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The Challenges Navy and Marine Corps Veterans Face While Seeking Civilian Employment in San Diego County, California

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The Challenges Navy and Marine Corps Veterans Face While Seeking Civilian

Employment in San Diego County, California

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ABSTRACT

The Challenges Navy and Marine Corps Veterans Face While Seeking Civilian

Employment in San Diego County, California

by Absalom "Mo" Morris

Purpose: The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived

experiences of Navy and Marine Corps veterans who have transitioned to the civilian

workforce in San Diego County, California since the 2011 draw-down of Operation Iraqi

Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom with respect to personal, mental health,

cultural/societal, and organizational support and barriers.

Methodology: This phenomenological, qualitative study identified and interviewed six

U.S. Navy veterans and six U.S. Marine Corps veterans who have transitioned from

active duty military service to the civilian workforce. The participants were purposefully

and conveniently selected based on specific criteria.

Findings: After the analyzing, coding, and theme portion of the study, six major findings

were yielded. The major findings of the study are: (a) Veterans can benefit from

networking and building relationships, (b) It is extremely important to prepare for

transition early, (c) Keep an open-mind and have realistic expectations, (d) Ensure to

seek support and guidance from your leadership, (e) Stay positive and make adjusting to

civilian culture a priority, and (f) Complete your VA compensation and pension exam

and utilize your benefits.

Conclusion: Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that keeping a positive

attitude, taking full advantage of all transition resources, and building networks/

relationships within the civilian industry is vital to a veteran's successful transition to the civilian workforce.

Recommendations: It is recommended that future studies be conducted on the successful active duty to civilian workforce transition in other major cities and counties across America. The current study focused on San Diego, County and only considered U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps veterans. Other studies should focus not only on the Navy and Marine Corps, but the Army, Air Force, and Coast Guard.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

It is estimated that since 2011, more than 200,000 service members per year have transitioned from the military to civilian life (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016b). As a result, these veterans are seeking to assimilate into the civilian workforce. However, there are many obstacles preventing a large majority of these veterans from successfully finding work (Lima, 2014). Moreover, since the draw-down of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), there are more veterans seeking civilian employment than after any other conflict in American history (M. Davies, 2017).

Many of these veterans joined the military immediately after high school, between the ages of 17-19 (Hart, 2017). Consequently, the majority of these young patriots have little or no college or higher-level education. Similarly, the skills that young service members possess are gained through their occupational trade schools and on-the-job military training (Messer & Greene, 2014). Several of the trades learned in the military, i.e. Tank Driver, Infantryman, Able Seaman, and Rifleman do not easily translate into the civilian workforce (Hart, 2017). That being the case, many veterans are forced to accept low-paying, low-skilled jobs in order to provide for themselves and their families (Zivin et al., 2015).

The U.S. Armed Forces have troops positioned throughout the world (Department of Defense [DoD], 2015). Of those troops dispersed, they are divided into five branches consisting of the Navy, Marine Corps, Army, Air Force, and Coast Guard. For the purpose of this study, the researcher will focus on two branches, the Navy and Marine Corps. The Navy has an active duty population of approximately 330,000 personnel –

consisting of 278,000 enlisted and 52,000 officers. Similarly, the Marine Corps has approximately 150,000 personnel – consisting of 125,000 enlisted and 25,000 officers (Navy Personnel Command, 2019). Each year, over 80,000 active duty members from these two branches transition from the military and begin the journey of seeking civilian employment (Department of Labor [DoL], 2014). To narrow the scope of the study, the researcher has chosen to focus on Navy and Marine Corps personnel in the heavily populated military region of San Diego County, California. To illustrate, there are over 100,000 active duty Navy and Marine Corps personnel in the greater San Diego area (Navy Personnel Command, 2019). Of those servicemembers, thousands separate each year and continue to reside in San Diego County (County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, 2018).

Background

The act of separating from the military is not a new concept for the 1% of Americans who volunteer to serve the nation. However, since the 2011 draw-down of OIF and OEF, there are more veterans inundating the civilian workforce than at any other time in history (M. Davies, 2017). Consequently, this has caused a bottleneck in the number of veterans seeking gainful employment in the civilian sector (Messer & Greene, 2014).

Transferable Skills

There is a plethora of variables that cause employers to become hesitant to readily hire veterans, or preventing veterans from finding the right opportunity as it relates to civilian employment (Zivin et al., 2015). For example, several authors that have written about the subject agree that having the right qualifications is key when seeking civilian

employment (Hart, 2017; Lima, 2014; Tatum, 2016). Ruehlin (2018) posited that many military veterans have trades and skills that are not easily transferable to the civilian sector. For example, Navy and Marine Corps specialties such as Tank Driver, Infantryman, Motor Pool Specialist, and Able Seaman may not have a direct correlation to a civilian job (Tatum, 2016). As a result, many veterans have felt compelled to accept low-paying, low-skilled general work in order to earn an income (Zivin et al., 2015).

Certifications

Authors Claudia Tatum, Michael Lima, and Frank Hart all agreed that obtaining qualifications and certifications that will immediately transfer to the civilian workforce is paramount. For instance, both the Navy and Marine Corps have the job specialty termed Personnel Specialist or Personnel Professional (DoD, 2015). This particular occupation has most of the characteristics of the civilian job called Human Resource Professional (PHR) (Navy Personnel Command, 2019). However, without the proper certification of PHR or Senior Human Resource Professional (SPHR), a seasoned veteran could be deemed "not qualified" by civilian standards (Fraynt et al., 2018). On the other hand, there is a general consensus among authors that most military personnel gain very sought-after skills while on active duty. Those particular skills consist of leadership, discipline, integrity, punctuality, and loyalty (Vasquez-Alverez, 2013). Furthermore, researchers agree that those veterans who have retired after 20 or more years possess more transferable skills than those who did not (Knight, 2014). On the same subject, if veterans are able to couple these skills with applicable civilian certifications, they would become exponentially more marketable (Walker, 2013).

Mental Health

A vast majority of scholars agree that the recent increase in post OIF and OEF

mental health issues has contributed to many veterans' struggles finding employment

(National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, 2018). Veterans' mental health issues are

very complex. Some of the most commonly diagnosed conditions consist of Post

Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Depression, and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI)

(Messer & Greene, 2014; Metraux, Byrne, Cusack, Hunt-Johnson, & True, 2017). As a

result, many would-be employers and companies have developed certain stereotypes and

have become extremely hesitant to hire veterans (M. Davies, 2017). For example, Kukla,

Bonfils, and Salyers (2014) espoused that many employers view veterans as being rigid,

disabled, and possibly suffering from mental health issues. As a result, the

unemployment rate among veterans has ballooned to in recent years (Metraux et al.,

2017).

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

PTSD has become a very recognizable term since September 11, 2001 and the

draw-down of OIF and OEF (Hart, 2017). As an illustration, Maples-Keller, Price,

Rauch, Gerardi, and Rothbaum (2017) concluded that the limited studies investigating

employment functioning in veterans of OIF and OEF with PTSD have demonstrated that

these veterans have suggestively inferior work efficiency and suffer on other important

occupational consequences. A significant number of researchers agree that veterans with

PTSD face challenges in addition to lack of transferable skills and applicable

certifications (Metraux et al., 2017). As a consequence, medical professionals, the

Veterans Administration (VA), and civilian practitioners are scrambling to deal with this

alarming issue (Zivin et al., 2015). Additionally, there is much attention drawn to the issue of veterans separating with undiagnosed mental health concerns (Kukla, Bonfils, & Salyers, 2014; Messer & Greene, 2014). If a transitioning veteran did not seek treatment or went undiagnosed before discharge, he or she could eventually be left with insufficient, or even worse, no funded healthcare (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016a).

Government Transition Assistance

Congress enacted into law that every separating military member, whether retiring or not, must attend a transition course (Military Transition Assistance [TAP], 2017; Knight, 2014). As a result, each branch of service has developed a version of the transition course. The standard course is called Transition, Goals, Plans, Success or T-GPS (Navy Personnel Command, 2019). Researchers who have examined the various services' transition programs tend to agree that the length of the class is insufficient in preparing transitioning personnel for civilian life (Hart, 2017; Knight, 2014; Lima, 2014). However, after examining this research, it appears to be missing a breakdown that delineates what would be sufficient for a retiring service member (20 or more years) as opposed to that of a member separating under other circumstances.

To provide an example, the average military retiree has 21 years of service (DoD, 2016b). After this lengthy time of service, the member receives less than one week of transition assistance before pursuing a new civilian career (Hart, 2017). On that same note, a civilian who joins the Navy has an initial nine weeks of basic training with a follow-on seven weeks to two years of occupational training (Navy Personnel Command, 2019). Some of the areas covered at transition courses consist of Veteran's Assistance

overview, Department of Labor (DoL) civilian job overview, professional resume writing, job interview training, and role-playing parodies between facilitators and students (U.S. DoL Employment Workshop, 2017). Nevertheless, this instruction is all truncated into a five-day transition assistance course (Tatum, 2016). There is a general consensus among researchers on the issue that five days is an inadequate amount of time to effectively cover all of the required areas (Hart, 2017; Lima, 2014; Ruehlin, 2018; Tatum, 2016).

As stated above, this study will delve into the four over-arching variables that researchers agree have hindered veterans from successfully obtaining civilian employment. Those four variables consist of: (a) transferable skills, (b) certifications/qualifications, (c) mental health concerns, and (d) transition programs (Messer & Greene, 2014). Additionally, as outlined below, the study will address two smaller variables consisting of Veteran Friendly Companies, and Cultural Adjustments/Stereotypes.

Veteran Friendly Organizations

Over the last two decades, myriad companies have shifted their business models towards assisting America's veterans (Hart, 2017). Companies such as Accenture, Adecco Group, ADP, AECOM, Aetna, Alaska Air Group, Allstate, and Amazon have all been identified by veterans' groups as military friendly companies (Military One Source, 2013). Conversely, many of these companies require specific technical skills and education to qualify for employment. This particular aspect can become a conundrum for many separating veterans (Ruehlin, 2018). As a result, thousands of veterans are unable to qualify for job descriptions being offered by these companies due to the

aforementioned non-transferable skills (Lima, 2014). On the same issue, many researchers agree that it would be beneficial if more military friendly companies offered apprenticeship programs aimed at training veterans to perform the specifics of the job (M. Davies, 2017;Walker, 2013). If this were to happen, it would allow companies to obtain employees who are already outfitted with critical skills such as leadership, communication, problem solving, team building and conflict resolution (Hart, 2017).

Even more, there is a considerable accord among researchers that America's companies should continue to display a concerted effort to help veterans effectively transition to the civilian sector (Austin, 2019; Hart, 2017; Knight, 2014; Lima, 2014; Tatum, 2016; Walker, 2013). As more and more military personnel transition to the civilian workforce, it is imperative that companies continue to seek out the talent possessed by these individuals for employment (Messer & Greene, 2014).

Cultural Adjustments

To begin with, over 1.7 million military members have transitioned from the services to civilian life since 2011 (Austin, 2019). For this reason, thousands of former troops have had to adapt from the high-paced war posture of OIF and OEF to a more peaceful existence in civilian life (Knight, 2014). The adjustment has resulted in many veterans developing depression and other anxiety issues (Kukla et al., 2014).

Secondly, Lima (2014) asserts that family members serve alongside the service member. When a service member separates or retires, the family is often uprooted from their familiar surroundings and relocated to an area where they must start over (Hart, 2017). To further expound, Walker (2013) articulated that the veteran family can suffer from culture shock and adjustment issues, especially the children. Granted, there are

several avenues that transitioning military families can utilize to help ease the transition process (DoD, 2011). These support outlets consist of Fleet and Family Support Centers (FFSC), Family Readiness Groups (FRG), and Military One Source to name a few (Navy Personnel Command, 2019). Nonetheless, researchers agree that transitioning from military to civilian life is a challenging time for the entire family (Austin, 2019; Hart, 2017; Metraux et al., 2017).

Another challenge for separating members is being stereotyped by some in the public and many employers (Zivin et al., 2015). It is true, and especially post 9/11, that many veterans are returning home with invisible wounds (Lima, 2014; Messer & Greene, 2014). However, this is still a small percentage of the thousands of veterans who separate from the military each year (Kukla et al., 2014). Even so, the perception that has evolved around veterans over the last decade has caused many would-be employers to label returning veterans as rigid, unable to adapt, disabled, and suffering from mental health issues (Zivin et al., 2015). M. Davies (2017) stated that when we adapt to how we distinguish the veteran populace and realize our responsibility to be both patriots and upright citizens, the outcomes can be astonishing, lucrative, and rewarding for both veterans and the public alike.

There is agreement among researchers that as a working population, veterans are service oriented, focused, have exceptional crisis management skills, work well in teams, bring a robust work ethos, a craving to acquire new skills, and are detail and goal focused (Davis, 2017; Hart, 2017; Messer & Greene 2014). Many of the characteristics possessed by these veterans have been refined on the field of battle, where teamwork, loyalty, and unit cohesion are essential (Tatum, 2016).

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study follows Schlossberg's theory of transition. This particular theory is based on the 4-s model. The model consists of four variables which are listed as: situation, self, support, and strategies (M. L. Anderson & Goodman, 2014). By definition, transition is a process that results in altered relationships, habits, norms, and roles (Angel et al, 2018). After in-depth examination of multiple transition theories, it was decided that Schlossberg's 4-s model was the best fit for this study. Mainly, the four pillars of self, situation, social support, and strategies have a direct parallel to the obstacles of transition that many military veterans face when separating from the Armed Forces.

Schlossberg's 4-s Model

Situation. Situation is the framework of the change, all-encompassing the nature, extent, and supposed significance of and readiness for transition (N. K. Schlossberg, 1981). Situation also includes family, finances, new job, up-rooting of children, and new surroundings (Morin, 2011). Servicemembers can find themselves separated from the military due to myriad circumstances. For example, members can retire, be administratively separated, medically retired, or separated as a result of a physical examination board (PEB). For this study these factors are designated as mental health, support and barriers.

Self. Self is the individual's notion of his or her own nature, character, and personality as related to ethos, origin, and individuality (N. K. Schlossberg, 1981). Self is the way individuals view their preparedness for change. This change can be developed over time in the military. As an illustration, Hart (2017) posited that the longer

individuals serve in the Armed Forces the more challenging readiness for separation tends to be. For this study these factors are designated as personal support and barriers

Social support. Social supports are households, networks, specialized care-givers, and resources (Barrera & Ainlay, 1983; N. K. Schlossberg, 1981). Tatum (2016) asserted that these support systems act as a mitigating force against the challenges of transition. One of the major support systems provided by the military is the FFSC which is located on every installation. For this study these factors are designated as /societal support and barriers.

Strategies. The active element of strategy is thoughtful action, execution, task completion, and course amendment (N. K. Schlossberg, 1981). Having strategies and a plan of action and milestones is an important aspect of a successful transition. Additionally, strategies can assist in mitigating the anxiety of the unknown during the process of change (Wilson, 2015). For this study these factors are designated as organizational factors.

Gap in the Research

After analysis of the literature on the lived experiences of veterans regarding obtaining civilian employment, the researcher discovered a gap. To illustrate, there is little to no observed examination that breaks down data for Navy and Marine Corps veterans in San Diego County. The County of San Diego has one of the most densely populated Navy and Marine Corps contingents in the country, with an estimated presence of over 95,000 (County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, 2018). There is a gap in researched information regarding the transition experiences of Navy and Marine Corps veterans in this geographical location. Therefore, this qualitative,

phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of Navy and Marine Corps veterans who have transitioned to the civilian workforce in San Diego County, California since the 2011 draw-down of OIF and OEF with respect to personal, mental health, cultural/societal, and organizational support and barriers.

Research Problem

Since the 2011 draw-down of OIF and OEF, more than 1.7 million service members have transitioned from the military to civilian life (Austin, 2019). As a result, there has been a rapid increase in veterans seeking gainful civilian employment (Tatum, 2016). However, many of these veterans are facing increasing difficulty with securing sufficient employment due in part to the invisible wounds of combat (Mansfield, Bender, Hourani & Larson, 2011).

Similarly, veterans that are transitioning soon after returning from a combat zone are not afforded an adequate amount of time to prepare for the daunting task of transitioning to civilian life (Knight, 2014). As a consequence, many veterans have resorted to accepting low-paying jobs in order to provide for themselves and their families (Zivin et al., 2015). Further, the homelessness rate has ballooned nationally in recent years, with per capita percentages surpassing that of the civilian sector (National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, 2018).

America has over 330,000,000 citizens. However, only 1% of American citizens have volunteered to serve in the country's Armed Forces (DoD, 2015). Considering this, we as a patriotic nation should honor these heroes as they make the transition from the longest conflict in U.S. history by providing them with all the possible resources to

become successful citizens (M. Davies, 2017). Indeed, this can be accomplished if we band together as a nation and make veterans a priority (Lima, 2014).

There have been several studies conducted and several contributing variables discovered regarding transitioning veterans. However, there are still several areas that need to be explored in order to gain increased clarity on the phenomenon. For instance, the researcher resides in San Diego County, California. This area is one of the most densely inhabited Navy and Marine Corps veteran regions in America; numbers exceed 8% of the population (County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, 2018). For this reason, the researcher focused on Navy and Marine Corps veterans from this geographical location.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of Navy and Marine Corps veterans who have transitioned to the civilian workforce in San Diego County, California since the 2011 draw-down of OIF and OEF with respect to personal, mental health, cultural/societal, and organizational support and barriers and to describe recommendations these veteran had for improving the process.

Research Question

The primary research question that guided this study was: *What were the lived experiences of Navy and Marine Corps veterans who have transitioned to the civilian workforce in San Diego County since the 2011 draw-down of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) with respect to personal, mental health, cultural/societal, and organizational support and barriers and what recommendations do these veterans have for improving the process.?*

Research Sub-Questions

1. What were the lived experiences of Navy and Marine Corps veterans who have transitioned to the civilian workforce in San Diego County since the 2011 draw-down of OIF and OEF with respect to:

    a. Personal Support

    b. Personal barriers

    c. Mental health support

    d. Mental health barriers

    e. Cultural/Societal support

    f. Cultural/Societal barriers

    g. Organizational support

    h. Organizational barriers

    i. Recommendations for improving the process

Significance of the Study

According the Department of Defense (DoD), more than 1.7 million military members have transitioned from servicemember to civilian since the 2011 draw-down of Operations Iraqi and Enduring freedom. Consequently, this has caused the largest number of veterans seeking civilian employment at any one time in our history (Hart, 2017; Tatum, 2016). The study is significant in part because these veterans are armed with myriad skills that could be beneficial in the civilian employment arena (Hart, 2017; Lima, 2014). However, for many reasons, thousands of veterans are not finding it as seamless to find gainful civilian employment as they may have predicted (Messer & Greene, 2014).

As a result, this study seeks to bring a better awareness to the public and government agencies by providing rich data that contributes to the effort of fighting veteran unemployment. If this state of affairs is not properly addressed, it could spiral into an epidemic that negatively affects the entire nation (National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, 2018). As reported by Lima (2014) one of the main variables hindering veterans when seeking civilian employment is veteran friendly companies. Knight (2014) asserts that more companies should establish training and apprenticeship programs that will assist transitioning veterans in matching the right skills with the right job.

Indeed, there are several companies such as Accenture, Aetna, and Amazon who have specific veteran programs. However, there appears to be a critical need for more nationwide companies to follow suit (Lima, 2014). An additional purpose of this study is to bring an awareness, based on research, to companies who could absolutely benefit from young leaders who already possess such traits as punctuality, discipline, loyalty, and a solid work ethic (Hart, 2017). There have been several studies conducted over the last five years that address civilian transition. However, the majority of those studies focused on the overall Armed Forces consisting of the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard. This study is significant because if focuses on two specific branches (Navy and Marine Corps) in a particular region.

San Diego County is one of the most heavily populated Navy and Marine Corps veteran regions in America, with numbers exceeding 95,000 (County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, 2018). This study propositions to bring awareness to this crisis by providing vital information to local veterans' groups, the military

community, and veterans' outreach organizations in order to provide better employment and self-help opportunities for this deserving population.

Definitions

The following terms were used throughout this study:

Certification. An official qualification that allows one to act in an official professional capacity as certified to perform the required duties (Lima, 2014; Walker, 2013).

Conflict. A battle between two or more opposing sides using military force (Tatum, 2016).

Cultural adjustment. Moving away from one learned way of thinking and behaving to another way of thinking and behaving that is unfamiliar to the group or individual involved (Kukla et al., 2014).

Cultural/Societal Barriers. Differences in military and civilian culture that can potentially hinder the veteran from adjusting to civilian life or workforce (Lima, 2014).

Cultural/Societal Support. Public and private sector support that assists veterans in the transition process (Hart, 2017).

Government transition assistance. A Congressionally mandated transition assistance program that is provided to all military personnel prior to discharge (Knight, 2014).

Invisible wounds. Internal scares as a result of incidents during combat such as traumatic brain injuries and witnessing serious bodily injury or loss of life (Mansfield, Bender, Hourani, & Larson, 2011; Messer & Greene, 2014).

Mental Health Barriers. The inability to seamlessly transition to the civilian workforce due to various mental conditions acquired while serving on active duty (M. Davies, 2017).

Mental Health Support. Programs and policies that promote mental health assistance for veterans who may be experiencing mental health issues (Messer & Greene, 2014).

OEF. Operation Enduring Freedom was part of the Global War on Terrorism that took place throughout the provinces of Afghanistan and the Horn of Africa from 2001-2014 (Tatum, 2016).

OIF. Operation Iraqi Freedom was part of the Global War on Terrorism that took place throughout the provinces of Iraq from 2003-2011 (Hart, 2017).

Organizational Barriers. Barriers within the military leadership structure that prevent the transitioning member from obtaining all the resources needed for a successful transition (Knight, 2014).

Organizational Support. Support from within the military leadership structure that aides transitioning members in obtaining all pertinent information and resources to enable a successful separation from active duty service (Hart, 2017; Knight, 2014; Lima, 2014).

Personal Barriers. Individual barriers that personnel must traverse as part of the transition process i.e., financial, family, and new environment (Schlossberg, 1981).

Personal Support. One-on-one support that is aimed at assisting each veteran with the needs of his or her specific transitioning circumstances (Military Transition Assistance Program (TAP), 2017).

PTSD. Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome is a mental health condition that an individual develops after experiencing a dangerous life-altering situation such as combat or domestic violence (M. Davies, 2017).

Separation. The process of separating from active duty military service into the reserve component or civilian sector (Woodworth, 2015).

Transferrable skills. Skills that would translate from an individual's job in the military to a civilian equivalent without the need for further certification (Ruehlin, 2018).

Transition. A change that involves relinquishing a facet of one's self-identity and roles by acclimating to another environment (M. L. Anderson & Goodman, 2014).

Veteran. An individual who served in the U.S. Armed Forces and met the qualifications to identify as a veteran upon separation (Lima, 2014).

Delimitations

The study was delimited to Navy and Marine Corps veterans in San Diego County who separated from active duty service since the 2011 draw-down of OIF and OEF.

Organization of the Study

This study explored the lived experiences of Navy and Marine Corps veterans in San Diego County who have transitioned to the civilian workforce since the 2011 draw-down of OIF and OEF with respect to personal support, personal barriers, mental health support, mental health barriers, cultural/societal support, cultural societal barriers, and organizational support. The findings of this study could address the lack of knowledge regarding this particular population and may serve to direct efforts to address the population's needs. The introduction started from the global "macro" setting and

funneled down to the "micro" setting. Therefore, the introduction provided a general assessment of the problem and how it relates to a larger issue.

Chapter II provides a wide-ranging review of the literature and background of the main variables. Chapter III presents the methodology, research design, data collection, population, sample, and evaluation for the study. Chapters IV and V provide study findings, summaries, conclusions, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Chapter II presents the historical data and theoretical framework of the study. This qualitative study sought to explore the lived experiences of Navy and Marine Corps veterans who have transitioned to the civilian workforce in San Diego County since the end of OIF and OEF. The literature review funnels-down from the macro view of the phenomenon to the micro view.

The Chapter begins with a general background of the military armed services. Eaton (2014) stated that by understanding the Armed Services' history, culture, and background, the public is able to understand the core values, mission, and vision. Next, the chapter provides a description of war and deployment, military separation, DoD transition assistance, transferrable skills, cultural adjustments, mental health, disability, unemployment, underemployment, theoretical framework, and gap in the research.

Military Armed Services Background

The United States Armed Services is comprised of five branches; The U.S. Army, U.S. Navy, U.S. Marine Corps, U.S. Air Force, and U.S. Coast Guard (Redmond et al., 2015). The Army, Navy, Marines, and Air Force all fall under the authority of the DoD. However, the U.S. Coast Guard falls under the authority of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) unless America is at war, in which they would fall under the DoD. Each branch of service, with the exception of the Marine Corps, has a civilian Secretary who is the head of the service concerned. The Marines Corp falls under the Secretary of the Navy.

Branches

Each branch of service has its own unique culture, core values, and mission statement (Redmond et al., 2011). Table 1 provides a snapshot of the individualism of each branch.

Table 1

Overview of Military Departments

Branch	Founded	Service Members	Mission	Core Values
Army	June 14, 1775	Soldiers	Fight and win our Nation's war by providing prompt, sustained, land dominance across the full range of military operations and spectrum of conflict in support of combatant commanders.	Loyalty, duty, respect, selfless service, honor, integrity, and personal courage
Air Force	September 18, 1947	Airmen	Fly, fight, and win…in air, space, and cyberspace.	Integrity first, service before self, and excellence in all we do
Navy	October 13, 1775	Sailors	Maintain, train, and equip combat-ready Naval forces capable of winning wars, deterring aggression and maintaining freedom of the seas.	Honor, courage, and commitment
Marine Corps	November 10, 1775	Marines	Train, organize, and equip Marines for offensive amphibious employment and as a force in readiness.	Honor, courage, and commitment
Coast Guard	August 4, 1790	Coast Guardsmen	Safeguard the Nation's maritime interests.	Honor, respect, and devotion to duty

Note. Adapted from "A Brief Introduction to the Military Workplace Culture" by S. A. Redmond, S. L. Wilcox, S. Campbell, A. Kim, K. Finney, K. Barr, and A. M. Hassan, 2015, *Work, 50*(1), 9-20. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.3233/WOR-141987

Ranks by Branch of Service

The five branches of service share a common thread with regards to paygrade. There is only one military pay chart that encompasses all military personnel for pay and benefits purposes (Defense Finance and Accounting Service, 2019). The military pay chart covers the paygrades from E-1 to O-10. However, titles of rank and rank insignias vary from branch to branch (U.S. Military Ranks, n.d.). Table 2 provides an in-depth look at military ranks by branch of service.

Table 2

Military Pay Grades and Rank by Service Branch

Rank	Pay Grade	Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Air Force	Coast Guard
Commissioned Officer	O10	General	Admiral	General	General	Admiral
	O9	Lieutenant General	Vice Admiral	Lieutenant General	Lieutenant General	Vice Admiral
	O8	Major General	Rear Admiral (Upper)	Major General	Major General	Rear Admiral (Upper)
	O7	Brigadier General	Rear Admiral (Lower)	Brigadier General	Brigadier General	Rear Admiral (Lower)
	O6	Colonel	Captain	Colonel	Colonel	Captain
	O5	Lieutenant Colonel	Commander	Lieutenant Colonel	Lieutenant Colonel	Commander
	O4	Major	Lieutenant Commander	Major	Major	Lieutenant Commander
	O3	Captain	Lieutenant	Captain	Captain	Lieutenant
	O2	Second Lieutenant	Lieutenant Junior Grade	Second Lieutenant	Second Lieutenant	Lieutenant Junior Grade
	O1	First Lieutenant	Ensign	First Lieutenant	First Lieutenant	Ensign

Rank	Pay Grade	Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Air Force	Coast Guard
Warrant Officer	W5	Chief Warrant Officer 5	Chief Warrant Officer 5	Chief Warrant Officer 5	N/A	N/A
	W4	Chief Warrant Officer 4	Chief Warrant Officer 4	Chief Warrant Officer 4	N/A	Chief Warrant Officer 4
	W3	Chief Warrant Officer 3	Chief Warrant Officer 3	Chief Warrant Officer 3	N/A	Chief Warrant Officer 3
	W2	Chief Warrant Officer 2	Chief Warrant Officer 2	Chief Warrant Officer 2	N/A	Chief Warrant Officer 2
	W1	Warrant Officer	N/A	Warrant Officer	N/A	N/A
Enlisted	E9	Sergeant Major	Master Chief Petty Officer	Master Gunnery Sergeant	Chief Master Sergeant	Master Chief Petty Officer
	E8	Master Sergeant	Senior Chief Petty Officer	Master Sergeant	Senior Master Sergeant	Senior Chief Petty Officer
	E7	Sergeant First Class	Chief Petty Officer	Gunnery Sergeant	Master Sergeant	Chief Petty Officer
	E6	Staff Sergeant	Petty Officer First Class	Staff Sergeant	Technical Sergeant	Petty Officer First Class
	E5	Sergeant	Petty Officer Second Class	Sergeant	Staff Sergeant	Petty Officer Second Class
	E4	Corporal or Specialist	Petty Officer Third Class	Corporal	Senior Airman	Petty Officer Third Class
	E3	Private First Class	Seaman	Lance Corporal	Airman First Class	Seaman
	E2	Private Second Class	Seaman Apprentice	Private First Class	Airman	Seaman Apprentice
	E1	Private	Seaman Recruit	Private	Airman Basic	Seaman Recruit

Military Culture

The military has a culture that is unique to those who serve in uniform. This can create many challenges for individuals who separate and eventually transition to the civilian workforce (Pease, Billera, & Gerard, 2016). For example, Navy personnel are groomed to live by the core values of Honor, Courage, and Commitment (Navy Personnel Command, 2019). These core values mean that every team member is to maintain his or her integrity and treat teammates with dignity and respect at all times (Pease et al., 2016). However, after separating from the service, many veterans find it difficult to find a similar concept in sectors of the profit-driven civilian workforce (M. L. Anderson & Goodman, 2014).

A study conducted by Prudential Financial Inc. (2012) revealed that 60% of veterans who transition to the civilian workforce are fearful that they will have difficulty adjusting to the new culture. One particular reason for this fear is the language barrier between the military and civilian segment. The military has a unique language that is filled with jargon and acronyms (Coll & Weiss, 2017). As a result, a veteran may find it difficult to learn terminology that has a completely different meaning than in the military (Parsi, 2017). Veterans have expressed that civilian recruiters and hiring managers do not fully understand military service, and that a standardized familiarization course would be beneficial (Beder, 2017; R. A. Miles 2014).

Career Path

In the military, a service member will embark on one of two career paths. Those paths are either officer or enlisted. All enlisted personnel are assigned a job specialty. In the Army and Marine Corps, job specialties are called Military Occupational Specialty or

MOS (U.S. Army, n.d.). In the Navy and Coast Guard job specialties are called Rate or

Ratings (Navy Personnel Command, 2019). Around 99% of all enlisted personnel are

high school graduates or possess a GED. In like manner, around 7% of enlisted

personnel possess a bachelor's degree and only 1% hold a graduate degree (DoD, 2015).

Conversely, the second career path is that of a commissioned officer. According

to the DoL (2017) commissioned officers plot missions, establish standards and lead

troops in military actions, oversee enlisted service members, control and command

aircraft and ships, and deliver medical and legal services. Further, around 94% of all

commissioned officers possess a bachelor's degree or higher (DoD, 2015).

In the same vein, there are paths for enlisted personnel to become officers through

a myriad commissioning programs (DoD, 2016a). Some of the available programs by

which enlisted members can earn a commission are:

- Officer Candidate School (OCS)

- Service Academies (Army, Navy, Air Force, Coast Guard)

  o Marine officers are commissioned through the Naval Academy

- Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC)

- Seaman to Admiral Program (STA-21)

- Medical Enlisted Commissioning Program (MECP)

- Limited Duty Officer/Chief Warrant Officer (LDO/CWO)

Granted, the above list in not all inclusive of enlisted to officer commissioning

programs. However, these are some of the more common programs that are utilized by

enlisted personnel. The common denominator when enlisted personnel are applying for

any commissioning program is a sustained record of superior performance (Navy

Personnel Command, 2019).

War/Conflicts

War has been part of American history since the Revolutionary War (Tatum,

2016). The United States has made it a matter of national security to build and maintain a

military fighting force stronger than the world has ever known (Miller, 2015; Torreon

2017). As a result, many service members of this mighty all-volunteer force are returning

home from war with the invisible wounds of battle (Messer & Greene, 2014). Table 3

lists the major conflicts that America has participated in throughout history.

Table 3

Timeline of America's Wars

War	Year Started	Year Ended
Revolutionary	1775	1783
1812	1812	1815
Mexican	1846	1848
Civil	1861	1865
Spanish-American	1898	1898
WWI	1914	1918
WWII	1939	1945
Korean	1950	1953
Vietnam	1954	1975
Desert Storm	1990	1991
Enduring Freedom	2001	2014
Iraqi Freedom	2003	2010
War on Terrorism	2001	Present

Note. Table adapted from "Timeline of America's Wars," by Roswell Remembers, 2019. Retrieved from http://www.roswellmemorialday.com/history/timeline-of-americas-wars/

Operation Enduring Freedom

Most recently, and specific to this study, America was involved in OEF and OIF

(DoD, 2015). OEF was the longest lasting conflict that America has ever fought in;

spanning the course of 13 years (Hart, 2017; Tatum 2016). OEF started as a result of the

September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in New York City, Washington D.C., and Somerset County, Pennsylvania and ended on December 28th, 2014 (DoD, 2015; Miller, 2015).

Operation Iraqi Freedom

Similarly, in March 2003, President George W. Bush declared war on the nation of Iraq and its leader Sadaam Hussain (Austin, 2019; Schauer, Naylor, Oliver, Maddry & April, 2019). The motive for the declaration was based on the assumption that Iraq possessed Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMDs) and intended on deploying them against America and its allies (Miller, 2015). The fierce battles in Iraq during OIF lasted for over seven years, until the U.S. officially withdrew and the war ended on August 31, 2010 (DoD, 2015; Torreon, 2017).

<div align="center">

Military Separation

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Upon separating from active duty service, a military member is either discharged under the administrative or punitive categories (Powers, 2016). Under the administrative category, there are three specific classifications of discharge. Those classifications are: Honorable, General, and Other than Honorable (Military Personnel Manual, 2018). By the same token, a service member discharged under the punitive category will receive one of two classifications known as a Bad Conduct or Dishonorable Discharge (Military Personnel Manual, 2018). Moreover, any service member who receives an Other than Honorable, Bad Conduct, or Dishonorable Discharge will automatically forfeit his or her veteran's benefits (Powers, 2016).

<div align="center">

Military Retirement

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One of the benefits of serving in the United States military is the potential to earn a lifetime pension that is backed by the U.S. Treasury (Strangways & Rubin, 2012). A

service member who reaches 20 years of service and has obtained the required paygrade, is eligible to retire at the rate of 50% of his or her base pay (Defense Finance and Accounting Service, 2019; Strangways & Rubin, 2012). In the same vein, a full retirement for an enlisted service member is 30 years. However, the DoD allows enlisted members to serve the remaining 10 years in a reservist status and receive what is called "retainer pay." Upon completion of the full 30 years, the retainer pay is replaced by retirement pay (Defense Finance and Accounting Service, 2019: Military Personnel Manual, 2018).

On the other hand, commissioned officers are eligible for a full retirement at the 20-year mark (Military Personnel Manual, 2018). Additionally, if an eligible enlisted service member or commissioned officer exceeds the 20-year mark, his or her retirement pay is increased by a multiplier of 2.5% a year until 100% at the 40-year maximum (Defense Finance and Accounting Service, 2019; Strangways & Rubin, 2012). With that said, only 10% of those who serve in the armed services actually reach the eligible rank and years of service to retire (DoL, 2018).

Government Transition Assistance

In 2011, President Barrack Obama enacted Executive Order 13518 which stipulated that Congress make the Transition Assistance Program mandatory for every separating service member (DoD, 2011; DoL 2018). As a result, the DoD and VA partnered with various civilian and government agencies to create the VOW to Hire Heroes Act (TAP, 2017).

Prior to the Presidential order, individual branches possessed the latitude to design and employ their own versions of the transition assistance program. In many cases, this

left veterans feeling extremely unprepared to make this life-altering transition to civilian life (Faurer, Rogers-Brodersen, & Bailie, 2014). However, the newly designed program was developed with the goal of accomplishing distinct milestones with every transitioning service member (Faurer et al., 2014). For example, the current program is called Transition, Goals, Plans, and Milestones or T-GPS. According to Navy Personnel Command (2019) T-GPS offers separating/retiring military members and their relatives the services, tools, and courage necessary to effectively join civilian labor force, pursue higher schooling or retire.

Furthermore, T-GPS is centered on the six levels of the Individual Transition Plan (IPT). Table 4 provides a snapshot of the IPT levels.

Table 4

Individual Transition Plan

Level	Purpose of Level
One	Needs, Finances, Training, Certifications
Two	Employment
Three	Higher Education
Four	Technical Training
Five	Entrepreneurship
Six	Transition Timeline

Note. Adapted from "Career Information," by Navy Personnel Command, 2019. Retrieved from https://www.public.navy.mil/bupers-npc/career/Pages/default2.aspx

In addition to the six levels of the IPT, a separating or retiring service member must also complete the "Capstone" module prior to release from active duty (DoD, 2011;

Navy Personnel Command, 2019; TAP, 2017). The capstone module was designed to ensure that the service member completes all the elements of the IPT before discharge (TAP, 2017).

By way of contrast, separating service members receive a myriad information during the five-day T-GPS course, however, many veterans have reported that only five days to absorb the massive amount of information provided is insufficient (Faurer et al., 2014). Equally, there is no current mechanism in place to evaluate the effectiveness of the transition assistance program as it relates to veterans' successful transition to the civilian workforce (Ware, 2017).

In like manner, the U.S. Marine Corps utilizes the T-GPS standard but also includes their own unique design for the transition assistance program. The U.S. Marine Corps' program is centered on two elements referred to as the Military Life Cycle Transition Preparation Model (MLCM) and the Transition Readiness Seminar (TRS) (Marine Corps Order 1700.31, 2015).

The TRS was designed as a holistic transition model that begins 12-14 months before a Marine separates or 24 months before a Marine retires (Marine Order 1700.31, 2015). To illustrate, the documented portion of TRS commences with pre-separation counseling 180 days prior to separation, followed by attendance at the five-day transition course, and ends after the mandatory "Capstone" course prior to the discharge date (Marine Corps Order 1700.31, 2015). The MLCM is comprised of sections aimed at ensuring each separating member receives adequate training, education, and skills to better prepare him or her for life as a civilian. Figure 1 gives an overview of the MLCM.

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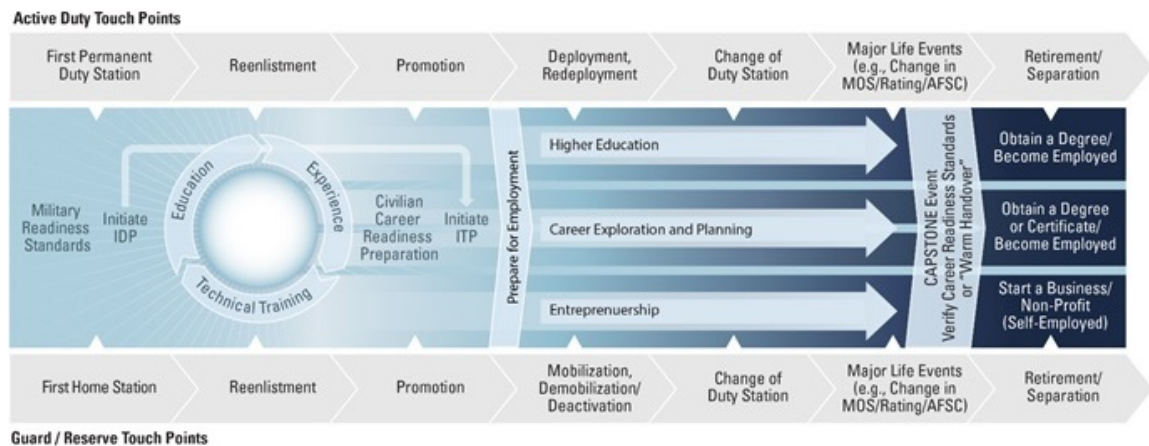
Figure 1. Military Life Cycle Transition Preparation Model. Caption taken from "Military Life Cycle (MLC) Model," by DoD TAP: Transition Assistance Program. Retrieved from www.dodtap.mil/mlc.html

Transferrable Skills

Veterans often suffer from high levels of unemployment due to the non-transferability of their skills (Cooper, 2012; Corri, Maury, & Faye, 2015). Particularly, when veterans are executing a resume, applying for jobs, or performing interviews many have a difficult time articulating how their specific skillset will benefit the civilian organization (Corri et al., 2015; E. Wright, 2015). McAllister, Mackey, Hackney, and Perrewe (2015) suggested that many veterans possess high anxiety about their military skillset translating to the civilian sector. Alternatively, veterans bring a unique set of skills with them upon separation in the form of discipline, leadership, punctuality, conflict resolution, and loyalty to their employer (Davis & Minnis, 2016). Alas, due to the lack of knowledge about military skills, many would-be hiring managers are missing the opportunity to employ this useful demographic (Mael, 2017).

Consequently, this has resulted in many veterans feeling a loss of confidence after having the previous perception of obtaining a well-paying job after military service

(Mael, 2017; Ruehlin, 2018). Nevertheless, many civilian hiring managers and recruiters have acknowledged the necessity to develop a more conducive process that would allow transitioning military personnel a seamless change from active duty service to the civilian workforce (Herasingh, 2014; McAallister et al., 2015).

Technical Skills and Certifications

When veterans separate from active duty and begin their transition to the civilian workforce, many realize that their qualifications earned on active duty may not be transferrable (Ahern et al., 2015). To illustrate, several military occupations such as equipment operator, emergency medical technician (EMT), human resources, and mechanic often require an additional qualification process outside of the military before the veteran can be hired (Lima, 2014; Ruehlin, 2018). To expound, Zogas (2017) asserted that some transitioning military members have an unrealistic mindset about how their military occupation will translate in the civilian sector. Mael (2017) argues that it is an on-going phenomenon how veterans with commensurate skills are not obtaining civilian employment at an equal proportion.

Soft Skills

While several veterans set their sights on utilizing the technical skills gained while on active duty, many civilian employers are more focused on veterans' soft skills (Hart, 2017). For example, Lima (2014) espoused that civilian employers are seeking to hire veterans due to their proven track record of "can-do" attitude, core values and ethos, leadership, and mission-driven approach towards their organization. Additionally, civilian employers are impressed by the ability of former military members to perform under pressure (Tarpey, 2016).

Veteran friendly organizations. Over the last several years, companies such as Aetna, Amazon, Allstate, and Accenture have partnered with the DoD in order to provide employment opportunities for veterans (Hart 2017, 2018; the White House, n.d.). In particular, programs have been launched that are aimed at recognizing and developing potential talent of veterans who can ultimately contribute to the civilian workforce (the White House, n.d.).

Even so, many of the companies have job opportunities that require a specific technical skill set (Messer & Greene, 2014). As a result, many veterans are unable to transition into these jobs without first obtaining advanced degrees or field related certifications (Hart, 2017; Messer & Greene, 2014). According to Woodworth (2015) America's companies should continue to display a rigorous effort with assisting transitioning veterans in obtaining apprenticeships, job-specific training, and employment opportunities.

Cultural Adjustments

A common difficulty encountered by veterans when entering the civilian workforce is the cultural adjustment (Redmond et al., 2011). Military members are accustomed to a specific structure in the workplace that is centered on methodically executing lawful orders given by leadership (Hale, 2017). Stone and Stone (2015) advised that civilian companies tend to operate under an employee inclusive structure, which at first can create a culture shock for many veterans. What is more, veterans may hesitate to adopt the employee vs employee competitive nature of civilian organizations due to their core values of loyalty and respect for comrades (Redmond et al., 2011).

However, with quality civilian mentoring, training, and experience veterans can easily overcome these cultural-based obstacles (Stone & Stone, 2015).

Mental Health

The draw-down of Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom has resulted in thousands of veterans separating from the military at the same time (DoL, 2018). Subsequently, thousands of veterans are also returning to civilian life bearing invisible wounds (Bur, 2018). Messer and Greene (2014) defined invisible wounds as those injuries suffered during war that don't outwardly appear. To complicate the situation more, many veterans are separating from active duty service without receiving adequate health care to address these issues (Nedegaard & Zwilling, 2017). Austin (2019) argued that many veterans don't seek mental health care prior to separation due to the numerous stigmas and stereotypes attached to military and mental health.

With that said, the VA does offer a plethora of long- and short-term mental health services, as well as in-patient care at many locations throughout the country (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016a). However, there is still not a sufficient instrument in place to attract more veterans to utilize these beneficial services (Sovereign, Health, 2016; J. Tsai, Kasprow, Kane, & Rosenheck, 2014). Additionally, female veterans face extra challenges as it relates to mental health, such as Military Sexual Trauma or MST (Accettola, 2013; Austin, 2019). According to Mankowski and Everett (2016) of the more than 25,000 sexual assaults reported in the military in 2012, one in five were female as opposed to two in 100 being male.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

Another affect that returning, battle-hardened service members face is the
potential diagnosis of PTSD (McGinty, 2015). PTSD is diagnosed at different levels
based on severity, ranging from mild to extreme cases (Department of Veterans Affairs,
2018). The DoD defines PTSD as a condition that develops as a result of experiencing or
witnessing a dangerous/life-threating event. To illustrate, a major element for developing
PTSD with those who served in OIF and OEF is the exposure to Improvised Explosive
Devices (IEDs) (Maples-Keller, Price, Rauch, Gererdi, & Rothbaum, 2017). As a result,
a large number of veterans also developed an additional invisible wound known as a
Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI) (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018; McGinty, 2015).
Yet, veterans continue to go untreated prior to separation and are facing a myriad of
obstacles while transitioning to civilian life (Messer & Greene, 2014). In like manner,
veterans are becoming an even more vulnerable demographic as it relates to the long-
term effects of mental health such as depression and suicide (Maples-Keller et al., 2017).

Suicide

Over the last decade, veteran suicide has become a front-line issue in the United
States (Wolf-Clarke & Bryan, 2017). According to Dao and Lehren (2013) suicide
among veterans continues to rise despite the many outlets offered by the VA and other
veterans' organizations to assist with those having suicidal thoughts or ideations.
Further, the number of veteran suicides has increased by 44% and 11% for males and
females respectively dating back to 2011 (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018, Nicks,
2014). Spelman, Hunt, Seal, and Burgo-Black (2012) suggested that the increase in
suicide rates among veterans over the last decade is directly associated with serving

multiple arduous deployments during America's War on Terrorism. As a result, many of our returning heroes are separating from active duty service in a "disabled veteran" status (Nicks, 2014).

Disability

Obtaining disabled status is the process by which a service member or veteran is evaluated by the VA and subsequently issued a rating (Cotner, Ottomanelli, O'Connor, Njoh & Jones, 2016; Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018). VA ratings are issued based on the severity of the case using a standardized system of grading. Additionally, ratings are issued in increments of 10 and cap at 100% (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018). Edens, Kasprow, Tsai, and Rosenheck (2011) attested that a disability rating could mean the difference between a veteran ending up homeless or not. Similarly, if a veteran reaches the VA disability rating of 50% to 100%, he or she is entitled to a life-time monthly payment based on the VA disability pay chart (Dismuke-Greer et al., 2018, Edens, Kasprow, Tsai & Rosenheck, 2011). Moreover, a service member can file a VA claim at any time after separation if he or she feels the condition was "service-connected" while on active duty (Cotner et al., 2016; Department of Veterans Affairs, 2018). However, if a veteran has been separated for more than one year, it becomes exponentially more difficult to prove the VA claim to be service-connected (Cotner et al., 2016).

Unemployment

Veterans have feared the prospect of unemployment for many years (Loughran, 2014). Many veterans perceive they will seamlessly transition from a military specialty into a commensurate occupation within the civilian sector (Zogas, 2017). However, due

to several circumstances upon discharge veterans find themselves facing the challenge of finding employment with a salary proportionate to their active duty pay (Loughran, 2014). The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2014) advanced that the conclusion of wars historically creates high unemployment rates among the veteran population. This scenario is more present than ever as a result of the massive 2011-2015 draw-down of OIF and OEF (Stern, 2017). Table 5 gives a historical view of the unemployment rates among veterans from 2011-2015.

Table 5

Veteran Unemployment Rates

Age Group	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
All	945,000	773,000	722,000	573,000	495,000
Post OIF/OEF	234,000	205,000	205,000	182,000	168,000
18-24	64,000	46,000	34,000	23,000	26,000
25-34	158,000	128,000	129,000	107,000	101,000
35-44	150,000	116,000	124,000	106,000	83,000
45-54	228,000	195,000	156,000	125,000	95,000
55 and older	345,000	288,000	279,000	213,000	189,000

Note. OIF = Operation Iraqi Freedom; OEF = Operation Enduring Freedom. Adapted from "Office of Economic Opportunity: Veterans Benefits Administration," by U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015. Retrieved from http://content.govdelivery .com/attachments/USVAVBA/2016/01/08/file_attachments/471578/BLS%2BEmployme nt%2BData%2B%2B2015%2BAnnual%2BAverages.pdf

Stern (2017) suggested that another factor plaguing veterans is the obsession with possessing a long-term career. In recent years, American workers have shifted from a life-long employment model and opted for the multi-career concept (Brannon, 2013).

Ultimately, this concept can be difficult for career veterans to accept after having spent 20-30 years in the same profession (Stern, 2017).

On the other hand, the DoD has designed and implemented several initiatives aimed at combating the veteran unemployment epidemic (Hart, 2017; J. Tsai et al., 2014). Yet, the unemployment rates among veterans has remained higher than their civilian counterparts during the past decade (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014). What is more, many veterans are facing the choice of underemployment in order to provide the necessities for themselves and their families (Hart, 2017; Tatum 2016).

Underemployment

In 2018, the national jobs report was released showing unemployment rates had reached an all-time low (Department of the Treasury, 2018). However, the DoL (2018) reported that many of the new hires were at or below the federal minimum wage rate of $15 per hour. Batka and Curry-Hall (2016) surmised that approximately 42% of veterans who have transitioned since 2011, reported they feel underemployed in their current occupation. Mainly, because they were unable to obtain an adequate job that reflected their occupational specialty while of active duty (Carter, Schafer, Kidder & Fagan, 2017).

Under those circumstances, many veterans find it difficult to transcribe their technical and soft skills on a resume or during an interview (Lima, 2014; Ruehlin, 2018; Zogas, 2017). As a result, veterans are accepting low-paying jobs due to the fear of being unemployed (Robertson & Brott, 2014; E. Wright, 2015). Similarly, veterans are finding themselves living in poverty as a byproduct of being underemployed or unemployed (National Veteran's Foundation, 2015).

Poverty

      Poverty among America's veterans has become an inconvenient truth that we as a nation must immediately address (J. Tsai, Link, Rosenhack, & Pietrzak, 2016). According to the Department of Veterans Affairs (2018) approximately 1.5 million veterans have experienced some version of poverty since separating from active duty over the last decade. Table 6 illustrates the percentage of veterans living in poverty by age group.

Table 6

Veterans Living in Poverty

Age Group	Male	Female
17-34	10.5%	13.1%
35-54	7.4%	8%
55-64	9.5%	10.2%

Note. Adapted from "Profile of Post-9/11 Veterans: 2014," by U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, 2016. Prepared by the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics. Retrieved from https://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/SpecialReports/Post_911_Veterans_Profile_2014.pdf

      Messer and Greene (2014) argued that a major cause of poverty among veterans are the invisible wounds of war that aid in preventing them from obtaining and maintaining gainful employment. Unfortunately, many veterans who experience poverty also experience homelessness (National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, 2018).

      Homelessness. Over the last decade, homelessness among veterans has increased significantly (J. Tsai, Hoff, & Harpaz-Rotem, 2017). According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness (2015) 8.6% of America's homeless population are veterans. To illustrate, over 1,300 homeless veterans sleep unsheltered in the streets and alleys of San Diego County each night (County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency,

2018). By comparison to the civilian population, only 1% of U.S. citizens ever serve in the Armed Services. This fact makes the rate of veteran homelessness highly disproportionate (J. Tsai et al., 2017).

What is more, the veteran homelessness epidemic has excessively affected veterans in the 18-34 age group (National Veteran's Foundation, 2015). Specifically, female veterans in this particular cohort are facing homelessness rates that America has not seen in the past (J. Tsai et al., 2014). J. Tsai, Rosenheck, and Pietrzak (2012) stated that female veterans are two times more likely to experience a period of homelessness than their male counterparts. Conversely, the U.S. Government has been diligently working to eradicate the homeless veteran problem with initiatives across the nation (Bratcher et al., 2015). For example, veteran's living facilities have been established across the country, such as the Veteran's Village of San Diego (VVSD) (National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, 2018). Furthermore, the United States has established the "Functional Zero" initiative which provides health services and necessities to homeless veterans (J. Tsai et al., 2016).

Even so, many veterans choose to avoid the government offered services such as health care at the VA hospital and shelter at a veteran's housing facility (Bratcher et al., 2015). Whatever the situation, researchers are imploring America's citizens to join in a concerted effort to end the veteran homelessness crisis in this country (Austin, 2019; Hart, 2017; Lima, 2014; Tatum, 2016).

Theoretical Framework

This qualitative, phenomenological study was designed utilizing Schlossberg's transition theory as the theoretical framework. Additionally, the researcher used

Schlossberg's 4-s model as a guide to measure the coping skills of the subjects as it relates to the overall transition process (De Munck, 2013; Morin, 2011). A description of Schlossberg's theory of transition and the 4-s model variables are provided in the following sections.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory

When an active duty service member reaches the end of his or her military career, the prospect of transitioning to civilian life can cause anxiety, fear, and even anger (M. L. M. L. Anderson & Goodman, 2014). N. K. Schlossberg (1984) defines transition as a process by which a person moves from one reality to another and forms new relationships and roles. In the same vein, counselors serve as guides and providers of information for those who are experiencing the rigors of transition (N. K. Schlossberg, 1984). According to M. L. Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2012) transition counselors are equipped with specialized training in assisting adults with developing strategies to prepare them for future success.

A study conducted by D. C. Miles (2002) showed that even high-level corporate executives who were terminated at the height of their careers, were able to apply Schlossberg's theory and find commensurate employment. With that in mind, Schlossberg's 4-s model is a dependable system to employ when supporting people who are traversing the transition process (M. L. Anderson et al., 2012). Table 7 delineates the 3 types of transition that fall under Schlossberg's theory.

Table 7

Schlossberg's Transition Types

Type of transition	Definition
Anticipated	Ones that occur predictably, such as graduation from college.
Unanticipated	Not predictable or scheduled, such as divorce or sudden death of a loved one.
Non-events	Transitions that are expected but do not occur, such as failure to be admitted to medical school.
Non-events (subcategories)	
• Personal	Related to individual aspirations.
• Ripple	Felt due to a nonevent of someone else.
• Resultant	Caused by an event.
• Delayed	Anticipating an event that might still occur.

Note. Excerpt from "Student Development in College: Theory, Research, and Practice," by N. J. Evans, D. S. Forney, and F. M. Guido-DiBrito, 1998, pp. 111-114. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, CA.

Situation

Situation is the framework of the change, all-encompassing the nature, extent, and supposed significance of and readiness for transition (N. K. Schlossberg, 1981). Situation also includes family, finances, new job, up-rooting of children, and new surroundings (Morin, 2011). Servicemembers can find themselves separated from the military due to a myriad of circumstances. For example, members can retire, be administratively separated, medically retired, or separated as a result of a physical examination board (PEB). For the purposes of this study, and to assure respondents

understand the nature of the inquiry, situation will be called the personal variable. What barriers and supports occur at the personal level?

Self

Self is the individual's notion of his or her own nature, character, and personality as related to ethos, origin, and individuality (N. K. Schlossberg, 1981). Self is the way individuals view their preparedness for change. This change can be developed over time in the military. As an illustration, Hart (2017) posited that the longer individuals serve in the Armed Forces the more challenging readiness for separation tends to be. For the purposes of this study, and to assure respondents understand the nature of the inquiry, self will be called the mental health variable. What barriers and supports occur to one's mental health?

Support

Social supports are households, networks, specialized care-givers, and resources (Barrera & Ainlay, 1983; N. K. Schlossberg, 1981). Tatum (2016) asserted that these support systems act as a mitigating force against the challenges of transition. One of the major support systems provided by the military is the FFSC which is located on every installation. For the purposes of this study, and to assure respondents understand the nature of the inquiry, support will be called the cultural/societal variable. What barriers and supports occur in the cultural/societal arena?

Strategy

The active element of strategy is thoughtful action, execution, task completion, and course amendment (N. K. Schlossberg, 1981). Having strategies and a plan of action and milestones is an important aspect of a successful transition. Additionally, strategies

can assist in mitigating the anxiety of the unknown during the process of change (Wilson, 2015). For the purposes of this study, and to assure respondents understand the nature of the inquiry, strategy will be called the organizational variable. What barriers and supports occur at the organizational level?

Gap in the Research

After analysis of the literature on the lived experiences of veterans regarding obtaining civilian employment, a gap was identified as it relates to the geographical location of San Diego, California. Granted, several studies have been conducted over the last decade that explore the lived experiences of veterans who have transitioned from military to civilian life. However, a study has yet to be conducted that examines the lived transition experiences of Navy and Marine Corps veterans in San Diego County.

The county of San Diego has one of the largest contingents of Navy and Marine Corps veteran populations in the country, totaling 13.1% of the population (County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, 2018). Therefore, this phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of Navy and Marine Corps veterans who have transitioned to the civilian workforce since the 2011 draw-down of OIF and OEF with respect to personal, mental health, cultural/societal, and organizational support and barriers.

Summary

Chapter II of this qualitative, phenomenological study provided a literature review which analyzed myriad authors connected to the obstacles that veterans encounter when transitioning to civilian life/workforce. Additionally, Chapter II employed the use of a synthesis matrix to compare and contrast the literature pertaining to the study (see

Appendix A). The matrix was developed from online library databases such as

EBSCOhost, ProQuest Dissertations and Thesis Global Database, ebook Academic

Collection, and Academic Search Premier. Similarly, the author researched a host of

government sites and literary resources to include the Department of Veteran Affairs,

DoD, and the DoL. Further, Chapter II provided a historical background for the study

that funneled-down from the following sections:

- Military Armed Services

- Military Culture

- War & Deployment

- Military Separation

- Government Transition Assistance

- Transferrable Skills

- Cultural Adjustments

- Mental Health

- Disability

- Unemployment

- Theoretical Framework

- Schlossberg's Transition Theory

- Gap in the Research

It is widely accepted throughout the literature that an alarming situation exists

with regards to active duty military personnel successfully transitioning to civilian life

(Austin, 2019; Hart, 2017; Knight, 2014; Lima, 2014; Tatum, 2016; Walker, 2013).

Additionally, researchers agree that veterans possess valuable soft skills such as conflict

resolution, team building, leadership, and fierce dedication to duty (Lima, 2014; Mael, 2017; Messer & Greene, 2014; Tarpey, 2016). Yet, civilian hiring managers and recruiters have not fully grasped the value that hiring a veteran can bring to their organizations (Hart, 2017; Zogas, 2017). With this theme in mind, research should continue to be conducted and aimed at assisting America's veterans find gainful employment within the civilian sector (Corri et al., 2015; Davis & Minnis, 2016; Tatum, 2016).

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Chapter III describes the methodology, instrumentation, and procedures applied to conduct this study. It includes the purpose statement to explain the motive for this study, the research questions, the research design, a description of the population and sample, and the sample selection process. Additionally, this chapter reports the expansion and accounts of the data collection instruments, field-testing for reliability and validity, an explanation of the data collection procedures, clarification of the qualitative data analysis, and the limitations of the study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of Navy and Marine Corps veterans who have transitioned to the civilian workforce in San Diego County, California since the 2011 draw-down of OIF and OEF with respect to personal, mental health, cultural/societal, and organizational support and barriers and to describe recommendations these veteran had for improving the process.

Research Question

The primary research question that guided this study was: *What were the lived experiences of Navy and Marine Corps veterans who have transitioned to the civilian workforce in San Diego County since the 2011 draw-down of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) with respect to personal, mental health, cultural/societal, and organizational support and barriers and what recommendations do these veterans have for improving the process?*

Research Sub-Questions

1. What were the lived experiences of Navy and Marine Corps veterans who have transitioned to the civilian workforce in San Diego County since the 2011 draw-down of OIF and OEF with respect to:

    a. Personal Support

    b. Personal barriers

    c. Mental health support

    d. Mental health barriers

    e. Cultural/Societal support

    f. Cultural/Societal barriers

    g. Organizational support

    h. Organizational barriers

    i. Recommendations for improving the process

Research Design

A qualitative, phenomenological methodology was selected for this study. An emotion, state of being, specific act, or even a career can be classified as a phenomenon, and viewing these acts through the lens of phenomenology "aims to capture the essence of program participants' experiences" (Patton, 2015, p. 116) with such phenomena. In this study, the phenomenon is the lived experiences of Navy and Marine Corps veterans who have transitioned to the civilian workforce in San Diego County, California. This study seeks to examine these lived experiences of Navy and Marine Corp veterans who

have made a successful transition by collecting and analyzing data from in-depth, semi-structured interviews and from artifacts collected from the participants (Creswell, 2007; Patton, 2015).

Qualitative methods have become "important tools within this broader approach to applied research, in large part because they provide valuable insights into the local perspectives of study populations" (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest, & Namey, 2005, p. 7). In qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument of data collection and is able to focus on collecting the experience of the participants through stories or words (Patton, 2015). Furthermore, Patton (2015) contents a phenomenological approach can focus on more deeply exploring how humans "make sense of experience and transform experience into consciousness, both individually and as shared meaning" (p. 115). This is confirmed by Seidman (2013), as he explains:

> Phenomenological theory leads to an emphasis on exploring the meaning of peoples' experiences in the context of their lives. Without context there is little possibility of exploring the meaning of an experience […]. It allows both the interviewer and participant to explore the participant's experience, place it in context, and reflect on its meaning. (p. 20)

Lived experiences, from Navy and Marine Corps veterans who have transitioned successfully to the civilian workforce in San Diego County, can be captured and more intensely examined by utilizing a qualitative, phenomenological methodology. Subsequently, Merriam (2009) contends researchers should strive to examine and explain meaning of social phenomena "with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible" (p. 5). In-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted in an environment selected by the

participant will allow the participant to share his/her story in a natural environment, while the researcher will have increased flexibility with the proposed questions to derive additional experiences based on how the participant responds (Merriam, 2009). The most appropriate deign for this study is a phenomenological qualitative design, which will utilize in-depth, semi-structured interviews, which allows for the collection of data in the respondent's natural environment and provides a form to share insight into their thoughts, inner feelings, and lived experiences (Patton, 2015) of barriers and support systems to attaining a successful transition into the workforce.

Population

A population is a group that "conforms to specific criteria" to which research results can be generalized (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 129). The population used in research is one of the most important aspects of a study. Patten (2017) asserted the population is a large group of individuals in which researchers are ultimately interested. The population for this study consisted of 6,370,000 Navy and Marine Corps veterans worldwide.

Target Population

According to Creswell (2014), the target population is the "actual list of sampling units from which the sample is selected" (p. 393). A target population for a study is the entire set of individuals chosen from the overall population for which the study data are to be used to make inferences. The target population defines the population to which the findings are meant to be generalized. It is important that target populations are clearly identified for the purposes of research study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). It is typically not feasible, due to time or cost constraints, to study large groups; therefore, the

researcher chose population *samples* from within a larger group. Creswell (2009) notes

that a target population or sampling frame is "a group of individuals with some common

defining characteristic that the researcher can identify and study" (p. 142). The study was

narrowed to the sampling frame of 95,000 Navy and Marine Corps veterans residing

within San Diego County (County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency,

2018).

Sample

According to Patton (2015) a sample is a subgroup of the overall population. The

sample is a group of participants in a study selected from the population from which the

researcher intends to generalize. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010),

sampling is selecting a "group of individuals from whom data are collected" (p. 129).

Similarly, Patton (2015) and Creswell (2003) defined a sample as a subset of the target

population representing the whole population.

Purposeful sampling was applied in order to select participants. In purposeful

sampling, the researcher selects participants for a precise purpose, typically individuals

who have understanding of the fundamental phenomenon or main concept (L. D. Wright,

2013). In addition, convenience sampling was used to ensure that the researcher had

access to the participants. Convenience sampling is the use of those participants to which

the researcher has the easiest and most convenient access (McMillan & Schumacher,

2010) (see Figure 2).
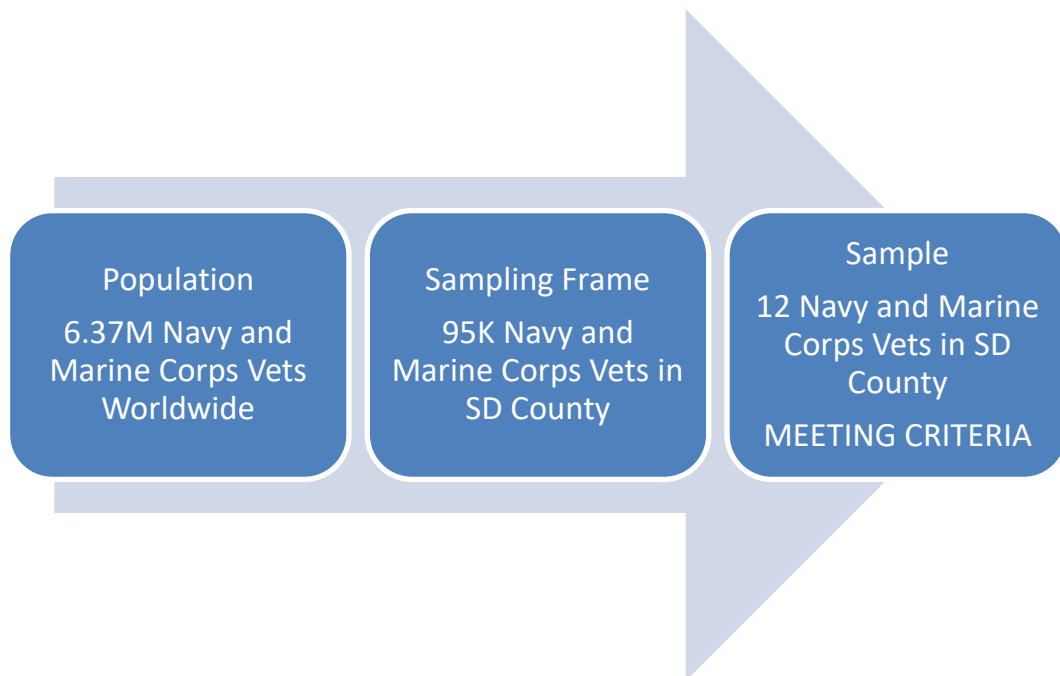
Figure 2. Population, Sampling Frame, and Target.

Sample Selection Criteria

Applying purposeful sampling, 12 Navy and Marine Corps veterans, consisting of 6 former Sailors and 6 former Marines, were selected based on the following conditions:

- Served in the United States Navy or United States Marine Corps and was honorably discharged no earlier than 1 January 2011.

- Have resided in San Diego County since the date of discharge.

- Successfully transitioned to the civilian workforce in a career of their choice for a minimum of one year.

Sample Selection Process

The sample for the study was selected using the following process:

1. The United States Navy, United States Marine Corps, Offices of Veterans Affairs, USO, and other veteran related organizations were contacted to

identify and develop a list of USN and USMC veterans in San Diego County that met the study criteria.

2. A group of 24 qualified participants were identified and contacted via email describing the process and nature of the study and requesting their participation (see Appendix B).

3. From those who agreed to participate, the researcher developed a list of 12 participants based upon convenience and accessibility to the researcher.

4. Informed Consent materials were sent to each participant (see Appendix C) which included the audio release form (see Appendix D), Participants Bill of Rights (see Appendix E) and, upon return of the materials and approval from Brandman University Instructional Review Board (BUIRB) (see Appendix F) and the necessary course work was completed and a certificate of completion was granted from The National Institutes of Health (NIH) (see Appendix G), interviews were scheduled and conducted.

Instrumentation

In qualitative studies, the researcher serves as the chief instrument for data collection (Patton, 2015). For this reason, it is imperative for qualitative researchers to be highly proficient in the practice of interviews and to be thoughtful and aware of bias to protect the integrity of the data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The researcher applied semi-structured interview questions as the primary method of data collection (see Appendix H). An Interview Question Development Matrix was used to align Interview Questions to research questions to assure that the data gathered was valid (see Appendix

I). Patten (2017) suggested that the researcher should employ uniform, open-ended questions to allow for consistency of data gathering.

During the interview process, each participant was allowed to contribute any additional information he or she felt was pertinent to the study. Additionally, the researcher employed the probing method to extract information that was not previously disclosed. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) advanced that the researcher uses arranged queries to guide the discussion and preserve the validity in semi-structured interviews but can also request follow-up inquiries as desired to probe for answers that are more detailed.

Interview Protocol

The interview protocol was established using uniform, open-ended, and semi-structured interview questions aligned with the research questions. According to Patton (2015) consistent interviews determine the precise language and categorization of interview questions and follow-up prompts. The variables of personal, mental health, cultural/societal, and organizational supports and barriers were adapted from Schlossberg's Transition Theory as described in Chapter II. The interview protocol was developed directly from the research questions using the Interview Question Development Matrix. The following questions were asked in sequential order throughout the interview:

1. What personal support did you receive during your transition from active duty service to your civilian employment?

2. What personal barriers did you experience during your transition from active duty service to your civilian employment?

3. What mental health support did you receive during your transition from active duty service to your civilian employment?

4. What mental health barriers did you experience during your transition from active duty service to your civilian employment?

5. What cultural/societal support did you receive during your transition from active duty service to your civilian employment?

6. What cultural/societal barriers did you experience during your transition from active duty service to your civilian employment?

7. What organizational support did you receive during your transition from active duty service to your civilian employment?

8. What organizational barriers did you experience during your transition from active duty service to your civilian employment?

9. What recommendations do you have for your branch of the military for improving the transition process?

10. What recommendations do you have for service members for improving the transition process?

11. Are there any other thoughts you would like to offer the interviewer?

Validity

When performing research, it is vital that the examination approaches used are valid and reliable. Lakshmi and Mohideen (2013) surmised the act of accomplishing validity and reliability can prove to be a challenging exercise when conducting research. Patten (2017) stated that validity is a decisive process of measurement that averts accidentally including variables that are not intended to be a portion of the study. The

interview questions for this study were based upon Schlossberg's Transition Theory and were derived directly from the research questions for the study, which were developed from the literature that addresses the transition of military veterans to the civilian workforce. An alignment matrix was developed to assure that the questions asked addressed the variables of the study.

Reliability

Similarly, in the process of achieving validity, the researcher must also achieve reliability. According to Patton (2015) reliability is the measure of consistency of the researcher's results. Validity and reliability in qualitative research are based on four main concepts. Those concepts are referred to as: (a) credibility, (b) dependability, (c) transferability, and (d) conformability (Patten, 2017).

Credibility

To ensure credibility, the researcher employed a pilot interview and expert panel review. As a result, the researcher was able to identify areas of the interview that did not align with the research questions. Creswell (2009) advocated that the pilot interview process will prevent the researcher from deviating from the purpose of the study. With agreement of the contributors through informed consent, interviews were chronicled and translated. The expert panel review involved asking the participants to review the transcription to verify accuracy.

Field test. After developing and screening the interview questions with the expert panel, the researcher used the interview protocol with volunteers who met the stipulations of the sampling frame but who were not contributors in the actual study. These experts were individuals who had themselves made a successful transition into civilian

employment and who had previous experience working with veterans in the transition process. One expert observed the researcher administer the field teat and gave feedback regarding the researcher's delivery to detect any researcher bias. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) notes reliability must be achieved with persons who are comparable to the participants in the study. The researcher used the 10 open-ended, semi-structured interview questions during the field test. After the field test was completed, the researcher analyzed the feedback collected. The feedback was used to help refine the interview questions and improve the reliability of the study. The research asked the following questions of the expert panel:

1. Are the interview questions clear and concise?

2. Do the questions clearly relate to the research questions and objective of the study?

3. Do you detect any perceived researcher bias in the interview questions?

4. Do you have any suggestions for improving the interview protocol?

Upon completion of the field test, modifications were applied to the interview questions and protocol based on the suggestions and feedback of the expert panel.

Dependability

Dependability refers to how the researcher accounts for variations in the singularity of the research and fluctuations in the design, due to an advanced familiarity of the location (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). For this reason, the researcher used two veterans who are employed by the VA, who currently work with veterans in transition, and who have made successful transitions themselves, to assist in coding, formulating

themes, and identifying patterns in the participants' responses. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010) the researcher should employ a third party to assist in data analysis.

Transferability

Transferability denotes the aptitude to simplify or transfer qualitative research conclusions to other circumstances (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Additionally, Patten (2017) attested transferability can be hard to create but can be achieved by methodically relating the procedure so others can track and reproduce. To ensure transferability, the researcher recorded rich details of the lived experiences of Navy and Marine Corps veterans who have transitioned to the civilian workforce in San Diego County since the 2011 draw-down of Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom.

Conformability

Conformability addresses the capacity of another individual or scholar to confirm the results of the research (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). In order to ensure conformability, the researcher chronicled all stages and conclusions made during the study by implementing an assessment process to offer a basis for all procedural and interpretative findings discovered in the research (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013).

Data Collection

As per institutional program policy, no data was collected for this study until permission to conduct the study was attained from the. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010) the IRB process is used to guarantee compliance with federal guidelines and aids in assuring the academic has measured all ethical implications. In a

like manner, prior to gathering any data, the researcher completed all necessary coursework and was granted certification by The National Institutes of Health.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face at the Veteran's Memorial Park in the Point Loma community of San Diego, California. The park provided a calm setting that was suitable in theme and comfortable for the interviewees. Participants identified through purposeful sampling were informed of the purpose of the study and the interview procedure. The researcher started each interview by introducing himself to establish a relationship with each of the participants. Likewise, the participant introduced him or herself and the interview process commenced.

The data gathering process started after the researcher clarified the importance of informed consent with each contributor and attained a signature on the informed consent form. Each participant was reminded of the privacy of the interview and his or her right to end the interview at any time. Additionally, each contributor was reminded of the necessity to capture, transcribe, code, and theme the interview proceedings. All participants received a copy of the interview transcriptions to certify the data was precise and met its intent. Every interviewee was asked the same open-ended, semi-structured questions in sequential order. Each interview was recorded using a Samsung audio recording device. Upon completion of an individual interview, each contributor was thanked for his or her time and participation.

Data Collection Sequence

The following approach was used to gather and analyze data for this research:

1. Purposeful sampling to garner six former U.S. Sailors and six former U.S. Marines who have separated since January 2011 and have worked in a civilian career of their choosing for a least one year.

2. Solicit the participation of the 12 subjects via informed consent forms on a volunteer basis.

3. Conduct interviews with the participants utilizing 10 open-ended, semi-structured interview questions.

4. Record the individual interviews using a Samsung recording device and forward each participant a copy upon transcription.

5. Code the validated records and examine for tendencies and patterns.

6. Review tendencies and patterns using Inter-coder reliability to ensure accuracy.

7. Table all codes founded on frequency and report on the findings of the research.

8. Secure all data and personal information in a locked safe pending destruction.

Data Analysis

One week after completion of the interview phase, the researcher began data analysis. Patton (2015) suggested that establishing some sort of controllable coding system is the first step in successful analysis. To that end, the researcher employed the assistance of NVIVO software to assist in coding and developing themes from the data.

Further, the researcher utilized an individual who is familiar with the qualitative research process to assist in coding the data to provide Inter-coder reliability.

Preliminary themes were identified and then studied for uniformity. Data were categorized and coded. The identification of final themes was constructed, and actual codes and themes are presented in Chapter IV. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) designed a flow chart to guide the researcher through the coding process. The following information describes this procedure:

1. Collect Data

2. Organize Data

3. Transcribe Date into Segments

4. Code Data

    a. Inter-coder reliability

5. Describe Data

6. Categorize Data

7. Develop Patterns

At the conclusion of data collection and transcription, the validated transcripts were coded for themes via NVIVO software. All data, including artifacts, were placed into matrices for comparison and evaluation. Additionally, the researcher employed the assistance of an expert to provide Inter-coder reliability. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010) Inter-coder reliability, "…is the extent to which two or more persons agree what they have seen, heard, or read" (p. 182). All recorded and privacy information obtained during this study is maintained within a locked safe. The

information is maintained for five years. After this time has expired, all information

pertaining to the participants is shredded using a "Secret" level security shredder.

Limitations

In all research there are limitations. Limitations are parts of the study which the

academic has no control and could have a detrimental effect on the results of the research

(McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Some limitations the researcher faced were: the

sample was only from the county of San Diego and the results may not be indicative of

Navy and Marine Corps veterans worldwide. Selecting a sample size that expanded

outside of San Diego County may have produced a wider variety of responses.

Additionally, the participants may have felt the need to give "positive" answers out of

their loyalty to country and affinity for their respective branches of service. Finally, the

participants could have refrained from providing perceived negative responses due to the

interviewer's status as an active duty Navy officer.

Summary

Chapter III included a detailed account of the methodology used for this study.

The research questions, the qualitative research design method, and the population

sample selection processes were reviewed. Additionally, the instrumentation, data

collection process, data analysis, and projected limitations for the study were discussed.

This study sought to explore the lived experiences of Navy and Marine Corps veterans

who have transitioned to the civilian workforce since the 2011 draw-down of OIF and

OEF with respect to personal, mental health, cultural/societal, and organizational support

and barriers. The researcher acted as the instrument and employed an interview protocol

using 10 open-ended, semi-structured interview questions. Moreover, a pilot interview

and expert panel ensured reliability and validity (Creswell, 2009). Using a methodical

approach, the researcher collected data and performed analysis. Lastly, with the

assistance of Inter-coder reliability, the researcher coded the data for themes to develop

tendencies and patterns.

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Overview

This qualitative research study explored the lived experiences of veterans who have successfully transitioned to the civilian workforce. Success was measured by the standard of working in a civilian career of the participant's choice for at least one year post active duty. This chapter begins with an evaluation of the purpose statement and research questions, followed by a rundown of the research design, population, sample, and demographics. Chapter IV concentrates on the presentation and analysis of the data composed during the research. A summary of significant findings is offered comparative to both the central and sub research questions.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of Navy and Marine Corps veterans who have transitioned to the civilian workforce in San Diego County, California since the 2011 draw-down of OIF and OEF with respect to personal, mental health, cultural/societal, and organizational support and barriers.

Research Questions

Central Research Question

The primary research question that guided this study was: *What were the lived experiences of Navy and Marine Corps veterans who have transitioned to the civilian workforce in San Diego County since the 2011 draw-down of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) with respect to personal, mental health, cultural/societal, and organizational support and barriers?*

Sub-Questions

1. What were the lived experiences of Navy and Marine Corps personnel who have transitioned to the civilian workforce in San Diego County since the 2011 draw-down of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) with respect to:

    a. Personal Support

    b. Personal barriers

    c. Mental health support

    d. Mental health barriers

    e. Cultural/Societal support

    f. Cultural/Societal barriers

    g. Organizational support

    h. Organizational barriers

Population

A population is a group the "conforms to specific criteria" to which research results can be generalized (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 129). The population used in research is one of the most important aspects of a study. Patten (2017) asserted the population is a large group of individuals in which researchers are ultimately interested. The population for this study consisted of 6,370,000 Navy and Marine Corps veterans worldwide.

Target Population

According to Creswell (2014), the target population is the "actual list of sampling units from which the sample is selected" (p. 393). A target population for a study is the

entire set of individuals chosen from the overall population for which the study data are to be used to make inferences. The target population defines the population to which the findings are meant to be generalized. It is important that target populations are clearly identified for the purposes of research study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). It is typically not feasible, due to time or cost constraints, to study large groups; therefore, the researcher chose population *samples* from within a larger group. Creswell (2009) notes that a target population or sampling frame is "a group of individuals with some common defining characteristic that the researcher can identify and study" (p. 142). The study was narrowed to the sampling frame of 95,000 Navy and Marine Corps veterans residing within San Diego County (County of San Diego Health and Human Services Agency, 2018).

Sample Criteria

Applying purposeful and convenience sampling, 12 Navy and Marine Corps veterans, consisting of six former Sailors and six former Marines, were selected based on the following conditions:

- Served in the United States Navy or United States Marine Corps and was honorably discharged no earlier than 1 January 2011.

- Have resided in San Diego County since the date of discharge.

- Successfully transitioned to the civilian workforce in a career of their choice for a minimum of one year.

Sample Demographics

The sample demographics gathered from the participants of the study included branch of service, age at the time of retirement or separation, years of service, military

specialty/occupation, race/ethnicity, state of legal residence upon initial enlistment/commissioning, highest level of education, and career field since discharge. The 12 participants of the study consisted of both male and female veterans of the U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps who discharged on or after 1 January 2011. The participants are a balanced ratio of both Officer and Enlisted personnel and range in age from 26 to 56. Also, the participants have worked in a civilian career field of their choosing for at least one-year post separation.

The method of participant solicitation was via the Department of Veteran Affairs, USO, and posting flyers in public information areas on bases and various locations in San Diego County. The method of data gathering was face-to-face interviews with each of the 12 participants. Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes to one hour. Table 8 gives a snapshot of participant diversity.

Table 8

Participant Demographics

Participant	Separation Age	Race / Ethnicity	Gender	Home State
P1	56	Asian	M	California
P2	26	Hispanic	M	California
P3	34	Caucasian	F	Texas
P4	45	African American	M	California
P5	30	Caucasian	M	Arkansas
P6	43	African American	M	Georgia
P7	28	African American	M	Georgia
P8	35	Caucasian	F	Maryland
P9	50	African American	M	New Jersey
P10	51	Caucasian	F	California
P11	50	Caucasian	M	California
P12	52	Caucasian	F	California

The participants fell into two categories of separation: retired or not retired from active duty service. Additionally, the participants had varying levels of education and training. Also, the 12 participants have all successfully transitioned into different career fields of their choosing. Table 9 gives an extensive breakdown of the participants' backgrounds.

Table 9

Participant Background

Participant	Branch of Service	Retired / Not Retired	Rank at Separation	Years of Service	Level of Education	Current Job / Annual Salary
P1	Navy	Retired	O6/Captain	26	Master's Degree	Program Management Analyst / $115,000
P2	Navy	Not Retired	E6/FCPO	12	Bachelor's Degree	IT Specialist / $90,000
P3	Marine Corps	Not Retired	E5/SGT	6	High School Diploma	Security Clearance Specialist / $65,000
P4	Marine Corps	Not Retired	O3/LT	10	Bachelor's Degree	Cyber Security Specialist / $94,000
P5	Marine Corps	Not Retired	E6/SSGT	9	High School Diploma	Security Clearance Specialist / $65,000
P6	Navy	Retired	E8/SCPO	24	Master's Degree	Consultant / $75,000
P7	Marine Corps	Not Retired	E5/SGT	8	Bachelor's Degree	Cyber Security Specialist / $135,000
P8	Navy	Not Retired	O3/LT	10	Master's Degree	Senior Consultant / $105,000

Table 9

Participant Background

Participant	Branch of Service	Retired / Not Retired	Rank at Separation	Years of Service	Level of Education	Current Job / Annual Salary
P9	Navy	Retired	E8/SCPO	22	High School Diploma	Finance Manager / $108,000
P10	Marine Corps	Retired	E8/MSGT	25	Master's Degree	Transition Specialist / $80,000
P11	Navy	Retired	E9/MCPO	30	Bachelor's Degree	Small Business Owner / $160,000
P12	Marine Corps	Retired	E7/GYST	24	High School Diploma	Financial Analyst / $89,000

Data Collection

As per institutional program policy, no data was collected for this study until permission to conduct the study was attained from the Brandman University Institutional Review Board (BUIRB). According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010) the IRB process is used to guarantee compliance with federal guidelines and aids in assuring the academic has measured all ethical implications. In a like manner, prior to gathering any data, the researcher completed all necessary coursework and was granted certification by The National Institutes of Health.

The interviews were conducted face-to-face at various places within the County of San Diego at the discretion of the participants. This enabled a calm setting that was suitable in theme and comfortable for the interviewees. Participants identified through

purposeful and convenience sampling were informed of the purpose of the study and the interview procedure. The researcher started each interview by introducing himself to establish a relationship with each of the participants. Likewise, the participant introduced himself or herself and the interview process commenced.

The data gathering process started after the researcher clarified the importance of informed consent with each contributor and attained a signature on the informed consent form. Each participant was reminded of the privacy of the interview and his or her right to end the interview at any time. Additionally, each contributor was reminded of the necessity to capture, transcribe, code, and theme the interview proceedings. All participants received a copy of the interview transcriptions to certify the data was precise and met its intent. Every interviewee was asked the same open-ended, semi-structured questions in sequential order. Each interview was recorded using a Samsung audio recording device. Upon completion of an individual interview, each contributor was thanked for his or her time and participation.

Data Analysis

One week after completion of the interview phase, the researcher began data analysis. Patton (2015) suggested that establishing some sort of controllable coding system is the first step in successful analysis. To that end, the researcher employed the assistance of NVIVO software to assist in coding and developing themes from the data. Further, the researcher utilized an individual who is familiar with the qualitative research process to assist in coding the data to provide Inter-coder reliability. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010) Inter-coder reliability, "…is the extent to which two or more persons agree what they have seen, heard, or read" (p. 182).

Preliminary themes were identified and then studied for uniformity. Data were categorized and coded. At the conclusion of data collection and transcription, the validated transcripts were coded for themes via NVIVO software. All data, including artifacts, were placed into matrices for comparison and evaluation. All recorded and privacy information obtained during this study was maintained within a locked safe. The information will be maintained for five years. After this time has expired, all information pertaining to the participants will be shredded using a "Secret" level security shredder.

Reliability

According to Patton (2015) reliability is the measure of consistency of the researcher's results. Validity and reliability in qualitative research are based on four main concepts. Those concepts are referred to as: (a) credibility, (b) dependability, (c) transferability, and (d) conformability (Patten, 2017).

To ensure reliability, the researcher employed a pilot interview and expert panel review. As a result, the researcher was able to identify areas of the interview that did not align with the research questions. Creswell (2009) advocated that the pilot interview process will prevent the researcher from deviating from the purpose of the study. With agreement of the contributors through informed consent, interviews were chronicled and translated. The expert panel review involved asking the participants to review the transcription to verify accuracy.

Schlossberg's 4-s Model

This study followed the framework of Schlossberg's theory of transition. The theory is based on the "4-s Model." The model consists of four variables known as Situation, Self, Support, and Strategy (M. L. Anderson & Goodman, 2014). After in-

depth examination of multiple theories, the researcher settled on Schlossberg's 4-s

theory/model as the best fit for this particular study. As a result, the researcher divided

the 11 semi-structured interview questions into the four categories of the theory.

Situation

Situation is the framework of the change, all-encompassing the nature, extent, and

supposed significance of and readiness for transition (N. K. Schlossberg, 1981). For the

purpose of this study, and to assure the respondents understood, situation was called a

Personal variable and therefore captured Interview Questions 1 and 2.

Self

Self is the individual's notion of his or her own nature, character, and personality

as related to ethos, origin, and individuality (N. K. Schlossberg, 1981). For the purpose

of this study, and to assure the respondents understood the nature of the inquiry, self was

called a *Mental Health* variable and therefore captured Interview Questions 3 and 4.

Support

Social supports are households, networks, specialized care-givers, and resources

(Barrera & Ainlay, 1983; N. K. Schlossberg, 1981). For the purpose of this study, and to

assure respondents understood the nature of the inquiry, support was called a

Cultural/Societal variable and therefore captured Interview Questions 5 and 6.

Strategy

The active element of strategy is thoughtful action, execution, task completion,

and course amendment (N. K. Schlossberg, 1981). For the purpose of this study, and to

assure the respondents understood the nature of the inquiry, strategy was called an

Organizational variable and therefore captured Interview Questions 7 and 8.

Data Presentation / Participant Summations

The participant summation portion of this chapter describes the interview proceedings with the individual participants. Along with asking the participants the 11 semi-structured interview questions, and probing for additional information, the researcher also observed the respondents body language/mannerisms in the setting. Moreover, several artifacts were analyzed and acknowledged for the purpose of triangulating the data.

Participant 1 Summation

Participant 1 is a retired male veteran who served in the U.S. Navy for 26 years as a Surface Warfare and Acquisitions Officer and retired at the rank of O6/Captain. When asked about his "situation" or readiness to transition as it relates to personal support and barriers, Participant 1 stated, "The sudden cultural shift was almost too overwhelming." Additionally, Participant 1 stated that it took some getting used to not having a support staff to handle the day-to-day administrative aspects for him. Participant 1 also shared that he had the false perception prior to retiring that he would easily transition to a civilian job, given his extensive executive leadership skills and experience.

Furthermore, when the researcher asked Participant 1 about the "self" aspect of his transition, as it relates to mental health support and barriers, Participant 1 stated, "There were a lot of stereotypes about veterans' mental stability harbored by a large number of civilian hiring managers – I never thought about that while on active duty." As for mental health support, Participant 1 offered that the VA benefits he has received post retirement have been highly beneficial to his overall health and well-being. However, Participant 1 espoused that most of the information he gathered about his VA

benefits was accumulated by conducting his own research, as opposed to receiving it during his transition course.

In the same vein, when questioned about "support" as it relates to cultural/societal support and barriers, Participant 1 said, "I felt that because I was a Captain, I received much more support than the younger Sailors upon their separation." Participant 1 added that he had built a vast network over his 26-year career, which was something that younger servicemembers are usually not in the position to do. Participant 1 showed the researcher a retired Navy Captain roster that contained all of the current retired O6 Acquisitions Officers across the nation. Participant 1 explained that the contact roster is utilized for everything from social events to help finding employment opportunities. Participant 1 stated, "If it were not for the network roster, I would not have my current job."

To further expound, when asked about "strategy" as it relates to organizational support and barriers, Participant 1 stated, "As the out-going Commanding Officer, the support my family and I experienced was incredibly helpful!" Additionally, Participant 1 stated that he was the president of his home owner's association (HOA) and that his community rallied around the family during retirement.

Lastly, Participant 1 was provided the opportunity to give advice to service members who are approaching separation or retirement. Participant 1 stated, "Active duty personnel should start preparing for separation at least 18 months in advance." Also, Participant shared that it is important to start building your network for potential job opportunities well ahead of your separation date.

Participant 2 Summation

Participant 2 is a non-retired male veteran who served in the U.S. Navy for 12 years as a Yeoman and separated at the rank of E6/FCPO. When asked about his "situation" or readiness to transition as it relates to personal support and barriers, Participant 2 stated, "I had my wife to lean on because she was also active duty and could maintain the household until I found gainful employment." Additionally, Participant 2 stated that he had established some connections with key personnel while he was still on active duty. Participant 2 also shared that he was a bit nervous because he had seen many of his Shipmates separate without a solid plan and not secure sufficient employment.

Moreover, when the researcher asked Participant 2 about the "self" aspect of his transition, as it relates to mental health support and barriers, Participant 2 stated, "I was really nervous that hiring managers might think I was suffering from a mental condition like PTSD." As for mental health support, Participant 2 stated that other than his separation physical, which was essentially a questionnaire, he had not received much mental health support.

What is more, when questioned about "support" as it relates to cultural/societal support and barriers, Participant 2 said, "The civilian culture is a lot different than in the Navy, that took some getting used to." Participant 2 added that he was used to the daily regime of military life for 12 years and now it is everyone doing their own thing.

Further, when asked about "strategy" as it relates to organizational support and barriers, Participant 2 stated, "I thought the Transition Assistance Course (TAP) was really helpful, but it was just one week long." Additionally, Participant 2 shared that the

U.S. DOL Employment Workshop handbook was very helpful with the way he approached transitioning from the military to civilian workforce.

Last of all, Participant 2 was given the opportunity to share anything that could be potentially beneficial for separating service members. Participant 2 said, "Anyone who is approaching separation should plan well." Also, he said make sure you have taken advantage of any training opportunities in the field you plan on working prior to your separation.

Participant 3 Summation

Participant 3 is a non-retired female veteran who served in the U.S. Marine Corps for six years as an IT specialist and separated at the rank of E5/SGT. When asked about her "situation" or readiness to transition as it relates to personal support and barriers, Participant 3 stated, "I was somewhat nervous because although I had prepared for civilian work by earning several certifications, I had not yet completed my degree." Additionally, Participant 3 stated that she had also volunteered with several civilian companies that were in her career field of interest.

Furthermore, when the researcher asked Participant 3 about the "self" aspect of her transition, as it relates to mental health support and barriers, Participant 3 stated, "I wondered prior to getting out if I should have given more attention to my mental health." Participant 3 stated that even though she had made several deployments to the "hot zone," she never talked to a professional about the potential invisible wounds she could have.

Additionally, when questioned about "support" as it relates to cultural/societal support and barriers, Participant 3 said, "In the civilian world, you really have to take

responsibility for yourself – There is no 1st SGT there to tell you what to do." Participant 3 added that she had to get used to making sure her priorities were in order each workday because there was no set master schedule or plan of the day to follow.

Similarly, when asked about "strategy" as it relates to organizational support and barriers, Participant 3 stated, "I thought the Transition Assistance Course (TAP) was inadequate for the amount of information they expected us to retain." Additionally, Participant 3 shared that she wishes her leaders were more proactive when it came to preparing Marines for separation. She stated, "It seemed that when my chain-of-command found out I was separating, they kind of just forgot I was there."

Finally, Participant 3 was given the opportunity to share anything that could be potentially beneficial for separating service members. Participant 3 said, "Service members should not automatically believe that a "good job" is waiting on them on the outside. You have to prepare yourself for a civilian job just like everything else in life."

Participant 4 Summation

Participant 4 is a non-retired male veteran who served in the U.S. Marine Corps for 10 years as a helicopter pilot and separated at the rank of O3/CPT. When asked about his "situation" or readiness to transition as it relates to personal support and barriers, Participant 4 stated, "I felt pretty comfortable knowing that I had lots of contacts through networking during my career and with the Naval Academy Alumni groups." Additionally, Participant 4 stated that he had been "greasing the skids" with the company he wanted to work for well before his discharge date.

Also, when the researcher asked Participant 4 about the "self" aspect of his transition, as it relates to mental health support and barriers, Participant 4 stated, "I was

rated at 70% disability by the VA for combat PTSD prior to separating – I would have to say the support has been there."

Moreover, when questioned about "support" as it relates to cultural/societal support and barriers, Participant 4 said, "After 10 years of high-speed military life as a combat pilot, it took a while to get used to the slower pace and calmer overall vibe of civilian culture." Participant 4 added that once he truly accepted his new self as a civilian cyber security specialist, he was able to better adjust.

Likewise, when asked about "strategy" as it relates to organizational support and barriers, Participant 4 stated, "TAPs class provided me with a lot of good info but it was hard to retain it all with just a week to work with." Additionally, Participant 4 shared that he didn't really receive much support from his command as it relates to separation because it seemed as if he did most of his research and preparation on his own.

Lastly, Participant 4 was given the opportunity to share anything that could be potentially beneficial for separating service members. Participant 4 said, "Military members who are approaching separation should implore their leaders to provide them with the adequate time and resources to fully prepare for the challenges of transition."

Participant 5 Summation

Participant 5 is a non-retired male veteran who served in the U.S. Marine Corps for nine years as an information technology (IT) specialist and separated at the rank of E6/SSGT. When asked about his "situation" or readiness to transition as it relates to personal support and barriers, Participant 5 stated, "I knew I had researched and obtained the exact certification I needed for the job I wanted before my separation date."

Additionally, Participant 5 stated that he also volunteered on the weekends at an IT company while still on active duty in order to gain additional skills in the industry.

Correspondingly, when the researcher asked Participant 5 about the "self" aspect of his transition, as it relates to mental health support and barriers, Participant 5 stated, "I was rated a 50% percent disabled veteran by the VA and I receive routine support for mental and physical health."

Furthermore, when questioned about "support" as it relates to cultural/societal support and barriers, Participant 5 said, "I felt I had good cultural/societal support because I had established relationships on the 'outside' prior to my separation." Participant 5 added that many service members wait until the last minute and it makes the cultural adjustment that much harder.

Likewise, when asked about "strategy" as it relates to organizational support and barriers, Participant 5 stated, "I didn't feel that my command prepared me as well as they could have for separation." Additionally, Participant 5 shared that he received some really beneficial information about the Department of Veteran Affairs and DoL during his transition assistance course.

To finish, Participant 5 was given the opportunity to share anything that could be potentially beneficial for separating service members. Participant 5 said, "Military members who are approaching separation should not wait until the last minute to prepare for discharge." Additionally, Participant 5 stated, "I'm telling you; you have to take care of yourself above all else."

Participant 6 Summation

Participant 6 is a retired male veteran who served in the U.S. Navy for 24 years as a Yeoman and separated at the rank of E8/SCPO. When asked about his "situation" or readiness to transition as it relates to personal support and barriers, Participant 6 stated, "I must say, initially I had the belief that I was just going to walk into a similar job – like HR manager." Additionally, Participant 6 stated that once he realized this was not necessarily the case, he adjusted course and started doing additional preparation to secure employment prior to his retirement.

Congruently, when the researcher asked Participant 6 about the "self" aspect of his transition, as it relates to mental health support and barriers, Participant 6 stated, "Between my separation physical, retiree Tricare, and VA benefits, I feel that I'm pretty well supported with regards to my mental health." Participant 6 did say however, he felt that many veterans neglected to get examined by the VA prior to separation and are now regretting forfeiting many of those would-be benefits.

Also, when questioned about "support" as it relates to cultural/societal support and barriers, Participant 6 said, "I had a difficult time adjusting to my new situation for about the first six months – I had to accept the fact that I was not in the same leadership capacity as I was on active duty." Participant 6 added that his civilian department head has made the cultural adjustment a smoother process because he relates well to veterans.

Equally, when asked about "strategy" as it relates to organizational support and barriers, Participant 6 stated, "The transition itself seemed so swift. I had to do a lot of the "heavy lifting" on my own to ensure I was as prepared as I could be for becoming a

civilian." Additionally, Participant 6 shared that networking to establish connections in the civilian sector was vital in eventually gaining employment.

Lastly, Participant 6 was given the opportunity to share anything that could be potentially beneficial for separating service members. Participant 6 said, "Don't think that a job is going to drop out of the sky when you separate – you must do some leg work before you separate to give yourself a good shot at finding a civilian job."

Participant 7 Summation

Participant 7 is a non-retired male veteran who served in the U.S. Marine Corps for eight years as an IT specialist and separated at the rank of E5/SGT. When asked about his "situation" or readiness to transition as it relates to personal support and barriers, Participant 7 stated, "It's all about knowing exactly what you want to do after the military." Additionally, Participant 7 stated that being a person who truly enjoys the IT world, he pursued a degree while in the military that prepared him for life after the military.

Correspondingly, when the researcher asked Participant 7 about the "self" aspect of his transition, as it relates to mental health support and barriers, Participant 7 stated, "I made my mind up that I would seek help for the hidden battle scars from my time in the Marines." Participant 7 added that it was a decision that was difficult at first because he was afraid of being given a stigma by his battle buddies. Participant 7 said that the true mental barriers are the ones that service members put on themselves by not seeking treatment. Also, Participant 7 said he is rated as a 100% disabled veteran by the VA.

Similarly, when questioned about "support" as it relates to cultural/societal support and barriers, Participant 7 said, "Adjusting to civilian culture took some getting

used to because the civilian world is not a close-nit unit like the Marines." Participant 7 added that he has found support from other former Marines and that made his cultural transition much easier.

Equally, when asked about "strategy" as it relates to organizational support and barriers, Participant 7 stated, "My Gunny was very supportive during my transition, even though he didn't want to lose me on the squad." Participant 7 added that he believes a lot of Marines don't get the same support from their leadership and he believes that a standard for leadership involvement should be developed by Marine Head Quarters in Quantico, VA.

Lastly, Participant 7 was given the opportunity to share anything that could be potentially beneficial for separating service members. Participant 7 said, "Not enough Marines take advantage of the education benefits offered while on active duty; use them!" Participant 7 added that in his initial four-year enlistment, he earned his associates and bachelor's degrees via the military tuition assistance program.

Participant 8 Summation

Participant 8 is a non-retired female veteran who served in the U.S. Navy for 10 years as an HR Officer and separated at the rank of O3/LT. When asked about her "situation" or readiness to transition as it relates to personal support and barriers, Participant 8 stated, "I established a relationship with my eventual company through a system of networking and attending seminars." Additionally, Participant 8 stated that it made her chances of being hired by the Defense Contracting company essentially a formality by the time she separated and applied for the job.

In the same manner, when the researcher asked Participant 8 about the "self" aspect of her transition, as it relates to mental health support and barriers, Participant 8 stated, "I took my separation physical very seriously, just in case I needed to follow-up with the VA down the road." Participant 8 added that it becomes very difficult to seek assistance for a service-connected health concern with the VA after separation if you failed to get it properly documented while on active duty.

Likewise, when questioned about "support" as it relates to cultural/societal support and barriers, Participant 8 said, "Adjusting to civilian culture wasn't as difficult for me as it is for some because most of my friends and contacts were civilians when I was on active duty." Participant 8 added that she thinks it is important for military members to establish a relationship with the civilian sector and not isolate themselves in the "military bubble."

Alike, when asked about "strategy" as it relates to organizational support and barriers, Participant 8 stated, "I informed my command leadership well ahead time that I would be blocking-off enough time to fully prepare for life after the Navy." Participant 8 added that she believes that if service members don't speak up with regards to organizational support, commands will expect them to work up until their separation date.

To end, Participant 8 was given the opportunity to share anything that could be potentially beneficial for separating service members. Participant 8 said, "I think many service members have the misconception that the civilian world is just waiting to hire them. It's like anything else, if you fail to plan, you are probably planning to fail."

Participant 9 Summation

Participant 9 is a retired male veteran who served in the U.S. Navy for 22 years as a Disbursing Clerk/Personnel Specialist and separated at the rank of E8/SCPO. When asked about his "situation" or readiness to transition as it relates to personal support and barriers, Participant 9 stated, "I was in the fortunate situation of being able to transition the active duty job I was doing into to a civilian billet at the same command." However, Participant 9 acknowledged that his situation was an anomaly rather than the norm for separating service members.

Additionally, when the researcher asked Participant 9 about the "self" aspect of his transition, as it relates to mental health support and barriers, Participant 9 stated, "Other than the typical separation physical and yearly physicals as a retiree, I really haven't needed much else up to this point." Participant 9 added that it is much easier for a retiree to take care of themselves mentally and physically as opposed to a non-retiree because of the lifetime health insurance.

Likewise, when questioned about "support" as it relates to cultural/societal support and barriers, Participant 9 said, "Adjusting to civilian culture wasn't difficult at all because I am literally doing the same thing I was doing as an active duty Senior Chief." Participant 9 added that it is important for separating Sailors to establish relationships that could help them in the future while still in the military.

Similarly, when asked about "strategy" as it relates to organizational support and barriers, Participant 9 stated, "I had an excellent relationship with the organization while on active duty, which is why I was the first choice to fill the new civilian position. In my opinion, it's all about relationships."

Finally, Participant 9 was given the opportunity to share anything that could be potentially beneficial for separating service members. Participant 9 said, "Don't count on TAPs or some other transition program to get you a job – you have to be proactive." Participant 9 added that too many Sailors get out of the military with no plan. He continued by stating, "That is something we have to fix because we owe our young troops more than that."

Participant 10 Summation

Participant 10 is a retired female veteran who served in the U.S. Marine Corps for 25 years as a Supply specialist and separated at the rank of E8/MSGT. When asked about her "situation" or readiness to transition as it relates to personal support and barriers, Participant 10 stated, "Initially, I placed several barriers on myself because I was afraid of leaving the Corps after a quarter century." Participant 10 added that once she got over her fear of the unknown, she was able to focus on preparing for life after the Marine Corps.

Furthermore, when the researcher asked Participant 10 about the "self" aspect of her transition, as it relates to mental health support and barriers, Participant 10 stated, "Over the past few years, since OIF and OEF, the Marine Corps has really put an emphasis on mental health – and I felt well supported." Participant 10 added that she is also rated as a 100% disabled veteran by the VA.

Equally, when questioned about "support" as it relates to cultural/societal support and barriers, Participant 10 said, "Adjusting to civilian culture was tuff at first because I missed my Marines!" Participant 10 added that she has felt welcomed into the civilian community since her retirement a few years prior.

Comparable, when asked about "strategy" as it relates to organizational support and barriers, Participant 10 stated, "My command had not landed a replacement for me at the 180-day mark. This made it rather difficult to get them to support my preparation for transition because I was expected to still lead my Marines on a daily basis."

To conclude, Participant 10 was given the opportunity to share anything that could be potentially beneficial for separating service members. Participant 10 said, "Marines need to come to the realization that we cannot stay in the Corps forever. We have to plan for that dreaded day when we are referred to as Former Marines."

Participant 11 Summation

Participant 11 is a retired male veteran who served in the U.S. Navy for 30 years as an Explosive Ordinance Demolition (EOD) technician and separated at the rank of E9/MCPO. When asked about his "situation" or readiness to transition as it relates to personal support and barriers, Participant 11 stated, "I didn't know what I wanted to do at first but, between my military retirement and savings, I could afford to take my time." Participant 11 added that he used his extensive network gathered over three decades in the Navy to help start his small business.

Additionally, when the researcher asked Participant 11 about the "self" aspect of his transition, as it relates to mental health support and barriers, Participant 11 stated, "I witnessed some pretty rough stuff out there over the years – I made sure to have my mental health documented so I could receive the proper support in the future." Participant 11 added that he is also rated as a 90% disabled combat veteran by the VA.

Similarly, when questioned about "support" as it relates to cultural/societal support and barriers, Participant 11 said, "Adjusting to civilian culture was not the easiest

thing for me because I was a Sailor for 30 years. However, once I approached it with the proper mindset, I realized the civilian community was quite welcoming." Participant 11 added that a positive outlook for separating service members is the first step toward a positive outcome.

In the same vein, when asked about "strategy" as it relates to organizational support and barriers, Participant 11 stated, "My commanding officer was absolutely awesome when it came to giving me all the tools I needed to prepare for the transition after a 30-year career." However, Participant 11 also said that he has seen first-hand how many young Sailors have received little to no command support during transition.

To end, Participant 11 was given the opportunity to share anything that could be potentially beneficial for separating service members. Participant 11 said, "It is our duty as Senior Enlisted Leaders and Commissioned Officers in the Navy to make sure our young Sailors have all the tools necessary to ease the stress on them and their families during separation."

Participant 12 Summation

Participant 12 is a retired female veteran who served in the U.S. Marine Corps for 24 years as a Finance specialist and separated at the rank of E7/GYST. When asked about her "situation" or readiness to transition as it relates to personal support and barriers, Participant 12 stated, "I was a bit worried because I was the bread winner in my family dynamic and my salary was about to take a major hit." Participant 12 added that she used her network that she built-up among Navy and Marine Corps Senior Enlisted Leaders over the years to help with job opportunities.

As well, when the researcher asked Participant 12 about the "self" aspect of her transition, as it relates to mental health support and barriers, Participant 12 stated, "Besides some of the typical issues you face as it relates to Tricare and military medicine, I felt I had sufficient support." Participant 12 added that the biggest challenge was making sure her family was taken care of with regards to shifting from active duty Tricare health insurance to the more ambiguous retiree version.

Likewise, when questioned about "support" as it relates to cultural/societal support and barriers, Participant 12 said, "Adjusting to civilian culture was not too bad being that my husband is a civilian and I was already kind of immersed in that culture." Participant 12 added that she did not feel as stressed now that she was actually part of the civilian workforce, which is something she feared before retiring.

Similarly, when asked about "strategy" as it relates to organizational support and barriers, Participant 12 stated, "My command really didn't offer much in the way of transition support – I kind of did everything on my own." Participant 12 also said that she felt her organization expected her to "tow the company line" up until the day she retired.

To close, Participant 12 was given the opportunity to share anything that could be potentially beneficial for separating service members. Participant 12 said, "My advice to Marines or Sailors who are facing separation is to prepare, prepare, prepare – no one is going to just hand you a job."

Participant Interview Summary

From the researcher's observation, all 12 participants were engaged and fully willing to share their transition stories. Being veterans themselves, the participants felt

that had a stake in contributing to making transition a more seamless process for their brothers and sisters in arms. The following was observed during the overall interview process:

- Participants seemed engaged throughout the interview procedure, opening up about their experiences of searching for civilian careers after separation or retirement from active duty.

- The interviewees appeared to be comfortable during the process and did not seem to reserve any information from the interviewer. The researcher's probing attempts during the interviews seemed to glean additional rich information from the participants.

- All interviewees appeared to hold their military service in high regard as they thoughtfully responded to the 11 semi-structured interview questions. The participants seemed to genuinely possess the desire to help future veterans however they could.

Artifact Collection

The assemblage of artifacts happened throughout and prior to the interviews. The researcher noted artifacts as cited by the interviewees in their answers to interview questions. Also, the contributors were provided a short description of artifacts and questioned as to whether there were any specific artifacts they related to their transition. Lastly, after a detailed evaluation of the researcher's minutes, a memo was made of any extra artifacts not formerly cited. Participants were sent a list of acknowledged artifacts to verify correctness. The following is a list of artifacts that were examined and acknowledged during the course of the study:

- U.S. Department of Labor Employment Workshop (Participant Guide).

- Ruehlin Associates Job Hunting Handbook.

- Military Occupational Codes Crosswalk (Participant Guide).

- VA Benefits I and II (Participant Guide).

- Navy Pay and Personnel Support Center (NPPSC) Separation Checklist.

- Navy Pay and Personnel Support Center (NPPSC) Separations Questionnaire.

- Department of Defense form 2656 – Data for Payment of Retired Personnel.

- Department of Defense form 2648 – Service Member Pre-Separation/Transition Counseling and Career Readiness Standards E-form for Service Members Separating, Retiring, Released from Active Duty (REFRAD).

- Department of Veteran Affairs Compensation and Pension Pamphlet.

Emergent Themes

After analyzing and coding the data, six major themes emerged from the data amongst the 12 participants. The six major themes derived from the participant responses during the interviews and shared transition experiences. The interview process consisted of 11 semi-structured interview questions, aided by participant probing, in order to glean detailed insight and perspective from the individuals. The six themes appeared to be instrumental among the respondents as it relates to overcoming the challenges of finding civilian employment post active duty.

Network and Build Relationships

This particular theme was one of the most emphasized steps to finding civilian employment espoused by the participants. It was specifically mentioned by 10 of the 12

respondents. What is more, this theme was referred to by every Senior Enlisted and Commissioned Officer Respondent during the interview process. Namely, Participant 1 stated, "If it were not for the network roster, I would not have my current job." Not only was the networking and establishing contacts element repeatedly mentioned, the act of actually building relationships with civilian hiring managers and recruiters was equally declared.

Prepare Early

This particular theme was highlighted in a definitive manner by 12 out of 12 participants. Similarly, networking and building relationships appear to be part of this emergent theme. Several of the respondents mentioned that they have witnessed many of their fellow Shipmates and Marines waiting until the last minute and failing to find sufficient employment after separation. To illustrate, Participant 12 said, "My advice to Marines or Sailors who are facing separation is to prepare, prepare, prepare – no one is going to just hand you a job." In like manner, another popular preparation technique that was shared by several of the participants is to volunteer in the civilian industry of your interest while you are still on active duty. Respondents stated that this was highly beneficial to them securing a position after discharge. Also, respondents emphasized the importance of utilizing the military's tuition assistance program to obtain degrees, certifications, and licensing prior to separation.

Have Realistic Expectations

This particular theme was mentioned emphatically by 9 of the 12 respondents during the interview process. Moreover, several of the respondents said that many military members separate with the perception that their military skills will immediately

translate into an equivalent civilian occupation. Additionally, respondents stated that

Sailors and Marines need to realize that they may not be placed in a commensurate

leadership role when they transition to the civilian workforce. In particular, Participant 3

said, "Service members should not automatically believe that a 'good job' is waiting on

them on the outside - you have to prepare yourself for a civilian job just like everything

else in life."

Seek Support from Leadership

This particular theme was mentioned by 8 of the 12 respondents during the

interview process. Further, the majority of the 8 respondents mentioned that leadership is

in no hurry to assist individuals with separating. Emphasis was placed on tactfully

informing/reminding the organization that it is every service member's right, by

congressional mandate, to be provided time and support for a pending separation at the

18-month threshold. To further expound, Participant 11 stated that, "Leadership is a key

component of military organizations and they should take responsibility for meeting the

needs of their people, especially during a life altering event like transition."

Cultural Adjustment

This particular theme was mentioned by 9 of the 12 respondents during the

interview process. Further, all nine respondents stated that the initial adjustment to

civilian culture was a challenge, however, it is vital to a veteran's success to overcome

that challenge. Several respondents stated that the main reason for cultural adjustment

issues is that service members miss their comrades and the comradery. Specifically,

Participant 10 said, "Adjusting to civilian culture was tuff at first because I missed my

Marines!" The respondents stated that being proactive in adjusting to the civilian

environment made their civilian co-workers more eager to help them in the process. Participant 11 stated, "Once I approached it with the proper mindset, I realized the civilian community was quite welcoming."

Utilize your VA Benefits

This particular theme was echoed by 7 of the 12 respondents during the interview process. To elaborate, several respondents stated that too many veterans neglect to use their earned VA benefits such as VA home loans, GI bill, Health Care, and most importantly, receiving an official Compensation and Pension examination prior to separation. Respondents opined that the wear and tear on the mind, body, and soul of service members during their military career can be catastrophic. As a result, the VA's compensation and pension (C&P) exam process is meant to examine a service member's/veteran's potential service-connected disabilities in order to assign a "disability rating." Participant 5 stated, "I was rated a 50% percent disabled veteran by the VA and I receive routine support for mental and physical health." The participants further explained that a VA rating of 50% - 100% results in a monthly payment from the VA ranging from $879.36 - $3057.13. That monthly payment could go a long way in assisting a veteran who is unemployed or underemployed.

Table 10 lists the six major themes and their frequency among the participants.

Table 10

Participant Themes

Theme	Respondents	Frequency Percentage
Network and Build Relationships	10	83
Prepare Early	12	100
Have Realistic Expectations	9	75
Seek Support from Leadership	8	67
Cultural Adjustment	10	83
Utilize your VA Benefits	7	58

Summary

Chapter IV included the detailed summations of 12 veterans from the U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps who separated on or after 1 January 2011, have lived in San Diego County, California since separation, and have worked in a job of their choice for at least a one year. These veterans ranged in age from ages 26-56, held seven different ranks, and had various military occupational backgrounds. The participants offered rich information that yielded six major themes that the researcher was able to transcribe, analyze, and code. The 12 participants echoed one another's sentiment as it relates to contributing to the success of future veterans finding gainful civilian employment after their service to country has ended.

Chapter V presents the research findings in connection with the review of the literature. Further, the chapter will discuss the conclusions, implications for actions, and recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER V: SUMMARY CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND

RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This phenomenological qualitative study explores the lived experiences of Navy and Marine Corps veterans who have transitioned from active duty service to the civilian workforce in San Diego, California. Rich data was gathered through face-to-face interviews using 11 semi-structured interview questions. Similarly, additional data was garnered through observations and artifacts that were vetted and acknowledged via the participants. After carefully analyzing and coding the data, six major findings were yielded. Subsequently, conclusions were fashioned, implications for actions were explored, and recommendations for future research were made.

Chapter V begins with a summary of the phenomenological study citing the purpose statement, primary research question and sub-questions, methodology, population, and sample. The chapter continues on to describe major findings and conclusions from the findings as well as implications for action and recommendations for future research. Chapter V ends with closing remarks and a reflection.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of Navy and Marine Corps veterans who have transitioned to the civilian workforce in San Diego County, California since the 2011 draw-down of OIF and OEF with respect to personal, mental health, cultural/societal, and organizational support and barriers.

The primary research question that guided this study was: *What were the lived experiences of Navy and Marine Corps veterans who have transitioned to the civilian workforce in San Diego County since the 2011 draw-down of Operation Iraqi Freedom*

(OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) with respect to personal, mental health,
cultural/societal, and organizational support and barriers? Eight sub-questions were
addressed by applying the primary research question with regards to the following:

   a. Personal Support

   b. Personal barriers

   c. Mental health support

   d. Mental health barriers

   e. Cultural/Societal support

   f. Cultural/Societal barriers

   g. Organizational support

   h. Organizational barriers

Twelve interviews were completed using the interview protocol and the 11 semi-structured interview questions based on the foundational transition research from the literature review. Additionally, the study followed the 4-s model framework of Situation, Self, Support, and Strategy which are the bases for Schlossberg's theory of transition. The interviews were conducted using the face-to-face method at various locations throughout San Diego, County at the discretion of the participants. The participants were selected from the target population of 95,000 Navy and Marine Corps veterans in San Diego, County utilizing specified criteria. Specifically, to be considered for participation in the study, interviewees had to meet all of the following criterion:

   • Served in the United States Navy or United States Marine Corps and was
     honorably discharged no earlier than 1 January 2011.

   • Have resided in San Diego County since the date of discharge.

- Successfully transitioned to the civilian workforce in a career of their choice for a minimum of one year.

Major Findings

The purpose of this phenomenological, qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of Navy and Marine Corps veterans who have transitioned from active duty to the civilian workforce since the 2011 draw-down of operations OIF and OEF. Six major findings address the primary research question and sub-questions.

Major Finding 1: Veterans can benefit from Networking and Building Relationships

This major finding was one of the most emphasized steps to finding civilian employment advocated by the participants. It was specifically mentioned by 10 of the 12 respondents. Also, this major finding was discussed at length by Senior Enlisted and Commissioned Officer Respondents during the interview process. Specifically, Participant 1 stated that networking is the reason he is making an annual salary of $115,000. Not only was the networking and establishing contacts element repeatedly mentioned, the act of actually building relationships with civilian hiring managers and recruiters was equally professed. A large number of the respondents mentioned that while they were still on active duty they had volunteered and built a relationship with their future employers.

Major Finding 2: It is Extremely Important to Prepare for Transition Early

This major finding was highlighted in a decisive way by 12 out of 12 participants. Likewise, networking and building relationships appear to go hand-in-hand with this major finding. Numerous respondents stated that they have witnessed countless fellow shipmates and Marines waiting until the last minute and failing to find sufficient

employment after separation. Respondent 12 said, "My advice to Marines or Sailors who are facing separation is to prepare, prepare, prepare – no one is going to just hand you a job." Similarly, another popular preparation technique that was shared by several of the participants was to get involved and make a presence at the civilian industry of your interest while you are still on active duty. Respondents stated that this was highly beneficial to them securing a position after discharge. Also, respondents emphasized the importance of utilizing the military's tuition assistance program to obtain degrees, certifications, and licensing there are applicable to civilian employment prior to separation.

Major Finding 3: Keep an Open-Mind and have Realistic Expectations

This major finding was mentioned categorically by 9 of the 12 respondents during the interview process. Furthermore, several of the respondents said that many military members separate with the perception that their military skills will immediately translate into an equivalent civilian occupation. Additionally, respondents stated that Sailors and Marines need to realize that they may not be immediately placed in a commensurate leadership role when they transition to the civilian workforce. In particular, Participant 3 said, "Service members should not automatically believe that a "good job" is waiting on them on the outside - you have to prepare yourself for a civilian job just like everything else in life."

Major Finding 4: Ensure to Seek Support and Guidance from your Leadership

This major finding was cited by 8 of the 12 respondents during the interview process. Moreover, the majority of the 8 respondents declared that leadership is in "no hurry" to assist individuals with separating. Emphasis was placed on tactfully

informing/reminding the organization that it is every service member's right, by mandate (Executive Order 13,518), to be provided time and support for a pending separation at the 18-month threshold. To further illustrate, Participant 11 stated that, "Leadership is a key component of military organizations and they should take responsibility for meeting the needs of their people, especially during a life altering event like transition."

Major Finding 5: Stay Positive and make adjusting to Civilian Culture a Priority

This major finding was mentioned by 9 of the 12 respondents during the interview process. Further, all 9 respondents stated that the initial adjustment to civilian culture was a challenge, however, it was vital to success to overcome that challenge. Several respondents stated that the main reason for cultural adjustment issues is that service members miss their comrades and the comradery. Specifically, Participant 10 said, "Adjusting to civilian culture was tuff at first because I missed my Marines!" The respondents stated that being proactive in adjusting to the civilian environment made their civilian co-workers more eager to help them in the process. Participant 11 stated, "Once I approached it with the proper mindset, I realized the civilian community was quite welcoming."

Major Finding 6: Complete your VA Compensation and Pension (C&P) exam and Utilize your Benefits

This major finding was stated definitively by 7 of the 12 respondents during the interview process. To provide substance, several respondents stated that too many veterans neglect to use their earned VA benefits such as VA home loans, GI bill, Health Care, and most importantly, receiving an official C&P examination prior to separation. Respondents lectured that the wear and tear on the mind, body, and soul of service

members during their military careers can be catastrophic. As a result, the VA's C&P

exam process is meant to examine a service member's/veteran's potential service-

connected disabilities in order to assign a "disability rating."   Participant 5 stated, "I was

rated a 50% percent disabled veteran by the VA and I receive routine support for mental

and physical health." The participants further explained that a VA rating of 50% - 100%

results in a monthly payment from the VA ranging from $879.36 - $3057.13. That

monthly payment can go a long way in assisting a veteran who is unemployed or

underemployed.

Conclusions

The study entailed exploring the lived experiences and points-of-view of 12 U.S.

Navy and U.S. Marine Corps veterans who have transitioned from active duty service to

the civilian workforce. Conclusions were drawn based on the data collected from

interviews, observations and vetted/acknowledged artifacts via the respondents.

Conclusions are presented using the interview question format of Schlossberg's 4-s

model – Situation, Self, Support, and Strategy.

Conclusion 1: Situation

Based on the findings of this study, as it relates to personal support/barriers, it is

concluded that preparing early by networking and building relationships with the civilian

sector prior to separation is a key element to a successful transition to the civilian

workforce.

According to the literature and the data gathered from the respondents, building a

system of connections with the civilian sector helped ensure success. While the act of

transitioning itself remains a challenging undertaking for the many veterans who

experience it, equipping yourself with as many tools as possible is the main ingredient for success. For emphasis, Participant 4 stated, "I felt pretty comfortable knowing that I had lots of contacts through networking during my career and with the Naval Academy Alumni groups." What is more, Participant 8 shared, "I established a relationship with my eventual company through a system of networking and attending seminars."

Conclusion 2: Self

Based on the findings of this study, as it relates to mental health support/barriers, it is concluded that seeking mental health support and conducting a VA C&P exam prior to separation is vitally important to a veteran's long-term health and stability.

The findings of this study show that neglecting to properly address mental and overall health concerns prior to separation can be catastrophic in the long-term. To illustrate, Participant 8 stated, "I took my separation physical very seriously, just in case I needed to follow-up with the VA down the road – it becomes very difficult to seek assistance for a service-connected health concern with the VA after separation if you failed to get it properly documented while on active duty." Not addressing mental health concerns could ultimately affect a veteran's ability to secure and maintain gainful employment.

Conclusion 3: Support

Based on the findings of this study, as it relates to cultural/societal support & barriers, it is concluded that keeping a positive attitude, right frame of mind, and immersing yourself in the new situation is vital to a veteran's successful adjustment to civilian culture.

The findings of this study show that veterans often have a difficult time adjusting to civilian culture. However, as relayed by a majority of the participants, veterans can make it a more seamless process by approaching the situation with the right attitude and maintaining realistic expectations. For example, Participant 11 said, "Adjusting to civilian culture was not the easiest thing for me because I was a Sailor for 30 years. However, once I approached it with the proper mindset, I realized the civilian community was quite welcoming." Additionally, several respondents added that there are several veteran's groups within the civilian workforce system that provide support, training, and guidance to help veterans adjust to the civilian workplace.

Conclusion 4: Strategy

Based on the findings of this study, as it relates to organizational support/barriers, it is concluded that separating service members must take full advantage of their transition assistance resources to include: the transition assistance program (TAP), military friendly hiring seminars (Job Fairs), and their chain-of-command (Leadership Assistance).

The findings of this study show that organizational support among the respondents was not optimal. Several participants stated that they felt neglected by their leadership with regards to separation. For example, Participant 5 stated, "I didn't feel that my command prepared me as well as they could have for separation." This sentiment was echoed by respondents throughout the interview process. It is the responsibility of leaders, as per their oath, to ensure subordinates are equipped with the tools to promote success. Most assuredly, this would include fostering the smoothest possible transition process to the civilian sector. To provide more detail, Participant 11

stated, "It is our duty as Senior Enlisted Leaders and Commissioned Officers in the Navy to make sure our young Sailors have all the tools necessary to ease the stress on them and their families during separation." One area in which the lack of organizational support showed was in the lack of coordination of job certifications between the military and civilian workforce. Military veterans are trained and certified to perform jobs in the military but their training and certification is not generally accepted in the civilian workforce.

Implications for Action

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the researcher propositions the following implications for action.

Military leadership overall must improve the way we are preparing our transitioning service members for life as civilians. As a fighting force that defends the nation, the military prides itself on the core values of Honor, Courage, and Commitment. That same commitment must be extended to service members who are separating and will no longer be part of the active duty force. Specifically, those service members who separate at the ranks of E-4 and below. These service members are not as experienced with networking and establishing outside relationships. It can be viewed as a failure on the part of leadership if servicemembers are allowed to separate without being properly prepared by those charged with guiding them through the process. Several areas from the literature and data have been identified, that must be addressed as it relates to assisting transitioning veterans:

- Establish or improve existing programs that pair military with civilian companies to gain valuable skills, licensing, and certifications that are civilian relevant.

- Coordinate certification and training with civilian colleges and vocational schools to assure that certifications received by military personnel are accepted in the civilian workplace.

- Extend the mandatory 5-day TAP to two weeks. The literature and data gathered from the study reveal that five days is an insufficient amount of time to absorb the information being delivered.

- Better align the Veterans Administration with the active duty force. The data shows that many separating service members are not aware of the plethora of VA benefits they are entitled to i.e., VA home loans, paid certification and licensing programs, extended GI-bill benefits, and the right to a C&P exam prior to separation.

- A mandatory mentoring program should be implemented at each command that mandates mentors track and address the protégé's progress with regards to transition - commencing 18-months from the prospective date of discharge.

- A mandatory pre-discharge mental health exam should be implemented for all separating members who have deployed to a combat zone. This would help mitigate active duty members separating with unaddressed mental health issues.

Recommendations for Further Research

The study involved exploring the transition from active duty service to the civilian workforce by U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps veterans since the 2011 draw-down of Operations Iraqi and Enduring Freedom. The framework followed N. K. Schlossberg's theory of transition using his 4-s model of situation, self, support, and strategy. The researcher proposes the following recommendations for future research.

Recommendation 1

It is recommended that a future study be conducted on Navy and Marine Corps veterans who have successfully transitioned to the civilian workforce in San Diego, County that held the ranks of E1-E4. This study will allow the perspective of younger and less experience service members to be provided. The current study consisted of more senior-level personnel with many years of military experience prior to separation.

Recommendation 2

It is recommended that future studies be carried-out on successful military to civilian workforce transition in other major cities and counties across America. The current study focused on San Diego, County and only considered U.S. Navy and U.S. Marine Corps veterans. Other studies should focus not only on the Navy and Marine Corps, but the Army, Air Force, and Coast Guard as well.

Recommendation 3

It is recommended that a future mix-method study be conducted on the successful military to civilian workforce transition as it relates to male vs female veterans. Empirical data shows that female veterans are twice as likely to become jobless and/or

homeless as opposed to their male counterparts (J. Tsai et al., 2012). This phenomenon should be fully explored via an official study.

Recommendation 4

It is recommended that a future study be conducted which consists of respondents who have failed to obtain gainful employment within one year of separation. The current study focused on respondents who have successfully transitioned to a career of their choice after separating from active duty service. Gaining the perspective from those who have been unsuccessful will provide additional data that could benefit the field at large.

Recommendation 5

It is recommended that a future study be conducted that addresses the appropriate steps of transition activities that separating servicemembers should follow. The current study focused mainly on the success rate of gaining civilian employment. However, a transition activity guideline study could provide invaluable information to servicemembers well before their actual discharge date.

Recommendation 6

It is recommended that a future study be carried-out that addresses the overall TAP duration. Researchers have debated the issue in multiple studies, however, a thorough and comprehensive study on the matter could provide vital information to separating servicemembers and the field at large.

Concluding Remarks

The present study intended to add to the limited existing body of research and to describe the successes and challenges of Navy and Marine Corps veterans who have transitioned to the civilian workforce since the 2011 draw-down of OIF and OEF. By

contributing to the frame of research and recognizing themes for impending studies, veterans are recognized and included by the embracing their perspective on transition. The 12 interviews yielded the major themes of networking and relationship building, preparing early for transition, keeping an open mind and maintaining realistic expectations, seeking and demanding guidance from leadership, staying positive while adjusting to civilian culture, and taking full advantage of VA benefits prior/post separation. This is invaluable information that can be applied to present-day service members who are facing transition. Additionally, the data can be adopted and applied by leaders of military organizations and transition assistance programs to develop a more seamless process to assist America's finest with transition.

Most veterans would probably agree that transition is a difficult effort no matter what resources are available. However, if we as a military organization can make it easier on our separating service members with regards to transition, we should endeavor to do all we can to assist in the effort.

Reflection

As a career naval officer with 24 years of active duty service, the researcher was determined to conduct a thorough study that could benefit the military family. The study revealed that there are myriad issues separating service members must overcome to enable a successful transition to the civilian workforce. This study has given the researcher a renewed vigor to assist in whatever way possible to better streamline the process of veterans finding gainful employment. Only 1% of America has served in the U.S. Armed Services (DoD, 2015). With that said, the nation owes it to these heroes to

sacrifice for them when they return home, just as they have sacrificed for us while defending our nation.

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APPENDICES

Literature Matrix

Factors that potentially hinder veterans from finding civilian employment in San Diego, County	Culture (Military vs Civilian)	Career Path alignment	Coping with military separation/ retirement	Insufficient Transition Assistance	Transferrability of Skills	Invalid Certifications	Lack of Veteran-friendly companies	Mental Health	Disabilities	Homelessness
Accettola, 2013								×		
Ahern et al., 2015	×									
Anderson and Goodman, 2014		×				×				×
Austin, 2019								×		
Beder, 2017	×									
Bratcher et al., 2015										×
Bur, 2018								×		
Coll and Weiss	×									
Cooper, 2012					×					
Corri et al., 2015					×					
Cotner et al., 2016									×	
County of SD Health & Human services, 2018										×
Dao and Lehren, 2013								×		
Davis and Minnis, 2016					×					
Department of Defense, 2011, 2015, 2016a, 2016b		×		×						
Department of Labor, 2018		×	×	×				×		
Department of Veteran Affairs, 2018								×	×	
Dismuke-Greer et al., 2018									×	
Edens et al., 2011									×	
Faurer et al., 2014				×						
Hale, 2017	×									
Hart, 2017		×				×	×			×
Herasingh, 2014					×					
Lima, 2014						×				×
Mael, 2017					×	×				
Mankowski and Everett, 2016								×		
Maples-Keller et al., 2017								×		
McCallister et al., 2015					×					
McGinty, 2015								×		
Messer & Greene, 2014		×					×	×		

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Factors that potentially hinder veterans from finding civilian employment in San Diego, County	Culture (Military vs Civilian)	Career Path alignment	Coping with military separation/ retirement	Insufficient Transition Assistance	Transferrability of Skills	Invalid Certifications	Lack of Veteran-friendly companies	Mental Health	Disabilities	Homelessness
Messer & Greene, 2014		x					x	x		
Miles, 2014	x									
Military Friendly, 2018							x			
Military Personnel Manual, 2018	x		x							
Military Transition Assistance, 2017				x						
Miller, 2015		x								
National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2015										x
National Coalition for Homeless Veterans, 2018										x
National Veterans Foundation, 2015										x
Navy Personnel Command, 2018		x								
Nedegaard and Zwilling, 2017								x		
Nicks, 2014								x		
Parsi, 2017	x									
Pease et al., 2016	x									
Powers, 2016			x							
Prudential Financial Inc., 2012	x									
Redmond et al., 2011	x									
Rosenheck and McGuire, 2012										x
Ruehlin, 2018					x					
Schauer et al., 2019		x								
Soveriegn Health, 2016								x		
Spelman et al., 2012								x		
Stone and Stone, 2015	x									
Strangeways and Rubin, 2012			x							
Tarpey, 2016						x				
Tatum, 2016		x								x
Torreon, 2017		x								
Tsai et al., 2017										x
Tsai et al., 2014								x		x
Tsai et al., 2016										x

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Factors that potentially hinder veterans from finding civilian employment in San Diego, County	Culture (Military vs Civilian)	Career Path alignment	Coping with military separation/ retirement	Insufficient Transition Assistance	Transferrability of Skills	Invalid Certifications	Lack of Veteran-friendly companies	Mental Health	Disabilities	Homelessness
U.S. Army, n.d.		x								
Ware, 2017				x						
Whitehouse.gov (n.d)							x			
Woodward, 2015							x			
Wolfe-Clarke and Bryan, 2017								x		
Wright 2015						x				
Zogas, 2017						x				

APPENDIX B

Invitation To Participate

Study: The Challenges that Navy and Marine Corps Veterans face while seeking civilian employment in San Diego County, California

September _____, 2019

Dear Prospective Study Participant:

You are invited to participate in a phenomenological, qualitative study to explore the lived experiences of Navy and Marine Corps veterans who have transitioned to the civilian workforce since the 2011 draw-down of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) with respect to personal, mental health, cultural/societal, and organizational support and barriers. The main investigator of this study is Absalom D. Morris, Doctoral Candidate in Brandman University's Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership program. You were chosen to participate in this study because you are a Navy or Marine Corps veteran who has separated from active duty on or after January 1, 2011, has resided within San Diego County since your discharge, and has worked in a profession of your choice for a least one year.

Six Navy veterans and six Marine Corps veterans for a total of 12 participants were selected for this study based on the criteria. Participation should require about one hour of your time and is entirely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences.

PURPOSE: The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore the lived experiences of Navy and Marine Corps veterans who have transitioned to the civilian workforce in San Diego County since the 2011 draw-down of OIF and OEF with respect to personal, mental health, cultural/societal, and organizational support and barriers.

PROCEDURES: If you decide to participate in the study, the researcher will interview you. During the interview, you will be asked a series of questions designed to allow me to share valuable information aimed at assisting veterans experience a more seamless transition from the military to the civilian workforce.

RISKS, INCONVENIENCES, AND DISCOMFORTS: There are minimal risks to your participation in this research study. It may be inconvenient to spend up to one hour in the interview. However, the interview session will be held at your site or at an agreed upon location, to minimize this inconvenience.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS: There are no major benefits to you for participation, however, your input and feedback could help shed some light on the steps that should be taken by transitioning military personnel to better prepare for the civilian workforce. The information from this study is intended to inform veterans, government agencies,

veterans associations and groups, and the general public. Additionally, the findings and recommendations from this study will be made available to all participants.

ANONYMITY: Records of information that you provide for the research study, and any personal information you provide, will not be linked in any way. It will not be possible to identify you as the person who provided any specific information for the study.

You are encouraged to ask questions, at any time, that will help you understand how this study will be performed and/or how it will affect you. You may contact me at [redacted] or by email at amorris5@mail.brandman.edu. You can also contact Dr. Phil Pendley by email at pendley@brandman.edu. If you have any further questions or concerns about this study or your rights as a study participant, you may write or call the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641.

Respectfully,
Absalom D. Morris
Doctoral Candidate, Brandman University

APPENDIX C

Informed Consent

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY
16355 LAGUNA CANYON ROAD
IRVINE, CA 92618

RESEARCH STUDY TITLE: The Challenges that Navy and Marine Corps Veterans Face While Seeking Civilian Employment in San Diego County, California

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Absalom D. Morris, Doctoral Candidate

TITLE OF CONSENT FORM: Consent to Participate in Research

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY: The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of Navy and Marine Corps veterans who have transitioned to the civilian workforce in San Diego County since the 2011 draw-down of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) with respect to personal, mental health, cultural/societal, and organizational support and barriers.

PROCEDURES: In participating in this research study, I agree to partake in an audio-recorded, semi-structured interview. The interview will take place, in person, at my site or other pre-determined location, and will last about an hour. During the interview, I will be asked a series of questions designed to allow me to share valuable information aimed at assisting veterans experience a more seamless transition from the military to the civilian workforce.

I understand that:

a) The possible risks or discomforts associated with this research are minimal. It may be inconvenient to spend up to one hour in the interview. However, the interview session will be held at my site or at an agreed upon location, to minimize this inconvenience.

b) I will not be compensated for my participation in this study. The possible benefit of this study is to potentially shed some light on the steps that should be taken by transitioning military personnel to better prepare for the civilian workforce. The findings and recommendations from this study will be made available to all participants.

c) Any questions I have concerning my participation in this study will be answered by Absalom D. Morris, Brandman University Doctoral Candidate. I understand that Mr. Morris may be contacted by phone at [redacted] or email at amorris5@mail.brandman.edu. The dissertation chairperson may also answer questions: Dr. Phil Pendley at pendley@brandman.edu.

d) I may refuse to participate or withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the investigator may stop the study at any time.

e) The study will be audio-recorded, and the recordings will not be used beyond the scope of this project. Audio recordings will be used to transcribe the interviews. Once the interviews are transcribed, the audio and interview transcripts will be kept for a minimum of five years by the investigator in a secure location.

f) No information that identifies me will be released without my separate consent and that all identifiable information will be protected to the limits allowed by law. If the study design or the use of the data is to be changed, I will be informed and my consent re-obtained. If I have any questions, comments, or concerns about the study or the informed consent process, I may write or call the Office of the Executive Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641. I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the Research Participant's Bill of Rights.

I have read the above and understand it and hereby voluntarily consent to the procedure(s) set forth.

_____   _____
Signature of Participant or Responsible Party   **Date**

_____   _____
Signature of Witness (if appropriate)   **Date**

_____   _____
Signature of Principal Investigator   **Date**

Brandman University IRB 2019

APPENDIX D

Audio Release Form

RESEARCH STUDY TITLE: The Challenges that Navy and Marine Corps Veterans Face while seeking Civilian Employment in San Diego County, California

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY
16355 LAGUNA CANYON ROAD
IRVINE, CA 92618

I authorize Absalom D. Morris, Brandman University Doctoral Candidate, to record my voice. I give Brandman University and all persons or entities associated with this research study permission or authority to use this recording for activities associated with this research study.

I understand that the recording will be used for transcription purposes and the information obtained during the interview may be published in a journal/dissertation or presented at meetings/presentations.

I will be consulted about the use of the audio recordings for any purpose other than those listed above. Additionally, I waive any right to royalties or other compensation arising correlated to the use of information obtained from the recording.

By signing this form, I acknowledge that I have completely read and fully understand the above release and agree to the outlined terms. I hereby release all claims against any person or organization utilizing this material.

_____   _____

Signature of Participant or Responsible Party   **Date**

APPENDIX E

Research Participant's Bill Of Rights

BRANDMAN UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Research Participant's Bill of Rights

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.
2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.
3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.
4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.
5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.
6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the study.
7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.
8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.
9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.
10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the Brandman University Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The Brandman University Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, Brandman University, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.

Brandman University IRB   Adopted   November 2013

APPENDIX F

Brandman University Instructional Review Board Approval

Dear Absalom D Morris,

Congratulations! Your IRB application to conduct research has been approved by the Brandman University Institutional Review Board. Please keep this email for your records, as it will need to be included in your research appendix.

If you need to modify your BUIRB application for any reason, please fill out the "Application Modification Form" before proceeding with your research. The Modification form can be found at IRB.Brandman.edu

Best wishes for a successful completion of your study.

Thank You,

BUIRB
Academic Affairs
Brandman University
16355 Laguna Canyon Road
Irvine, CA 92618
buirb@brandman.edu
www.brandman.edu
A Member of the Chapman University System

NIH Certificate

Certificate of Completion

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research certifies that **Absalom Morris** successfully completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants."

Date of Completion: 05/17/2018

Certification Number: 2822250

NIH> National Institutes of Health
Office of Extramural Research

Interview Protocol

Interviewer: Absalom D. Morris

Interview time planned: Approximately one hour

Interview place: Participant's site or other convenient agreed upon location

Recording: Digital voice recorders

Written: Field and observational notes

Introductions: Introduce ourselves to one another.

Opening Statement: [Interviewer states:] Thank you for taking time to meet with me and agreeing to participate in this interview. To review, the purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of Navy and Marine Corps veterans who have transitioned to the civilian workforce in San Diego County since the 2011 draw-down of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OEF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) with respect to personal, mental health, cultural/societal, and organizational support and barriers. The questions I will ask are written to elicit this information and to provide you an opportunity to share any personal stories and experiences you have had, at your discretion, throughout this interview. Also, your identity will remain anonymous, our interview will not take place until after a consent form is signed, and I encourage you to be open and honest for the purposes of this research study.

Interview Agenda: [Interviewer states:] I anticipate this interview will take about an hour today. As a review of the process leading up to this interview, you were invited to participate email or phone call, and signed an informed consent form that outlined the interview process and the condition of complete anonymity for this study. We will begin with reviewing the Letter of Invitation, Informed Consent Form, the Participant's Bill of Rights, and the Audio Release Form. Then after reviewing all the forms, you will be asked to sign documents pertinent for this study, which include the Informed Consent and Audio Release Form. Next, I will begin the audio recorders and ask a list of questions related to the purpose of the study. I may take notes as the interview is being recorded. If you are uncomfortable with me taking notes, please let me know and I will only continue with the audio recording of the interview. Finally, I will stop the recorder and conclude our interview session. After your interview is transcribed, you will receive a copy of the complete transcripts to check for accuracy prior to the data being analyzed. Please remember that anytime during this process you have the right to stop the interview. If at any time you do not understand the questions being asked, please do not hesitate to ask for clarification. Are there any questions or concerns before we begin with the questions?

Background Question:

The primary research question that guided this study was: What were the lived experiences of Navy and Marine Corps veterans who have transitioned to the civilian workforce in San Diego County since the 2011 draw-down of Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) with respect to personal, mental health, cultural/societal, and organizational support and barriers?

Content Questions:

1. What personal support did you receive during your transition from active duty service to your civilian employment?

2. What personal barriers did you experience during your transition from active duty service to your civilian employment?

3. What mental health support did you receive during your transition from active duty service to your civilian employment?

4. What mental health barriers did you experience during your transition from active duty service to your civilian employment?

5. What cultural/societal support did you receive during your transition from active duty service to your civilian employment?

6. What cultural/societal barriers did you experience during your transition from active duty service to your civilian employment?

7. What organizational support did you receive during your transition from active duty service to your civilian employment?

8. What organizational barriers did you experience during your transition from active duty service to your civilian employment?

9. What recommendations do you have for your branch of the military for improving the transition process?

10. What recommendations do you have for service members for improving the transition process?

11. Are there any other thoughts you would like to offer the interviewer?

APPENDIX I

Qualitative Interview Question Development Matrix

Research Questions	Interview Question(s)	Source
RQ1: Personal Support	**IQ1**: What personal support did you receive during your transition from your Active Military duty to your civilian employment?	Adapted from Schlossberg's Transition Theory and Ch. 2 Literature Review.
RQ2: Personal Barriers	**IQ2**: What personal barriers did you experience during your transition from your Active Military duty to your civilian employment?	Adapted from Schlossberg's Transition Theory and Ch. 2 Literature Review.
RQ3: Mental Health	**IQ3**: What Mental Health support did you receive during your transition from your Active Military duty to your civilian employment?	Adapted from Schlossberg's Transition Theory and Ch. 2 Literature Review.
RQ4: Mental Health	**IQ4**: What Mental Health barriers did you experience during your transition from your Active Military duty to your civilian employment?	Adapted from Schlossberg's Transition Theory and Ch. 2 Literature Review.
RQ5: Cultural/Societal	**IQ5:** What Cultural/Societal support did you receive during your transition from your Active Military duty to your civilian employment?	Adapted from Schlossberg's Transition Theory and Ch. 2 Literature Review.
RQ6: Cultural Societal	**IQ6**: What Cultural/Societal barriers did you experience during your transition from your Active Military duty to your civilian employment?	Adapted from Schlossberg's Transition Theory and Ch. 2 Literature Review.

RQ7: Organizational	**IQ7**: What Organizational support did you receive during your transition from your Active Military duty to your civilian employment?	Adapted from Schlossberg's Transition Theory and Ch. 2 Literature Review.
RQ8: Organizational	**IQ8**: What Organizational barriers did you experience during your transition from your Active Military duty to your civilian employment?	Adapted from Schlossberg's Transition Theory and Ch. 2 Literature Review.
RQ9: Recommendations for Military	**IQ9**: What recommendations do you have for your branch of the military for improving the transition process?	
RQ10: Recommendations for Service Members	**IQ10**: What recommendations do you have for service members for improving the transition process?	
RQ11: General	**IQ11:** Are there any other thoughts you would like to offer the interviewer?	

Note. Ch. = Chapter; IQ = Interview Question; RQ = Research Question.