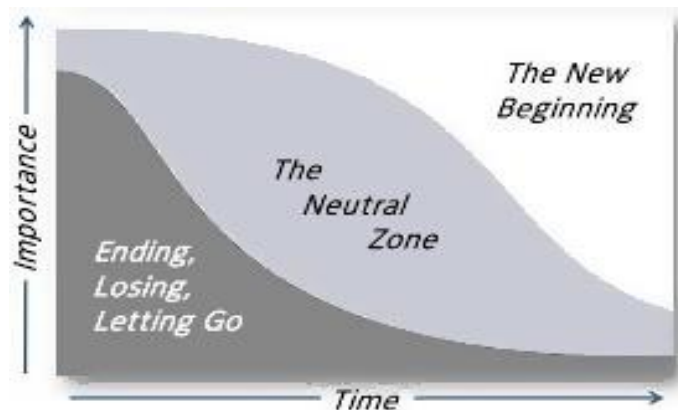


*Figure 1*. The individual in transition experiencing the three-phase process. From *Managing transitions; Making the most of change*, Bridges and Bridges (2015), Boston, MA: Da Copa Press.

Once the transition is expected to begin, the person must accept its occurrence by dealing with the resulting losses that often takes place. It is at this time that the support and resources designed to assist the soldier during this process will focus on the changes that will occur during

the initial phase of transitioning, as well as help them to uncover the losses that they may face. Bridges and Bridges (2016) stated, "it is the losses, not the changes, that they are reacting to".

For a veteran, the transition itself can take time to manage. The theorists call this period the "neutral zone" and claim it to be "one of the most difficult aspects to understand. Members anticipate the ability to move straight from the old and into the new (but) it is a journey from one identity to another and that kind of journey takes time (Bridges & Bridges, 2016).

**Transition Theory**

Schlossberg's transition theory is a human development model originating in 1981. This model is widely used to support research on adult career transitions with its primary focus on factors that retirees face when adjusting to life without employment. This theory is significant in this study. The theory helps identify the stages a veteran is going through when adjusting to life without the military. The theory suggested the need for transition counselors, programs, and strategies that should be provided to allow a retiree to properly adjust. Schlossberg's transition model has been previously used to study veteran transition into academic settings post separation. The resources needed, and obstacles faced were strongly considered in these studies and helped to identify system and policy changes that were needed in order to enhance positive outcomes (Griffin, & Gilbert, 2015).

According to Schlossberg, transition is defined as an event or non-event resulting in a change. An event usually deals with major life events that are either anticipated or unanticipated. An anticipated event may be getting married, obtaining a new job, whereas an unanticipated event would be a death in the family or the sudden loss of employment. A non-event is seen as a failed occurrence of an anticipated event. This can be considered as not receiving an expected

promotion or not being able to retire as originally planned. It is important to note that one can only be considered "in transition" by recognizing the experience of change (Schlossberg, 2011).

The transition theory consists of four key elements that impact a person's ability to cope with the transition. These elements are: (a) a *situation*, referring to what was happening at the time of transition; (b) *self*, referring to whom it was happening to at the time of transition; (c) *support*, referring to what help was available; and (d) *strategies*, referring to how the person copes (Schlossberg, 2011).

A *situation* provides insight into the individual's circumstances at the time of transition. The transition can be seen as being good or bad and is usually accommodated through additional challenges that may affect the person's perception. If the veteran's situation is not perceived as positive and is unplanned, this will impact how the event will be handled and cause additional stress in a person's ability to prepare oneself for the transition. A *situation* can be described as an injured veteran who can no longer serve in the Armed Forces due to the nature of an injury. If this individual served as the primary provider for the family, this situation may be perceived as negative due to the sudden urgency to find employment while adjusting to life with an injury.

*Self* gives understanding as to how a person's characteristics impact how one manages the situation. According to Schlossberg there are two dimensions that affect how a person can navigate through a situation. Personal characteristics such as gender, race and socioeconomic status make some individuals more likely than others to be successful in their transitions. Psychological resources involve personality characteristics or where an individual sees his or herself internally. Individuals with a high self-efficacy and resiliency tend to have more positive outcomes than those without such psychological resources (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012).

*Support* is regarded as an essential social element that involves the type of resources the person has available. The support available at the time of transition is extremely important to an individual's sense of well-being. Adaptation to the transition is seen as slow without the support and is considered a key component to the individual's achievement. The more resources provided to veterans the more likely they are to identify their transition as a positive experience. Coping responses are placed in three categories: modifying the situation, controlling the meaning of the problem and managing stress after the transition. Individuals are said to implement four coping modes: information seeking, direct action, inhibition of action, and intrapsychic behavior (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012).

*Strategy* creates awareness of the coping mechanisms constructed when a member faces a difficult situation. According to Schlossberg (2012), coping can occur at any time before, during or after a challenging situation. Coping is defined as "the overt and covert behaviors individuals use to prevent, alleviate, or respond to stressful situations (George & Siegler, 1981). Whether the transition is seen as a crisis event or a developmental adjustment the challenge grants an opportunity for growth and transformation. The concept of coping is explored throughout the various theories and is one that may require more research. The strategies people use are related to their psychological resources and can be impacted by their level of self-esteem. Pearlin and Schooler (1978) alerted against believing that the same coping efforts will work in all settings. The strategy of collective coping is addressed as being useful for interpersonal problems that a person cannot undo alone, and yet the technique is not always effective for issues that require more reflection and personal motivation.
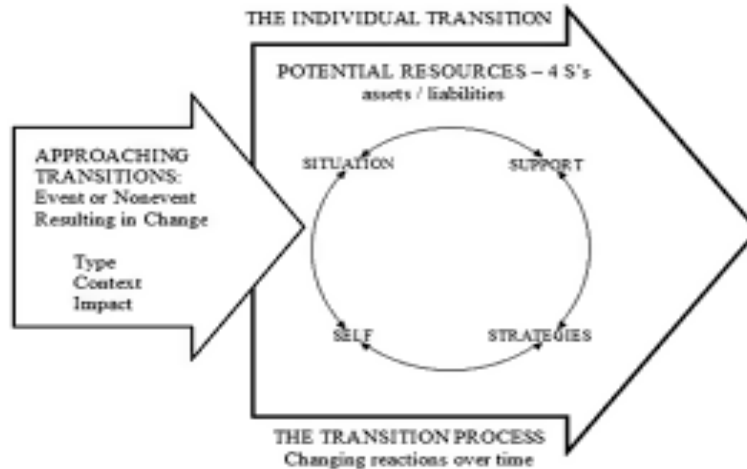
*Figure 2.* The individual in transition and coping strategies according to the 4S model.  From

*Counseling adults in transition: Linking Schlossberg's theory with practice in a real world* (4th

ed., p. 62), Goodman, Schlossberg, & Anderson (2011). New York, NY, Springer Publishing.

**Work-Role Transitions Theory**

Work-role transitions theory is an additional framework used and defined as any change

in employment status. Changes in employment status include unemployment, retirement and re-

employment (Nicholson, 1984). The theory also presents the potential consequences of mobility

and relates to the outcomes of job redesign and other examples of structural change in which the

work is radically reshaped by changes in the organization's goals or structure.

According to Nicholson, members should make work-role adjustments prior to their

transition in preparation for their new career roles. Three specific modes of adjustment are

considered: (a) coping responses; (b) identity changes; and (c) behavioral outcomes as a

consequence of adapting to a new environment (Nicholson, 1984). Veteran use of positive

methods of coping can be considered as a kind of personal development due to their ability to

adjust their frame of reference. The member can adjust to a certain role by changing skills or

lifestyle expectations to match the role being sought.

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A veteran's transition into the workforce is a specific occurrence that some researchers have attempted to explain. Work transitions, especially an unanticipated one, may leave a person in crisis (Anderson et al., 2012). Preparing for a change in role even when employment seems stable is recommended by many career counselors (Anderson et al., 2012).

At the point of separation, the service member becomes the veteran and is expected to exit from an institution that has supported and trained her or him to have very distinct behaviors, skills, and beliefs. As Zogas (2017) states, the veterans have learned the technical skills necessary to operate weapons, technology, and machinery. They have learned to act in extremely high-stakes situations; they have learned how to operate within an institutional hierarchy (Zogas, 2017). Much support is needed to assist the member into a more loosely formalized structure or system. Nicholson described novelty of job demands as the degree to which the role permits the active use of prior knowledge, skills, or habits. Ranging from low to high with a high level of novelty, meaning the veteran has little opportunity to exercise familiar behaviors and must obtain additional development in order to fit within the expectations of the new role (Nicholson, 1984).

**Identity Theory**

An identity, an internalized positional designation (Stryker, 1980), is held for the various positions a person holds within a given environment. These internalized positional designations can fall within certain identity categories that may affect one's role, social group, or personal identification. Individuals establish role identities that include all the meanings perceived to be associated with a particular role. They may also take on social identities that classify them as members of groups, having a group-based identity where there is uniformity in certain perceptions and beliefs (Burke, 2007). Personal identity is associated with the meanings one has,

to establish one's own identity, compared to a social role or group to which they may attach

themselves.

In Stryker's work on identity the influence of social structures is seen to influence one's

behaviors. Culture and socialization play a part in how a person interprets her or his role to be

played out in terms of soldier or veteran. It is important for the person to bring into one's role-

identity the misunderstandings one has about the role in order to properly negotiate with the role

should conflict arise (McCall & Simmons, 1978). Social identity occurs when a group shares

identities and they are able to evaluate themselves in the same way and have the same definitions

of who they are (Hogg, 2003). According to Hogg, group membership is a collective identity of

self and is governed by social perception as well as social conduct.

One diagram illustrates well the self-defined meanings or identity relevant to the

perceptions an individual attaches to identity. If a discrepancy occurs between perception and

regular identity, feedback received can cause a disconnect. As a result of the difference,

meaningful behavior is adapted to prevent any future disruptions. The disruption of these roles

can contribute to a significant amount of stress as veterans attempt to adjust the behavior and

therefore serve as an additional barrier in the reintegration process.
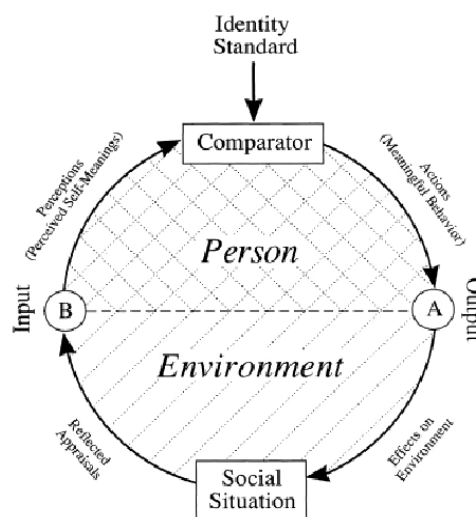
*Figure 3*. The feedback loop of an activated identity according to the identity model. From

Burke, P. J. (2007). Identity Control Theory. *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*.

doi:10.1002/9781405165518.wbeosi002

*Development of Identity in Female Veterans*

Gender and gender performance are explored to obtain a stabilized sense of how gender

may impact the veterans experience in transitioning. Specifically, females are interviewed in a

qualitative study to inform this research into their lived experiences pre- and post-military

service. Research conducted by Josselson (1987) explained women's development as being tied

to relationship connections and the attachments which they form with others, referred to as

anchoring. This study concluded that no matter the social setting, female identity was seen to be

in-relation with others (dependence) instead of the relation with their individual self

(independent). Recent findings on gender identity attempt to explore the complexity of gender

roles and female identity that does not include a broad sense of identity and fails to include

socio-economic status, ethnicity, or any other differentiating group which women belong to

(Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012).

Female soldiers comprise 14.9% of the DoD Active Duty force, while 1,166,434 men

comprise 85.1% of the DoD Active Duty force. Compared to 2000, the percentage of active duty

officers who are women has increased (from 14.4% in 2000 to 16.4% in 2013), while the

percentage of active duty enlisted members who are women has decreased slightly or remained

steady (from 14.7% in 2000 to 14.5% in 2013). Overall, the number and ratio of female officers

(39,286) to female enlisted members (164,609) is one female officer for every 4.2 female

enlisted members, while the number and ratio of male officers (199,587) to male enlisted

members (966,856) is one male officer for every 4.8 male enlisted members (International, 2014;

U.S. Census Bureau, 2013).

**Purpose of Study**

Too few studies have examined the perceptions of the experiences of female and male

veterans and how they have experienced their transition from the military into civilian

employment. The hope is that by understanding these experiences programs could be designed to

benefit current military members, veterans, career transition professionals –as well employers-at-

large – recognize insights into structural and procedural changes that could smooth military to

veteran transitions. Existing procedures have been put in place at the federal and state levels to

assist military members with the transition process. The two studies will, therefore, attempt to

provide additional conclusions that can help enhance the level and quality of transition services a

member receives pre and post separation.

Given that this study I is an attempt to reveal factors that can assist in the reduction of

unemployment and underemployment among transitioned service members, the hope is that

career transition professionals can gain greater awareness of the unique skills, coping strategies,

and barriers likely to be faced during the transition process. New insights from this study could

also assist professionals in providing more individualized counseling services which will help

identify the appropriate interventions needed to make the most significant impact on the

veteran's employment success.

Additionally, employers may find the results useful in better understanding the needs that

veterans require to obtain jobs in the field and roles according to their skills. The hope is that

employers can use some of these preliminary data to help identify ways to better support the

transition from military service to veteran status. Moreover, the results will hopefully provide a deeper understanding of how to assist female (and male) veterans in this transition.

The general purpose of this set of studies is to examine the perceptions of veterans in obtaining access to meaningful employment post-separation. Expected outcomes from the current research include the provision of empirical information not currently available that tests variables related to a more or less successful transitioning process. Specifically, this study will seek to address the following objectives: 1) to understand the influence of veteran identity in acquiring employment that meets their skills and knowledge sets; 2) to understand the significance of structured services, family members, and other supportive affiliations on the veteran's ability to obtain employment; 3) to explore Schlossberg's 4S model and Burke's identity control model as a means to understand the impact of factors on the transitional process. Additionally, the hope is that the research findings will help bring greater understanding of ways to more effectively prepare to transition veterans into the workforce and how employers and other professionals can best work toward obtaining, retaining, and assisting former service members with employment.

**Research and Guiding Questions**

In developing the research questions for the study, the types of challenges as well as supportive factors transitioning veterans face were reviewed. Research questions investigate the relationship among variables that the investigator seeks to know (Creswell, 2008). The research questions in this examination investigated the level of readiness members felt they achieved pre- and post-separation from military service. In support of the strong adaptability, rapid preparedness, and open mindset said to be had by military members, and the need to maintain these same characteristics even after the transition is underway.

The guiding questions for study one were:

1. Are veterans properly prepared to seek the type of employment that closely matches their

   skill sets upon transitioning?

2. What supports or resources are most effective in supporting employment among

   transitioning veterans?

### Study 1: Quantitative Study on Male and Female Veterans

**Method/Design**

Study one began using a quantitative non-experimental research approach in the form of

self-administered questionnaires. A survey to explore the attitudes and opinions of a small

veteran population was followed by a phenomenological research strategy involving qualitative

analysis. Phenomenological research is an area of inquiry which identifies the essence of human

experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants. The procedure involves studying a

small number of subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and

relationships of meaning (Moustakas, 1994).

The research approach utilized the survey for participants to complete an online survey.

The instruments for the study's collection are provided (see Appendix A). The veterans'

perception of self, the resources made available to them, and their relationship with positive

employment outcomes, including fit or satisfaction, were measured using a quantitative study.

**Participants**

A purposive sampling method was used to recruit 94 separated military veterans for the

quantitative portion of the study. Veteran participants were recruited through various online

military support groups, including one professional veteran site and a virtual support group

consisting of recently separated veterans from all branches of service. Members were asked

through various online posts and email to participate in a self-generated survey containing

questions exploring their perceptions around their transition from the military and into the

workforce. A link to the survey, hosted on a survey site, SurveyMonkey was shared within the

post and email. Both male and female veterans were asked to share in this work in an effort for

the researcher to gain an understanding from both perspectives. The only exclusion provided was

that of their veteran status. Participants were only accepted if they identified themselves as a

veteran or a person who served in the military but was no longer employed in that organization.

Respondents received a consent form prior to the start of the survey in SurveyMonkey (see

Appendix B). The consent form informed participants on the use of the data collected being

provided for independent research and provided them the opportunity to agree or disagree with

moving forward into the survey. At no point, throughout the survey were respondents asked to

provide their identity. Only demographic information was obtained from the participant.

Website links to the electronic surveys were shared with those agreeing to participate.

The protection of the participants is a primary concern for the researcher and the researcher's

institutional review board. Significant risks to participants' safety were not anticipated.

**Sampling Procedures and Instrumentation**

Participants for this study were deliberately targeted individuals with specific

characteristics and providing the most reasonable and accessible manner for obtaining

appropriate participants (i.e., separated military veterans). Veterans included in the study had

separated from service at any point of time and were not excluded based on any status

classifications (i.e., gender, military rank, and employment status). Surveys that did not provide

evidence of prior military service were excluded from the study.

The survey instrument used was specifically designed for this research. The questions generated were assembled by the researcher and no modified instruments were used. The survey tool used was SurveyMonkey (SurveyMonkey.com), a service that allows the researcher to create an independent survey and post it online or share via email. SurveyMonkey can quickly generate reports that include descriptive and graphed information (Creswell, 2009).

The web-based survey consisted of four sections; the consent form, demographic information, career information and an attitudinal Likert scale. The consent form provided at the start of each survey allowed the participant to closely understand and accept the expectations of the survey. Once consent was given, participants were asked to proceed with the survey. The demographic section contextualized the groups of veterans completing it. For example, branch affiliation, educational attainment and career field obtained while in service were a few of the questions used to inform their status. The career section explored the qualifications and experiences of each participating veteran along with their perceptions around support. Finally, a Likert continuous scale format containing measures ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree were used to understand the respondent's range of likeability in specified situations that were perceived to occur as a result of the transition. Respondents had the opportunity to review each sentence and identify the extent of its strength, or weakness, based on their personal experiences. The instrument for the study's collection is provided (see Appendix A).

**Data Collection and Analysis**

Data collection was initiated with the Institutional Review Board's approval. The research received full approval and the first collection of data began. The collection involved creating a web-based, internet survey that was administered online. The survey (see Appendix B) was used to gather information from 94 respondents. Participants were also reminded that they

could skip any question they did not feel comfortable answering, and they could stop completing

the survey at any time.

Preliminary data analyses were conducted using Statistical Package for the Social

Sciences (SPSS) 20 (IBM Corp., 2011). This analysis included the following descriptive

statistics: frequencies, the mean, median, range, standard deviations and percentages. The data

collected during the survey was analyzed to provide keen insight into the career-transition

adaptability, readiness, and support a veteran has prior to separation from service.

A specific associational approach was used to relate variables within the study. In the

associational approach, the independent variable is assumed to be continuous (Creswell, 2009).

Through analysis of the respondent survey data, two dependent variables were identified:  1) *are

you employed*, and 2) *are you currently in a position that matches your skill set*.

Five independent variables were used in this analysis: 1) *I try not to get discouraged but

it is difficult*; 2) *I have had to settle for an undesirable job in order to provide for myself

financially*; 3) *it was difficult to see myself as anything other than a soldier;* 4) *when at work, I

ask for help when I need it;* and 5) *I prefer to make my own decisions about how to do my work*.

These variables are distinct from one another and could potentially impact the member's success

in the attainment of employment. The independent variables, or predictors, have the potential to

show a predictive relationship between one or more of the dependent variables.

### Study 1: Results

This study examines the perceptions of personal identity as well as resources and support

offered in assisting transitioning veterans in obtaining employment. Though this subject has

proven to be a well-researched topic, the distinct differences between male and female support

and perceived support, provide the opportunity for a new contribution to the literature, thus

increasing the understanding of how the two populations can become the most successful in receiving supportive services.

*Profile and Description of the Respondents*

The survey was administered to a convenience sample of 100 veterans who served in the following branches of service: Army, Navy, Marines, and Air Force. The respondents were located in various parts of the United States. The results provided are based on the data collected from 94 respondents who participated in the online survey.

Of the 94 participants, approximately 59% were females and 41% were male. Table 1 depicts the branch in which they served: 47% of the respondents served in the Army, 31% served in the Air Force, 14% of participants served in the Navy, 7% in the Marines and 2% of the population's branch are unknown. As shown in the table below, most respondents served in the Army.

Table 1.

*Respondent Population by Branch of Service*

| Branch of Service | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Army | 43 | 45.7% |
| Air Force | 29 | 30.9% |
| Navy | 13 | 13.8% |
| Marines | 7 | 7.4% |
| Total | 92 | 100.0% |

**Education and Military Occupational Specialty**

Table 2 shows a cross-tab analysis of the highest education level by gender of the 92 respondents that participated in answering the question: 7% of respondents received a high school degree, 20% obtained some college, 15% received an Associate degree, 28% held a Bachelor degree, 27% obtained a Graduate degree and 1% obtained a Professional degree.

Additionally, the respondents' military occupational specialty (MOS) were captured in the survey. A cross-tab analysis was performed to provide a more in-depth view of work performed while in service. The top three occupations were identified as: *combat operations*, 23% (F=17%, M=34%), *business administration* 14% (F=11%, M=17%), and *health-care practitioners* 15% (F=23%, M=5%).

Table 2.

*Highest level of degree obtained by Gender*

|  | High School | Some College | Associates | Bachelors | Graduate (MBA, MS, MA) | Professional (PhD, MD, JD) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Female | 3.8% | 20.8% | 18.9% | 32.1% | 24.5% | 0.0% |
| Male | 12.8% | 20.5% | 10.3% | 23.1% | 30.8% | 2.6% |
| Total | 7.6% | 20.7% | 15.2% | 28.3% | 27.2% | 1.1% |

**Departure from Military and Employment** - Participants were asked to identify the reason for departing the armed forces. The two categories provided were planned, which may include a retirement or the decision to not extend a service contract; or unplanned, which may have included a personal injury that prevented them from fulfilling their service. The results were separated by gender and concluded that females were more likely to experience an unplanned separation than males (F=27, M=5).

Table 3.

*Summary of Planned and Unplanned Departures by Gender*

| Predictors | Planned (i.e., retirement, non-extended contract) | Unplanned (i.e., injury, conduct) | Frequency Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| Female | 28 | 27 | 55 |
| Male | 34 | 5 | 39 |
| Total | 62 | 32 | 94 |

The most recent employment status of the veteran was asked to provide insight into their

ability to obtain employment along with the psychological factors that may have or have not

aided them in their current employment status after separation.

*Independent Samples (t-test)*

Using a t-test sample as seen in Table 4, the assumptions were tested and satisfied with

the following findings; F = 3.78, p = .055. These results suggest that individuals who were more

comfortable seeking help at work were more likely to become employed in a job that matched

their skill set (M = .119; SD = .134). The result of the identity variable was tested and returned;

F =.353, p = .554. The issue of identity and employment overall did not yield significant findings

to assume this created an impact (M = .492; SD = .134).

Table 4.

*Independent Samples Test*

| | t-test for Equality of Means | | |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| | *T* | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
| I ask for help | .893 | 92 | .374 |
| Identify as soldier | 1.78 | 92 | .077 |
| Had to settle | .327 | 92 | .744 |
| Get discouraged | .267 | 92 | .790 |
| I prefer to make decisions | -.632 | 92 | .529 |

*Cross tab analysis*

Females were found to have a higher difficulty in seeing themselves as anything other

than a Soldier as opposed males.

Table 5.

*Participant Results by Gender in Difficulty to Identify as Anything Other than a Soldier with a*

*Dependent Variable of Skills Match*

| Employed? | | t | df | Sig. |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Matching skill/educational level | 4.696 | 51 | .000 |
| Not Matching skills/education level | 1.96 | 37 | .057 |

**Quantitative Analyses (Regressions)**

The administered survey consisted of a series of questions about support and resources
received as well as their outlook on transitioning from the military. A Likert scale measuring the
degree of each variable along with a nominal scale to measure specific resource designations
were used. In total, there were four regression analyses with two dependent variables broken
down by gender. The two dependent variables were employment and their perception of the
match between their skills and their occupations, and analyses were separated by gender. In prior
pre-analyses more demographic variables were included, such as education, age, amount of time
in the military, but none of those variables were significant and were left out in subsequent
analyses. In all cases logistic regressions were used because of the dichotomous yes - no
variables.

The first stepwise regression model predicted how veterans perceived living up to their
fullest potential. After the stepwise analyses were run the majority of the above predictors were
removed from the model. Table 6 shows the regression analyses predicting employment on a
categorical scale (yes, no), separate regressions were run for female and male participants. For
the females the variable "prefer to make decisions at work" had a positive beta, suggesting that
the more females prefer to make decisions at work, the more they are likely to be employed. The
beta for "try not to get discouraged" was negative suggesting those who were not employed were
trying not to get discouraged and suggests that they were fighting to keep themselves
encouraged. More on this in the discussion portion.

Males who were unemployed held a similar struggle with keeping encouraged. Of all the predictors included in the initial model, these are the psychological variables most related to their employment situation. What is interesting for males is that their identification with being a soldier, even today was consistent with their employment status.

Table 6.

*Regression Analysis of Employment*

|  | Predictor | B | S.E | Wald | df | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Female Step 5a | Prefer to make decisions at work | .995 | .437 | 5.177 | 1 | .023 |
|  | Try not to get discouraged | -.845 | .396 | 4.55 | 1 | .033 |
| Male Step 5a | Try not to get discouraged | -.751 | .399 | 3.54 | 1 | .060 |
|  | Identified being a Soldier | .898 | .456 | 3.87 | 1 | .049 |

Table 7 is essentially the same regression analyses with the different dependent or outcome variable of whether they felt there was a match in their skills and their current occupation. While participants who are not employed are bound to feel there is not a match with their skills and their employment; the important part is the predictor variables that are most related to their current situation. In this case, trying not to get discouraged is still the most prominently related variable for males. For females, there were two significant variables. Their willingness to ask for help at work was positively associated with their sense of match. Negatively related, no doubt due to either unemployment or current job dissatisfaction, the thought of "having had to settle" was significant.

Table 7.

*Regression Analysis of Skills Match*

|  | Predictor | B | S.E | Wald | df | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Female Step 6 | Identified with being a Soldier | .477 | .294 | 2.63 | 1 | .104 |
|  | Ask for help at work | 1.33 | .608 | 4.835 | 1 | .028 |
|  | Had to settle | -1.00 | .320 | 9.80 | 1 | .002 |
| Male Step 7 | Try not to get discouraged | -1.01 | .449 | 5.14 | 1 | .023 |

A two by two ANOVA was run (Tables 8 & 9). The two independent variables included employment (yes, no) and gender (male and female). The dependent variable was the extent to which participants felt during their transition, and whether it was difficult to see themselves as anything other than a soldier. The main effect for females showed that overall they had more difficulty. The interaction was marginally significant at .06, suggesting that gender does not matter for those who are employed. However, as can be seen in Figure 4, unemployed females felt it was difficult to ever see themselves as anything but a soldier. The unemployed male veterans felt that it was mostly effortless to see themselves as something other than a soldier. In the discussion section, further hypotheses will be discussed in an attempt to understand this interesting relationship.

Table 8.

*Test of Between- Subjects Effects*

| Source | Type III Sum of Squares | df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Corrected Model | 11.80 | 3 | 3.94 | 2.340 | .079 |
| Intercept | 604.00 | 1 | 604.60 | 359.200 | .000 |
| Gender | 10.10 | 1 | 10.10 | 6.020 | .016 |
| Employ_Status Gender | 1.41 | 1 | 1.41 | .841 | .362 |
| Employ_Status Error | 148.10 | 88 | 1.68 | | |
| Total | 1000.00 | 92 | | | |
| Corrected Total | 159.90 | 91 | | | |

*Note: Dependent variable: It was difficult to see myself as anything other than a soldier*

Table 9.

*ANOVA: Gender and Employment*

| Gender | Employed | Mean | Std. Error | 95% Confident Interval Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Female | No | 3.43 | .324 | 2.79 | 4.08 |
| | Yes | 3.13 | .213 | 2.71 | 3.55 |
| Male | No | 2.10 | .410 | 1.28 | 2.91 |
| | Yes | 2.96 | .241 | 2.48 | 3.44 |
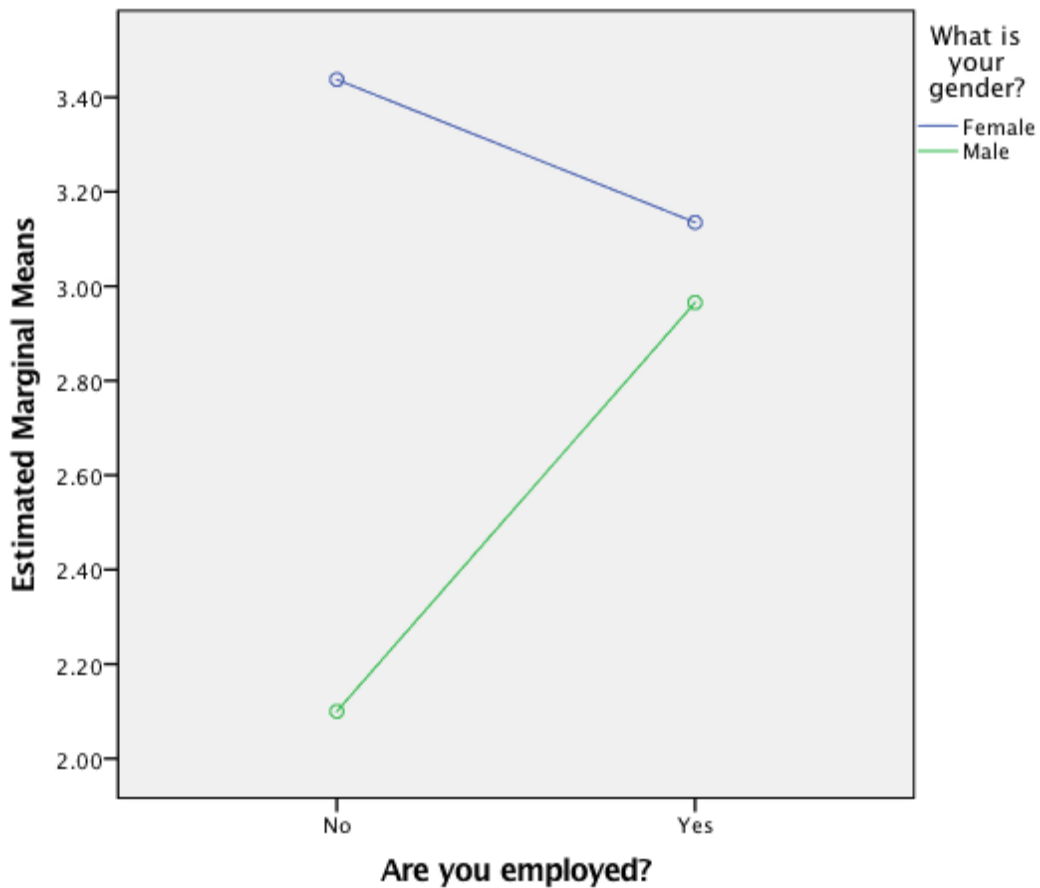
*Figure 4.* Estimated marginal mean. Question: It was difficult to see myself as anything other than a soldier.

## Study 1: Discussion

Two significant findings were discovered from the analyzed data as the transition into civilian employment was explored. First, the veterans' perspective when divided by gender contained significant distinctions and helped to better illustrate a scenario of the challenges both genders endured. Second, the confidence level of a member's re-integration impacted their ability to cope with their separation. Within each of these themes are areas where facilitation or counseling services may be beneficiary to further uncover and explore the distinctions and confidence levels using personalized services.

In relation to the findings identified, a member's confidence level can influence their ability to cope with their situation. From the survey, it was discovered that the females who participated in the study identified more closely with being a soldier post-separation as compared to the males. When analyzing the data based on gender, it was discovered that females had a more difficult time leaving the military than did the males. According to Schlossberg (2012), several characteristics impact the way a person will see themselves; gender, socioeconomic status, ego development, physiological resources, etc., all play a role. Social stigmas associated with being a female veteran may also provide additional challenges in how they perceive themselves (Springer, 2017).

Researchers have concluded that the adaptability and recovery of a veteran is more likely to occur if they have multiple coping strategies (Schlossberg, 2011). Members who obtained their education post-secondarily and who took advantage of supportive services prior to separation were expected to yield more positive findings than those that did not. The methods in which a veteran chooses to prepare for their transition is important to understand when attempting to provide further assistance in the process. Those who take advantage of these resources are seen to be more prepared for the obstacles that lie ahead as opposed to those who felt as if no assistance was needed.

Challenging dynamics impact the transition from military to civilian employment. Past studies have brought awareness to the encountered obstacles. The difficulties veterans face post-separation have often been linked to mental health challenges and the subsequent inability to obtain or retain employment. Those who do not seek support after separation have been found to have more trouble in obtaining employment. These same members have a low level of certainty in terms of their strengths, skills, and satisfaction with the transition process, thus causing them

to encounter difficulties in obtaining any employment, but in particular, employment that is

believed to meet their skill set.

When veterans work in positions misaligned with the skills acquired while in service, a

negative impact on confidence can occur and further challenge employment levels. As displayed

in Table 7 (Step 6 and Step 7), female and male veterans who struggled more with hopelessness

(I tried not to get discouraged, $p=$ .002), or defeatism, (I had to settle for a less qualifying

position, $p=$ .023), held a higher level of unemployment than those that did not share that as a

struggle. Military transition is a challenging event that requires deep understandings of military

separation and reintegration of the workforce. Given the barriers to integration, veterans can

easily face overwhelming feelings of hopelessness when returning home to look for employment.

There are many support services, conveniently and proximately located near military

installations that can be accessed at any time and help with the transition process. According to

the United States Government Office 2014 Report, there are 99 national programs identified by

the Department of Defense to assist with the transition of military veterans. These programs offer

an array of services throughout the country with just 18% identified as employment assistance

programs. Additionally, 46% were related to mental and physical health services, 13% to

education assistance, and 23% related to counseling and case management services. The

employment programs have been charged with assisting service members in professional

abilities such as resume writing, interview skills, and job search techniques that will help them

prepare for reintegration (DoD, 2014).

The improved targeting and strengthening of employment counseling services, both how

to apply for jobs and how to succeed in them if offered both pre- and post-separation, could be

the key to improving the hopelessness or defeated positions of some military veterans. It is

worthwhile to return to Schlossberg's transition theory, Nicholas' work transition theory, and Burke's identity control theory as potential tools to assist in understanding not only the obtaining of employment but of employment fit or satisfaction.

Utilizing Schlossberg's 4S model to establish a stronger consideration of the veteran and with it, the knowledge, skills, and abilities they can provide to an organization may be beneficial. Although there is an absence of civilian level industry specific understanding, the veteran holds the skills as well as work experience that can be seen as comparable to that of the non-veteran. Service members require the support from transition counselors, business leaders, family, and government agencies in order to facilitate a successful transition into the civilian workforce. The Department of Defense (DoD) has an increased focus and inherent responsibility to provide relevant workforce readiness support across the entire military service lifecycle, from the initial recruitment to the members' transition from service.

The findings suggest that veterans who separated the Armed Forces in a planned event, such as retirement or non-extended contract, held a higher level of employability compared to those that separated during a non-planned event such as an injury or misconduct. The consistency received across supportive services held little variance and is believed to be one of the success factors during the transitional process. The data showed that most participants felt that they had someone to go to for support, including friends and family members. Previous reports show the significance of having a supportive network which is even stronger when they include other veteran members.

As indicated previously, veterans in this study who displayed a higher perception of settling for a position that did not match their skill set were more likely to strongly identify with being a soldier post-separation (Tables 6 & 7). In separating regression results by gender in

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Table 8 (Step 6), females who identified strongly with being a soldier post-separation returned mildly significant results ($p= .104$), and admittedly asked for help in employment ($p= .028$), were more likely to obtain a position that closely aligned with their skills set. The theory of identity or the way in which people perceive themselves to be, can dramatically alter their success in re-integrating into the civilian community.

As of 2015, females were noted as one of the fastest growing groups in the military with more than two million; roughly 10% of the population (Springer, 2017). The intersectionality of roles held by females can be difficult to manage and in turn can affect the level of stress encountered during a transition. Burke (2006) argued that the lack of identity verification leads to negative emotions. He also included the validation of the identity process as that the meanings held in one's identity standard are equal to their perception of the overall self in a given situation. If individualized counseling is offered to all members pre- and post-separation, including more in-depth psychological assistance for the female veterans, the way in which they are able to handle any potential disconnections could dramatically shift in a more positive direction as they work to adjust to life after the military.

### Study 2: Qualitative Study of Female Veterans

The findings of Study 1 suggested intriguing relationships between perceptions of personal identity, resources, and supports for Veterans with their employment status. The gender differences found and in particular how the identity of female veterans around being a soldier may relate to employment and general quality of life was intriguing. From the beginning of the conception of these studies, the interest has been in the transition process from military to veteran/civilian life. Consistent with this, the two guiding questions for Study 2 were:

1.    How the perceptions of female veterans around their past and present identities relate to their overall experiences in obtaining employment and their quality of life.

2.    How female veterans describe their process in navigating through the transition from military into civilian-life.

## Study 2: Method

A qualitative study was conducted to obtain a better understanding of the ways in which female veterans experience their transitions into the workforce or difficulties in entering the workforce. The small sample size for this qualitative, phenomenological inquiry allowed for the gathering of extensive detail and data about the participants' experiences of their lives within the military, their current quality of life, and their transition, up until the current day. The research conducted by Moustakas (1994) and Koch (1999) argues, within the qualitative literature, that the phenomenological approach is most appropriate when attempting to explore the feelings and perceptions of participants. The approach is particularly useful in its ability to uncover underlying themes that are critical to understanding the complexity of phenomena like the relationship between identity and life transitions for female veterans.

An additional purpose of this qualitative research was to build on the findings of the quantitative research conducted as part of Study 1. It also serves as an attempt of the researcher to explore the patterns among the diverse views female veterans hold to be true, particularly after they have transitioned into the civilian environment. The goal of most qualitative research is not to generalize data to a population beyond the sample, but rather to describe the essence of the participants' experiences. Yet in this current mixed method research, the qualitative interviews help the researcher to obtain a rich, in-depth understanding of the generalizable, quantitative findings from Study 1.

The individual interviews with female veterans were intended to create a more conversational atmosphere with the women that would invite a secure and trusting place for thought and reflection of experiences and emotions. Nevertheless, a sense of trust and security is not always easy to achieve. The participants in Study 1 were different from the participants in Study 2, requiring the researcher to establish a new sense of trust with the participants.

A consent form was provided to all participants prior to the start of collecting data. The consent form stated explicitly that participation in the survey was, from start to finish, voluntary, and that no penalty from the researcher or institution would result from early departure or otherwise declining to participate.

The interviews were conducted using two modalities: SurveyMonkey and one-on-one personalized recorded phone interviews. The researcher elected to use the online survey platform SurveyMonkey due to its efficient data gathering methods. It also provides web support, survey distribution, and can assist with survey analysis. The decision to use both an in-person and written response interview had to do with the potentially difficult emotional nature of the research, allowing the participant to choose the modality with which she was most comfortable. By allowing the choice of an online format, the methodology provided an additional level of comfort for the participant. Prior to selecting these two modes of delivery, an attempt was made to recruit female veterans for an in-person interview in various military affiliated social networks. This led to very little initial response. Therefore, the researcher chose to allow an additional mode of participation, which included allowing those interested to conduct the interview using SurveyMonkey in lieu of a one-on-one interview. Participation was anonymous. In fact, a larger percentage of participants preferred to share their experiences privately and at

their own convenience using SurveyMonkey**.** Data was stored in a locked private digital file and

only the researcher conducting this study has access to the data.

**Participants**

Approximately 25 female veterans were contacted either face-to-face, by email, or by

phone to obtain a sample of nine participants. Participants were deliberately targeted individuals

within the researcher's social network, either close or one or two degrees of separation. The ages

of the participants for this study ranged from approximately 25 to 60. The age of 25 was chosen

to accommodate at least one contracted period of military service of three to five years. Female

veterans included in the study could have been separated from service at any point of time. The

employment status of the female veterans varied from employed and unemployed.

**Data Collection**

Following additional approval from the IRB for the qualitative interviews, all participants

received an informed consent document prior to beginning any data collection. They were

notified that while the results of this study may be published or otherwise reported to scientific

bodies, one's identity would in no way be revealed. Participants were also given the option to

agree or disagree with this before proceeding with a statement that read "Do you agree with the

above terms?" (See Appendix E). The researcher was able to utilize the network of female

veterans obtained throughout years of military service to recruit participants. The SurveyMonkey

link was shared in a military connected social group to also recruit any additional members that

would be interested in providing a response.

**Interview Protocol**

Semi-structured qualitative questions were created to explore the phenomenological

perspective participants had of their life experiences serving in the military to their transition into

the civilian workplace and how their identity influences or is shaped by social forces.

Important to both parties was the participant's understanding and agreement to the

interview. Whether in person or by phone, the interviews would be recorded and transcribed.

Recording and transcribing the interview implied consistency, reliability, and provided the

opportunity for the participant to verify the data.

The formulation of the research questions was based on previous veteran information

gathered from Study 1. The intent was to ask questions relevant to the experiences associated

with being a female transitioning from military to civilian status as well as seeking employment.

Answering the questions as honestly as possible provided the necessary objectivity and

credibility needed for this study. The relaxed atmosphere of the interview process provided all

participants the opportunity for honest feedback to the questions. To mitigate the risk of a

respondent feeling uncomfortable discussing physical or psychological injuries, the researcher

used open ended questions that allowed the participants to guide the discussion based on their

own comfort level.

The actual interview protocol, found in Appendix A, combined phenomenological and

life-story approaches. Much like the surveys within Study 1, Study 2 interviews consisted of four

sections; demographic information, pre-military experiences, experiences while in service and,

post military experiences with employment. The audience for study 2 was different from those

whom participated study 1. The demographic section allowed for the simple data collection and

contextualization of the groups of veterans completing it. Some of the questions included were;

a) How old are you in years? b) How many years did you serve in the military? c) Are you

employed?

The fuller interview, averaging approximately 40 minutes focused on a variety of

questions to get more involved responses about the issues of interest. The interview progressed

more slowly, starting with pre-military experiences in order to understand the motivations of

joining the Armed Forces and what those experiences felt like. Those initial, slower questions

allowed started participants off in reflecting about what their subjective experiences were while

serving in the military. For the phone interviews at least, the slower building of questions

allowed the participant to gain comfort in discussing the final section, which included more

difficult questions about their post-military experiences and the perceived impact those

experiences had on participant transition into civilian life.

The sections of the interviews were organized in such a way that allowed the participant

to recall events in a systematic fashion to tell their story in an order that built on the previous

question. First, demographic information was obtained to assess their length of time in service

and included their age and educational level. Second, questions were raised to explore their

experiences before entering the military along with the motivations allowing them to join.

Additionally, the experiences while in military service and the times in which identity was

consciously negotiated are raised. Finally, the circumstances surrounding their separation are

discussed, including their ability to navigate from one major life event to another.

As can be found in the appendices, there were much more extensive questions about the

community psychology of the participants. Additional questions asked by the interviewer

included: *Can you tell me about some of your experiences that led to you joining?, Were there*

*times when you perceived a struggle to fit in as a female?, Describe what it was like to be a*

*female in the military?, Do you feel as if your experiences in the military have impacted your*

*employment experiences?* (See Appendix B).

The sample included nine female veterans, three who were unemployed, and six who

were employed. A total of seven females served in the Army, while one was in the Marines, and

one in the Navy. The research intentionally explored the female veterans' perception of their

time in service as well as the transition process to discover themes or patterns possibly linked to

the phenomenon. The interview was used to obtain data to analyze for themes or patterns that the

participants themselves believed as the truth.

## Study 2: Results and Discussion

### Credibility of the Data and Subsequent Analysis

The personal and collective identity of the researcher is as a female, African American

veteran who has a desire to support veterans in their transitions from military to civilian life.

From this researcher's perspective, participants offered authentic responses of lived experiences

that were fair and honest. The empirical data gathered from participants was found to be

powerful, persuasive descriptions, especially in combination with the researcher's own past

experiences in the military and as a veteran. If validity refers to authenticity, reliability refers to

dependability and consistency (Neuman, 2006). The documentation of the research interviews,

transcribing, and reporting were conducted consistently and dependably meeting the reliability

definition. Once the data were collected and the interviews transcribed, a mixed method

approach of both grounded theory and inductive coding was utilized to determine themes. After

examinations of the data two evaluators were used to increase reliability in the identification of

themes.

**The Analysis Process**

The analysis plan and the sequence of the coding and interpreting the themes was an extensive process. Given the theories utilized and the prior quantitative data from Study 1, this could not be considered a purely grounded theory analysis. Inductive coding was also used to identify pre-existing themes the researcher wanted to study further as a result of Study 1. Nevertheless, close attention was paid to the themes that emerged from the participant interviews.

The initial step involved working with the raw data (i.e. transcriptions) obtained from the participant interviews. Typed notes were used by the researcher to document responses as well as behavior observed during the interview. These notes were used, along with the recordings to provide a detailed account of the responses as well as to organize and prepare the data for reflection of its overall meaning, as identified as the second and third step. Once all data were read and the researcher obtained a thorough understanding of the content and the events, themes were identified.

Themes were discovered from the most commonly referred to phrases or meanings provided in participant responses. The researcher used qualified three or more similar responses as a measure to explore potential themes within the responses. Coding the data, as shown in the fourth step, is the process of organizing the materials in chunks or segments of text before bringing meaning to information (Creswell et al., 2009). The researcher used a spreadsheet created in Microsoft excel to place all transcribed data and associate it with a respondent. Themes were later identified through the transcription process and highlighted near each response. Respondents were also given code names to protect their identity and to also allow the researcher a more efficient way of organizing the transcribed data.

A codebook was created to allow for a more efficient process of interpreting the data. Inductive analysis was used as a way to derive certain concepts, themes or models through interpretations made from the raw data (Thomas, 2006). The inductive coding approach was used to establish clear links between the researcher's objectives and to ensure they were justifiable given the objective of the research (Thomas, 2006). This process allowed the researcher to efficiently organize the data for interpretation in order to effectively discover the themes or categories to shape them into a general description of lived experiences, or phenomenon as identified in steps five through eight.
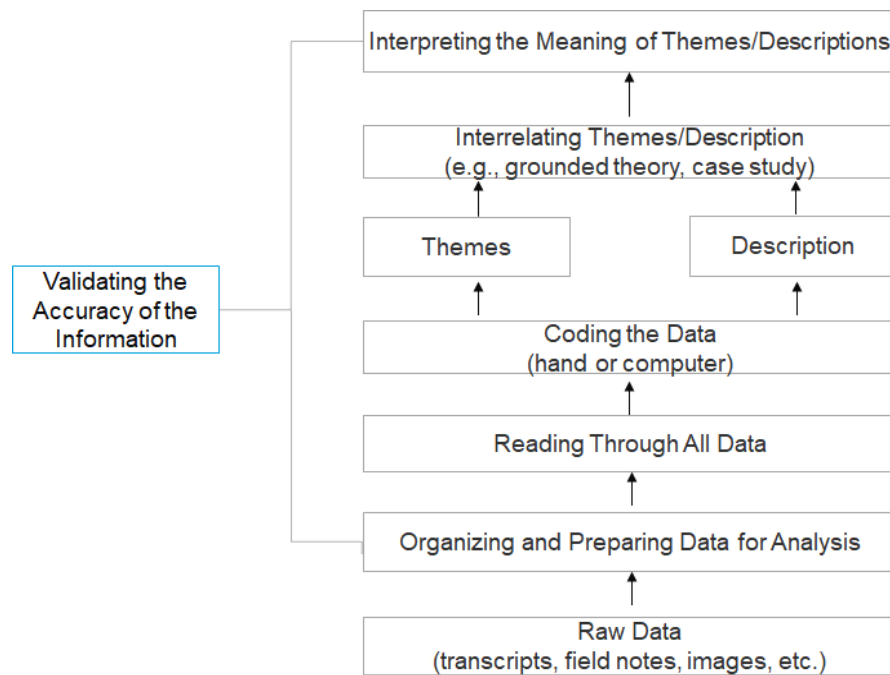


*Figure 5:* Data Analysis in Qualitative Research (Creswell, 2009)

A broader, underlying focus of the analysis was how, in the military and the overall occupational world, the male-dominated focus leaves females, at-times, faced with re-negotiating their identity in order to fit into these setting. This re-negotiation also occurs throughout the

whole transition process, from separation from the Armed Forces and through the new journey of

being a veteran woman in the civilian world.

The qualitative data collection process allowed the female respondents the time needed to

reflect on their experiences and the way in which they wanted to express them. The participants

were instructed to take their time and to provide as much information as they felt comfortable

with sharing with the researcher.

A thematic qualitative approach was used to identify themes rooted in the narratives of

the female veterans into an existing framework. Experiences during three significant periods of

their life were extracted for a better understanding of the phenom in which they faced at each

stage. The first significant experience was noted as "Pre- military service" which was determined

to be the point immediately before they decided to join the service along with their motivation to

join. It was during this time, many respondents identified themselves to be either entering

because other family members or friends had also joined or due to not having any other plans

upon completion of high school.  The second significant experience wad noted as "during

service" and determined to be the full period of their service. This period included their

challenges

While keeping an eye out for themes related to transition, work-role transition and

identity, an otherwise open coding method was used with the data. Using an inductive method,

repeating themes, or those that emerged more than three times were identified and organized into

coherent categories.

*Table 10.*

Demographics

| Study Participant | Branch | Years of Service | Education |
|---|---|---|---|
| FV01 | Army | 11-15 | Associate Degree |
| FV02 | Army | 11-15 | Associate Degree |
| FV03 | Army | 16-20 | Graduate Degree |
| FV04 | Army | 20+ | Graduate Degree |
| FV05 | Navy | 11-15 | Graduate Degree |
| FV06 | Army | 6-10 | Graduate Degree |
| FV07 | Army | 6-10 | High School Degree |
| FV08 | Army | 20+ | Associate Degree |
| FV09 | Marines | 16-20 | Graduate Degree |

The Three Emergent Themes and their Evidential Bases

Through extensive, repeated listening to and taking notes of participant interviews, three significant themes emerged as the most central to understanding female veterans transition from military to veteran status. These themes occurred more than three times throughout the total number of participants responses, First, the veteran's perspective of their military experiences illustrated the challenges they endured. Second, consistently, their narratives of what led to their departures from service contained an emphasis on family and health. Third, they repeatedly expressed the insufficiencies of their transition support, at least in some areas.

**Theme 1: Perception of Identity during Military Service**

One of the most fruitful questions was Q.8 '*Were there times when you perceived a struggle to fit in as a female?*' (see Appendix A). A compilation of the responses can be found in Table 11.

FV02 responded: *"In the Army you're looked at as a soldier not male or female so once you get around a gender-specific environment [in civilian life] it becomes different.*" The deindividuation that occurs in the military around gender, ironically a more gender-neutral

44

environment, is distinctly different from current business settings that pay attention to, and closely to gender and the interactions that can have severe issues around liability when gender-based paths are crossed.

FV06 stated: *"There will always be the challenge of females being inferior due to several different things but -we' had to prove to the fellas so to speak that we could hold our part, this was always an issue."*

Question 9 explored the extent to which the females felt they had to, within their military experience, to re-negotiate their identity to gain acceptance.

Participant FV05 responded,

"*I struggled with being too feminine and not masculine enough. It was hard for me to find a comfortable balance and so I felt like I was always switching myself around.*"

This quote is particularly clear on the difficult process of re-negotiating identity, which the female military figure needs to do throughout the transition process, within the military and well into the period in which they conducted the interviews.

To the key question, FV09 responded:
"*My problem with being viewed as the hard female is that there are different sides, it's not just one person, the hard individual all the times, I'm a soft female too. Depending on what the incident is who you need to be. Be a chameleon and fit in anywhere.*"

Across the board, the participants described their difficulties with fitting in and having to code switch throughout service and beyond, and felt severe tensions around their need to shift their presented self, depending on the context (Burkes, 2009).

This shift could occur for as long as the person needs it to in order to discover what identity is appropriate for the situation. Notions of gender roles and behaviors are constructed

through an array of social networks and contexts which change as a person experiences the world (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Understanding female veteran's perceptions of self as they navigate between the military culture and employment setting is beneficial in exploring how their identity roles may develop.

Notions of gender roles and behaviors are constructed through an array of social networks and contexts which change as a person experiences the world (Bussey & Bandura, 1999). Understanding female veteran's perceptions of self as they navigate between the military culture and employment setting is beneficial in exploring how their identity roles may develop.

*Table 11.*

Question 8 and Question 9 Representative Sample of Open Coding Results

| Participant | Theme | Phrases/descriptive words |
| --- | --- | --- |
| FV02 | Perception on Identity | In the Army you're looked at as a soldier not male or female so once you get around a gender-specific environment it becomes different. |
| FV05 | Perception on Identity | I struggled with being too feminine and not masculine enough. It was hard for me to find a comfortable balance and so I felt like I was always switching myself around. |
| FV06 | Perception on Identity | There will always be the challenge of females being inferior due to several different things but "we" had to prove to the fellas so to speak that we could hold our part, this was always an issue. |
| FV09 | Perception on Identity | My problem with being viewed as the hard female is that there are different sides, it's not just one person, the hard individual all the times, I'm a soft female too. Depending on what the incident is who you need to be. Be a chameleon and fit in anywhere. |

**Theme 2: Motivation Behind Departure**

Data analysis of the response to Q.11 'Can you please share your motivation to leave the

military?' revealed two themes surrounding the departure from service: family and medical

issues. Three of nine participants (33%) noted difficulties with medical issues that led to their

departure from service. Four of the nine (44%) spoke of family being the reason behind them no

longer serving. Table 12 represents the participant's responses.

*Table 12.*

Question 11 Open Coding Results

| Participant | Theme | Phrases/descriptive words |
| --- | --- | --- |
| FV01 | Motivation to Separate | I chose to leave early due to having my third child while in. So I got out under parenthood. I really missed the Military |
| FV02 | Motivation to Separate | Being as though I didn't intend on getting out of the army it has been a rough transition for me. I was medically retired and due to my multiple ailments, it has been extremely difficult. |
| FV03 | Motivation to Separate | I am passionate about being a Soldier, I didn't want to leave not, but my heart is more important. My motivation now is getting back to my family whom was torn down due to me being stationed without them. |
| FV05 | Motivation to Separate | I eventually decided to settle down and have a family. Although the military is supportive of families, I did not want to have to move around anymore. I wanted stability. |
| FV07 | Motivation to Separate | My son was my main motivation to leave |
| FV08 | Motivation to Separate | Unfortunately, I had to leave for medical reasons. |
| FV09 | Motivation to Separate | I started battling some pretty serious medical issues, basically it came down to if I kept doing the same thing, I would lose a lot of function. |

For example, FV05 stated the need for more stability among her family was the motivation for her to leave. Another, FV03, stated that her service in the military impacted her family and became the reason she chose not to continue her service.

Many women choose their family over their commitment to serve. For some female veterans the challenge of raising a family and being active in a competitive military career can conflict with the identity that the female sees for herself. For instance, if a woman has wanted so have a family and take on a traditional role of caretaker within the household, service in the military can conflict with those expectations at times, the need to travel, deploy away from family and loved ones and work in highly adrenalized environments do not fit within that female's idea of being a family woman, therefore the decision to leave so that the expectations around her personal identity are fulfilled.

Additionally, some female veterans identified their motivation for separating as a result of medical reasons. FV02 stated "*Being as though I didn't intend on getting out of the Army, it has been a rough transition for me. I was medically retired…it has been extremely difficult...*". Another participant, FV09 states "*I started battling some pretty serious medical issues. Basically, it came down to if I kept doing the same thing, I would lose function.*" And FV08 recalled, "Unfortunately, I had to leave for medical reasons."

Many of these women found that they were competing with the males within the organization and sacrificed their own physical health in an effort to maintain the expectations of them being just as competitive as the male soldiers. Oftentimes, the strain of rigorous and continuous physical regiments could leave the body in disrepair.

**Theme 3: Transition Support**

Participant responses to Q.14 "*Do you feel as if you were properly supported by military support services in your transition?*" revealed five out of nine participants felt they did not receive the proper support. Those that felt they were not supported, described the services not being explained clearly, or being rushed through. One participant was medically discharged, and the VA process was left for her to figure out on her own. Another participant is a reservist and didn't feel like there was any support for someone in her position. "*I attended a transition program, but I was still lost after it was over. I really wish they would have spent more time focusing on the actual need of the veterans instead of trying to fit 100 topics in a one-week period. I could have used one week of just resume writing and interview techniques.*"

Additionally, for those that felt there was support, they described using programs like Soldier for Life (SFL), Transition Assistance Program (TAP), and Army Career and Alumni Program (ACAP). Others mention additional services being available but allude to not being in the right place of mind to take advantage of them at the time they separated. "I took advantage of the ACAP services provided such as help with my resume and VA disability services."

The women's perceptions concerning the effectiveness of support received or not provided. Soldiers are strongly encouraged to attend a transition assistance program provided by their respective branch of service. Nonetheless, the perceptions of those encounters vary for each person. Table 13 informs the respondents both positive and negative experiences surrounding the transition process. Lazarus and Folkman (1987) suggested that optimism was associated with the use of active coping when dealing with adversity. Optimists were found to be more likely to take action to solve problems, confront adversity, and focus on coping efforts (Scheier & Carver,

1993). Circumstances that were perceived and responded to through realistic optimism were

found to persevere.

*Table 13*

Question 14 Respondent Sample Open Coding Results

| Participant | Theme | Phrases/descriptive words |
|---|---|---|
| FV05 | Perceptions of post separation support | I attended a transition program, but I was still lost after it was over. |
| FV07 | Perceptions of post separation support | ...when I got out, I was not explained services that were offered to me… nothing was offered to me when I got out of service. |
| FV08 | Perceptions of post separation support | There isn't much support for reservists getting out of the military. The emphasis is always on active duty. |
| FV02 | Perceptions of post separation support | … the process was rushed and unprofessional... leaving me to figure it out on my own. |

**General Discussion**

Development of Identity in Female Veterans

Gender and gender performance were explored to obtain a stabilized sense of how gender

may impact the veterans experience in transitioning. Specifically, females were interviewed in a

to inform this study in their lived experiences pre and post military service.

Research conducted by Josselson (1987) explained women's development as being tied to

relationship connections and the attachments in which they form with others, referred to as

anchoring. Study 2 concluded that no matter the social setting, women's identity was seen to be

in-relation with others (dependence) instead of the relation with their individual self

(independent). Recent findings on gender identity attempt to explore the complexity of gender

roles and female identity that does not include a broad sense of identity and fails to include

socio-economic status, ethnicity or any other differentiating group in which women belong to

(Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012).

Service members enter into the Armed Forces voluntarily, the perks of having education

benefits and on the job training attract members into the organization as an incentive to join the

force. Utilizing educational benefits such as the Post 9/11 GI Bill can attempt to further satisfy

the veteran's ability to obtain employment that meets their perceived set of skills.  There are a

great number of research studies that have been conducted on the benefits higher education has

in obtaining employment within the veteran community. Education benefits cover up to a

graduate degree at certain colleges and universities and can also be used to obtain industry

recognized license and certifications. Although a great incentive for service members to obtain

their education, some veterans choose not to use these educational benefits. The service member

may choose to pass on the educational benefit to their spouse or children, allowing them the

opportunity to secure educational resources for their family. Education should be seen as an

additional resource that can be used post-separation as means to assist in securing employment.

**Conclusions**

In summarizing this phenomenological study, key findings associated with the research

questions will be discussed. Support and resources will be recommended that will provide

additional insight on the types of services that are available. Recommendations of future study

and opportunities of further exploration of this topic will also be considered.

The purpose of this study was to examine the level of confidence of veterans in obtaining

access to meaningful post-separation employment. Specifically, this study sought to address the

following objectives: 1) To understand the influence of veteran identity in acquiring employment

that meets their skills and knowledge sets; 2) To understand the significance of structured services, family members and other supportive affiliations on the veteran's ability to obtain employment; 3) To explore Schlossberg's 4S model and Burke's identity control model as a means to understand the impact of factors on the transitional process. Additionally, the hope is that the research findings will bring greater understandings of ways to more effectively prepare to transition veterans into the workforce and the knowledge of their self-perceptions.

It is common for veterans to experience uncertainty and considerable difficulties during their reintegration period. Moreover, female veterans struggle with additional challenges that may cause them to deeply ponder their identity post separation and in securing employment. The Armed Forces is an institution where training is structured around masculine tactics to develop soldiers. Females are faced with establishing their position early in order to gain acceptance from the majority male force (Herbert, 1998). During the transitional period, they are directed once again to establish what it means to be a female in the civilian life. Although the struggle of fitting into society is common among veterans (Demers, 2011; Paulson, 2005), females, in particular, encounter the additional burden of discovering what strategies are necessary to use to be accepted as a female veteran (Herbert, 1998).

**Future Research Implications**

The following recommendations for future study will bring additional insights into this area of research:

1. Understand this transitional process to figure out mechanisms that will help provide solutions to the obstacles of the transitional experience.

2. Examine female veteran identity pre and post separation to understand the challenges and opportunities of navigating between these past and current identities.

3. Conduct demographic studies to compare female veteran identity management of different ethnicities, military affiliation and education.

4. Investigate reasons of transition (retirement, medical discharge etc.), and its impact on the ability to obtain meaningful employment.

5. Examine how transitioning veterans perceive and experience readiness around transition assistance programs. The program design to assist in post-separation employment can be improved.

Despite the research on experiences during career transition, second career satisfaction and fulfillment, more studies are needed to fully understand the transfer of behaviors from the military into a civilian career. Understanding perceptions surrounding female veteran identities as they navigate their transition is essential in attempting to understand their experiences.

Women make up the fastest growing population in the Armed Forces (Department of Veteran Affairs, 2013). Historically, the Armed Forces has been a male dominated organization with a highly masculinized culture. This culture has fed many of the biases that contribute to gender stereotyping and, in some cases, occupational segregation. Men, in the military and civilian spheres receive rewards for displaying masculine traits and behaviors such as assertiveness, independence, and strength and pursuing professions that value masculinity. Military, federal law enforcement, and construction occupations are characterized by tasks that are stereotypically masculine (e.g., dangerous work environment, use of force, guns, and physically demanding), dominated in the senior levels by men, and stereotyped as a job where women will not qualify or succeed (Barratt et al., 2014; Buse et al., 2013; DiRamio, 2015). Study after study has unfortunately shown that male norms, in a variety of settings, force women to

create gendered personas to reproduce appropriate gender behaviors as dictated by the social structure (Barratt et al., 2014).

The United States Armed Forces is comprised of millions of women and men who will all, at some point, experience a transition from military service to civilian life. Service-members are trained to serve in a variety of military occupational specialties, with some skills being easily transferred into areas of civilian employment. Other skills, however, may be more difficult to translate in ways that are needed in the workforce. Even more important, some of the psychological ways of being and attitudes and norms of military life may clash with civilian norms, unique to each setting, outside in the real world.

Through both the quantitative and qualitative research. The comprehensive review of literature was appropriate for the research questions that guided this study. The questions that guided this research were: 1) Are veterans properly prepared to seek the type of employment that closely matches their skill sets upon transitioning? 2) What supports or resources are most effective in supporting employment among transitioning veterans? 3) How do the self-reported perceptions of female veterans influence their ability to obtain employment? 4) How do females navigate their transitions into civilian-life?

It was necessary for the researcher to review studies that highlighted the transition process, the barriers experienced during the process and the perceptions around identity before, during and after military service. The need to understand the phenomenon allowed the researcher to provide additional insight on veterans lived experiences of the crossover from soldier to veteran as well as their entry, or lack thereof, into the civilian workforce.

Study 1 focused on the veteran's perception of resources and supports available to them post separation. Study 2 focused on the perceptions of female veterans' identity while serving

and post separation. It was important to limit study 2 to female veterans who actively

experienced the transitioning process and were willing to share their perceptions for this research

in order to fully understand the phenomenon of this group more closely.

While veterans experience many barriers and challenges during the transition process, it

was discovered through this research that the challenges experienced by males were females

were not mutually exclusive. Female veterans held on to their veteran identity a lot longer than

male veterans and this identity belief made it difficult for them to fully embrace the transition

into civilian life more challenging.  There are a significant number of plausible reasons why this

identity belief can occur, many of which were not explored in this study. The reasons that were

explored were the female's attachment to their time in service being related to having a

developed a more salient identity to being a Soldier.

Women who acknowledge their re-negotiation of identity during military service were

found to have had more difficulty separating and were also faced with the challenge of adjusting

to life outside of their military identity. An intervention to help with the adjustment of those

females during their separation can prove to be useful. Services provided specifically for female

veterans to help them understand and ultimately accept how they identify can allow for a deeper

understanding of why they have chosen there identity to be as it is. It can also assist in

transitioning to employment, family, and for those that were separated due to medical issues,

adjusting to the limitations of their new physical status.

The field of community psychology can benefit from future studies impacting the veteran

community and specifically female veterans. Given the findings of this study, interventions will

be necessary in helping to empower these veterans with a continued sense of service and

committeemen that they were able to achieve during their military service. Recognizing female

veteran's contribution to dedicate their lives to a cause greater than themselves will help them in

their continued identity of being a Soldier. Ensuring that federal policies are created, and not just

those that are approved at the state level, to advocate for the improvement of the lives of female

veteran and their families upon transition will be critical to continue this work. Creating a

continued sense of awareness to the veteran community and beyond through public speaking

engagements, symposiums and training events will help to promote positive awareness to this

population and the need for additional support.

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transitions-back-civilian-life-and-va-s-response

**APPENDIX**

**APPENDIX A: INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

**Individual Participant- Veteran**

**Purpose of the Study**- You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by
Tiffany Allen-Hampton, doctoral student at National Louis University, Chicago, Illinois. The
study is entitled "Veteran Transition into the Civilian Workforce- Identifying Support and
Resources That Are Most Effective" The purpose of the study is to gain a greater understanding
of transitioning veterans and how successful they have or have not been with obtaining a career
after they have left the service.

**Interview Process-** With your consent, you will complete a survey lasting approximately 15
minutes.  A follow-up interview may be requested based on some of the answers selected and
will last no more than 30 minutes. Any information you share in your interview will be kept
confidential and your identity will not be disclosed.

**Protection of Data & Ensuring Confidentiality-** Your participation is voluntary, and you may
discontinue your participation at any time without penalty. Your identity will be kept
confidential by the researcher and will not be attached to the data. Only the researchers will have
access to field notes from the interview(s). Your participation in this study does not involve any
physical or emotional risk to you beyond that of everyday life. While you are likely to not have
any direct benefit from being in this research study, your taking part in this study may contribute
to our better understanding of veteran's needs' once they begin to transition from the force.

**Use of Participation Data-** While the results of this study may be published or otherwise

reported to scientific bodies, your identity will in no way be revealed. In the event you have

questions or require additional information you may contact the researcher: Tiffany Allen-

Hampton, (708) 668-6082 or tallen15@nl.edu.

If you have any concerns or questions before or during participation that you feel have not been

addressed by the researcher, you may contact Dr. Brad Olson, (312) 261-3464,

Bradley.olson@nl.edu or the chair of NLU's Institutional Research Review Board:

Shaunti Knauth, National Louis University, 122 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois

60603; phone, (224) 233-2328; email: shaunti.knauth@nl.edu.

_____

Participant Name (Print)

_____          _____

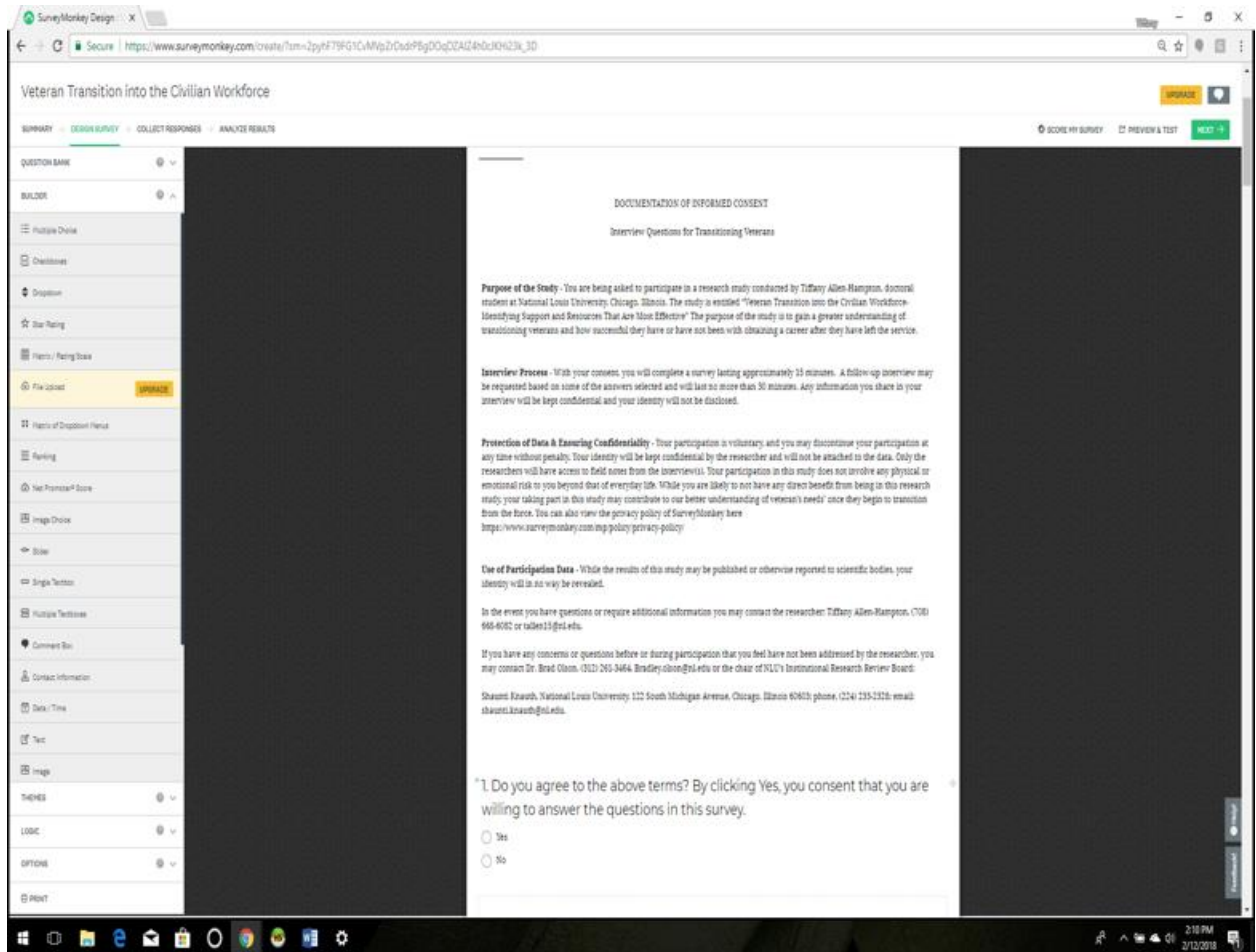Participant Signature                                                      Date

_____

Researcher (Print)

_____          _____

Researcher Signature                                                    Date

## APPENDIX B: STUDY 1: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

### Veteran Transition into the Civilian Workforce Questionnaire



How old are you in years? _____

How many years did you serve in the military? _____

What branch of military did you serve?

□ Army □ Air Force □ Navy □ Marines □ Coast Guard

Identify the career field that closely matches your military occupational specialty.

□ Accounting, Budget, Finance □ Combat Operations

□ Arts, Communications, Media and Design □ Communications Equipment Technicians

□ Aviation                          □ Construction, Building and Extraction

□ Business Administration           □ Counseling, Social Work and Human

Services

□ Education and Training            □ Environmental Health and Safety

□ Health Care Practitioners         □ Engineering and Scientific Research


What is your highest level of degree obtained? (Categorical)

□ Associates      □ Bachelors   □ Graduate (e.g., MBA, MA, MS)  □ Professional (e.g., PhD,

MD, JD)


Are you employed?  *If yes please answer next question*

□ Yes          □ No


How long have you been employed?  *Please provide this answer in number of years. For*

*example, if less than one year please put 1.*  _____


Are you currently in a position that matches your current skill set and/or educational level?

□ Yes          □ No


Have you participated in any of the career assistance programs offered by your branch of

service?

□ Transition Assistance Program (TAP)

□ Veteran Center

☐ Soldier For Life Program (SFLP)


Other than the Armed Forces, from whom were you able to obtain support in searching for a

career?

☐ Family

☐ Friends

☐ Religious affiliation

☐ Support groups

☐ Other


Which did you receive the **most** support from?

☐ Career assistance programs provided by Armed Forces

☐ Other


Please describe the level of career support you **expected** to receive upon your separation from

the military

☐ Low (I do not expect much assistance

☐ Moderate (I expect *some* level of support to aide in job search but not employment)

☐ High (I expect a great deal of support in finding employment)


Please select the response that best fits your departure from the military

☐ Planned (i.e., retirement, non- extended contract)

☐ Unplanned (i.e., injury, conduct)

Do you feel as if you were properly prepared to leave the military?

□ Yes, I felt prepared

□ No, I needed more time


Upon your departure, did you look for work immediately?

□ Yes, I looked for worked immediately

□ No, I did not look for work immediately


Upon your departure, how comfortable were you with completing a resume?

□ Very comfortable

□ Somewhat comfortable

□ Not comfortable


Upon your departure, how confident were you in looking for employment?

□ Very comfortable

□ Somewhat comfortable

□ Not comfortable


Select the option that *Mostly* described you during your transition from the military

□ Highly optimistic

□ Somewhat optimistic yet slightly apprehensive

□ Highly apprehensive

□ Somewhat apprehensive


In searching for employment, did you ever experience any level of depression?

□ Yes, I experienced depression

□ No, I did not experience depression


In your opinion, do you feel that more preparation was needed upon your transition into the

workforce?

□ Yes, I could have benefitted from more assistance

□ No, I received the appropriate amount of assistance to prepare me for job searching

|  | **Strongly Agree** | **Agree** | **Neutral** | **Disagree** | **Strongly Disagree** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| _____ | **5** | **4** | **3** | **2** | **1** |

1. If employed, I make my own decisions about how to do my work.

2. I can be creative in finding solutions to problems.

3. My ideas and input are valid.

4. I am often involved when changes are planned.

5. I ask for help when I need it.

6. I believe I can meet my current personal goals.

7. I have people I can count on.

8. I can handle stress.

9. At times, the career transition process was extremely difficult to complete.

10. I felt confident in my ability to do well in finding a career.

11. Before my transition, I considered myself prepared to handle the challenges of finding employment.

12. I wish I would have taken more time to prepare myself for a career transition.

13. I have a difficult time adjusting to change

14. It was difficult to see myself as anything other than a Soldier.

15. I know of many veterans that have been successful at finding a career.

16. I have had to settle for an undesirable job in order to provide for myself financially.

17. Since separating, I feel like I am not living up to my fullest potential.

18. If anyone can find the perfect career, I can.

19. I try not to get discouraged but it is difficult.

20.   I have always strongly identified with being a Soldier and have not felt like myself since my transition.

### APPENDIX C: DOCUMENTATION OF INFORMED CONSENT

### Individual Female Veteran Participant- Qualitative

**Purpose of the Study** - You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by

Tiffany Allen-Hampton, doctoral student at National Louis University, Chicago, Illinois. The

study is entitled "Veteran Transition into the Civilian Workforce- Identifying Support and

Resources That Are Most Effective" The purpose of the study is to gain a greater understanding

of transitioning veterans and how successful they have or have not been with obtaining a career

after they have left the service.

**Interview Process** - With your consent, you will complete a survey lasting approximately 15

minutes.  A follow-up interview may be requested based on some of the answers selected and

will last no more than 30 minutes. Any information you share in your interview will be kept

confidential and your identity will not be disclosed.

**Protection of Data & Ensuring Confidentiality** - Your participation is voluntary, and you may

discontinue your participation at any time without penalty. Your identity will be kept

confidential by the researcher and will not be attached to the data. Only the researchers will have

access to field notes from the interview(s). Your participation in this study does not involve any

physical or emotional risk to you beyond that of everyday life. While you are likely to not have

any direct benefit from being in this research study, your taking part in this study may contribute

to our better understanding of veteran's needs' once they begin to transition from the force.

**Use of Participation Data** - While the results of this study may be published or otherwise

reported to scientific bodies, your identity will in no way be revealed.

In the event you have questions or require additional information you may contact the researcher:

Tiffany Allen-Hampton, (708) 668-6082 or tallen15@nl.edu.

If you have any concerns or questions before or during participation that you feel have not been

addressed by the researcher, you may contact Dr. Brad Olson, (312) 261-3464,

Bradley.olson@nl.edu or the chair of NLU's Institutional Research Review Board:

Shaunti Knauth, National Louis University, 122 South Michigan Avenue, Chicago, Illinois

60603; phone, (224) 233-2328; email: shaunti.knauth@nl.edu.


_____

Participant Name (Print)


_____       _____

Participant Signature                                             Date


_____

Researcher (Print)


_____       _____

Researcher Signature                                             Date

**APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

**Study 2 Follow-up Questions for Transitioning Female Veterans**

I am interested in your story and the experiences you have acquired, particularly from the time

prior to your transition, becoming a veteran, and obtaining civilian employment. I would like to

hear about your visions of the future as well. Tell me about the events you have experienced

during your transition.

1. The first thing I would like to know is what was your life like prior to joining the military?
    a.   Can you tell me about some of your experiences that led to you joining?

2. I would like to get is an overview of your time in service. Tell me about your motivation to

enlist and the way you felt while serving in your military occupational specialty.

3. Were there times when you perceived a struggle to fit in as a female?
    a.   Can you tell me more about that?

4. Were there also times when you felt you had to re-negotiate your identity to gain acceptance?
    a.   Can you tell me more about that?

5. Describe what it was like to be a female in the military?

*Next, I would like to understand your transition from the military as well as your experiences*
*with employment. Please answer these questions as best as you can.*

6.  I am interested in you transition, what was your motivation to leave the military

         a. Would you consider this a negative or positive event in your life?

7. Were you able to obtain employment after your separation?

         a.   If so, how long did it take?

8. Do you feel as if you were properly supported by military support services in your transition?

         a.   Can you tell me more?

9. Do you feel as if you were supported by your peers and family members in your employment transition?

         a.   Can you tell me more?

10. Do you feel as if your experiences in the military have impacted your employment experiences?

11.  I know we have talked about some of this, but generally, how well supported do you feel as a veteran? And again, this is anonymous and don't hold back on your honest feelings. Tell me about a time when you have felt you needed support at your place of employment and you either got it or didn't.

12. Next I would like to hear about your journey of seeking employment. I understand that this may have been a long and tedious process but tell me about how you navigated through this process.

         a. What measures did you put in place to seek employment?

         b. What challenges did you encounter?

         c. How did you feel about conducting an interview?

         d. Are you working in your ideal position? Can your current job be considered a career?

13. What do you feel would have helped you during your transition?

14. If you could change anything about your experiences in the military, would you?
   a. If you are able, can you please tell me more?

15. Is there anything else you would like to share?