Spring 4-14-2022

From the Battlefield to the Classroom: An Exploration of Post-9/11 Female Combat Veterans Who Completed Graduate School After Military Service

Arthur Littler III
University of Massachusetts Global, alittler@gmail.com

From the Battlefield to the Classroom: An Exploration of Post-9/11 Female Combat Veterans Who Completed Graduate School After Military Service

A Dissertation by

Arthur Littler III

University of Massachusetts Global

Irvine, California

School of Education

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

April 2022

Committee in charge:

Timothy McCarty, Ed.D., Committee Chair

Keith Larick, Ed.D.

Laurie Goodman, Ed.D.

University of Massachusetts Global

A Nonprofit Affiliate of the University of Massachusetts

Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership

The dissertation of Arthur Littler III is approved.

Timothy McCarty, Ed.D., Dissertation Chair

Timothy McCarty, Ed.D.

Keith Larick, Ed.D., Committee Member

Keith Larick, Ed.D.

Laurie Goodman, Ed.D., Committee Member

Laurie Goodman, Ed.D.

Patrick Ainsworth, Ed.D., Associate Dean

Patrick Ainsworth, Ed.D.

April 2022

From the Battlefield to the Classroom: An Exploration of Post-9/11 Female Combat Veterans Who Completed Graduate School After Military Service

by Arthur Littler III

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The attainment of this degree is not only the result of countless hours and efforts, but proof that regardless of the situation you find yourself in, as long as you have the right support system, you can achieve anything. Although it is my name listed on this degree, I want to take the time to recognize that it was not earned without the support of my village which encompasses my family, friends, colleagues, cohort mentor and peers, and dissertation committee. Given the topic and findings of my dissertation, I feel acknowledging those various support systems is not only appropriate, but absolutely necessary.

First and foremost I'd like to thank my wonderful partner and soulmate, Miranda, for her unwavering support and encouragement. For understanding that any endeavor such as this can and will result in days in which we could not be a 50/50 partnership and for her willingness to be the 90 on days that I could only be a 10. I love you with all my heart and could not imagine accomplishing this without you by my side.

Secondly, I'd like to thank my children: AJ, Carly, Jaelyn, Wyatt, and Edgar; for although you all are so young, you have known the cost of sacrifice and I hope you have learned through the journey I have taken you on with me, the rewards that may come from sacrifice, hard work, and a strong commitment to your goals. I look forward to the many adventures and experiences our family will have now that this chapter in our lives has come to a conclusion.

To my closest friends and family, thank you for being understanding of my absences from various events, for being there for Miranda and the kids when I could not, and for your unwavering support through the various trials and tribulations I experienced

while I attempted to complete this academic journey. To those peers, colleagues, and supervisors who have provided mentorship, space and availability, and outside perspective to working through (relatively) short term pain for long term gain, I cannot convey enough how much I appreciate you. To my cohort mentor, Dr. Timothy McCarty, and members, Dr. Julie Corona, Dr. James “the Voice” Vaughn, and Dr. Michelle Manno, this was an incredible journey. I’m so grateful to all of you for the help, guidance, love, and memories you all provided to me during the past few years. I’m so proud and happy to have been lucky enough to been part of such a wonderful team. To my knowledgeable sponsors, words cannot express enough how thankful I am for the assistance you provided to help me complete the final stretch of this journey. Without you, I do not know how I would have been able to complete the necessary data collection efforts to make my dream a reality.

Last, I’d like to provide an honorable mention to a man who has been like a father to me for over 20 years; someone who was here throughout not just this journey, but in some of the most difficult times of my life. I dedicate this accomplishment in remembrance of Johnny Edwin Harvey. You were a wonderful father, role model, mentor, and friend. You were, and will always remain, an integral part of my family. We love you and know that if you could have been, you would have been standing beside your beautiful wife at my graduation celebrating with us.

ABSTRACT

From the Battlefield to the Classroom: An Exploration of Post-9/11 Female Combat Veterans Who Completed Graduate School After Military Service.

by Arthur Littler III

Since 2011, approximately 200,000 service members transitioned from military service to the civilian sector each year (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016). , 2014). According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' 2018 *Employment Situation of Veterans Summary* report, 8.9% of veterans were disadvantaged as they have little to no higher education. Without a financial support system to fall back on, transitioning veterans face the inevitable issue of homelessness. Research by Tsai, Hoff, and Harpaz-Rotem (2017) found the rate of homelessness among veterans has increased over the past decade with female veterans more likely than their male counterparts to experience high rates of homelessness or unemployment.

Purpose: The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore and describe the transition experiences of female veterans regarding their graduate-level education program after leaving service using the Schlossberg transition theory.

Methodology: This multiple case study explored and described the transition experiences of six post-9/11 female combat veterans living in Sacramento and Solano counties through interviews, observations, and artifact analysis. Respondents were purposively chosen based on specific criteria and recommendations of knowledgeable sponsors.

Findings: Examination of this study's qualitative data and artifacts from the post-9/11 female combat veterans indicated three major findings:

1. Develop and adhere to a schedule that includes time for self-care.

2. Know yourself both as you are and what you aspire to be.
3. Identify and maximize the usage of any and all available support.

Conclusions: Multiple conclusions were drawn; the top three were as follows:

1. Detailed and specific schedules are imperative for a degree of self-care and self-management necessary for the successful completion of a graduate program.
2. Female veterans must be well-grounded in their own values and understanding about their role in their various communities.
3. Successful female veterans identify and utilize support systems available to them.

Recommendations: Future research is recommended to continue the exploration of the transition experiences of veterans in a variety of contexts and situations.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Following the drawdown of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), the U.S. Department of Defense's military service branches (Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force) observed a significant number of service members transition to the civilian sector. Since 2011, 1.7 million service members have transitioned to the civilian sector (Austin, 2019) at an estimated rate of 200,000 members per year (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2016). A number of female service members transitioning from military service to civilian life found it difficult to secure the same quality of life they had while serving their country. A particular problem was the competition with civilians for employment. Davies (2017) described this particular phenomenon as a historically overwhelming abundance of the civilian workforce; an issue which Messer and Greene (2014) compared to the bottleneck effect.

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' 2018 *Employment Situation of Veterans Summary* report, 8.9% of veterans were stuck in this bottleneck effect, disadvantaged as they have little to no higher education. According to Hart (2017), many of these veterans joined the military between the ages of 17-19 immediately upon completing high school, thereby resulting in fewer veterans having higher education experience prior to their transitions. Although these transitioning veterans may lack higher education, they do possess extensive knowledge, skills, and abilities which, according to Messer and Greene (2014), were obtained during service in military occupational schools and on-the-job training. Despite their expertise, training, and uniquely extensive workforce experience, many veterans find that their military workforce experience does not directly translate into the civilian workforce (Hart, 2017).

Furthermore, without the civilian certifications for the occupations that do cross into the civilian workforce and not having any higher education, they are resigned to accepting low-skilled jobs that have equally low pay (Zivin et al., 2015). Unfortunately, they also find themselves unemployed because of the sheer number of applicants versus available low-skilled jobs.

Without employment or a financial support system to fall back on, transitioning veterans face the inevitable issue of homelessness. Research by Tsai, Hoff, and Harpaz-Rotem (2017) found the rate of homelessness among veterans has dramatically increased over the past decade. Additionally, researchers have agreed that female veterans are more likely than their male counterparts to experience a historically high rate of homelessness or unemployment (Tsai et al., 2012, 2014).

The military has a long history of providing military educational benefits. These benefits have shifted under various programs through the years with the most recent set of postmilitary service educational benefits being the Post-9/11 GI Bill. Kelly, Smith, and Fox (as cited in S. J. Smith et al., 2018) found the Post-9/11 GI Bill to be the most comprehensively and widely utilized postmilitary service educational benefit since the inception of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944. According to the Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics (2018a), use of Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits increased from approximately 34,000 when it was made available in 2010 to over 750,000 in 2013. However, despite the financial benefits and mass utilization of the Post-9/11 GI Bill, veterans, particularly female veterans, still experience barriers to successfully completing higher education and therefore barriers to the secondary and tertiary effects of increased rates of gainful employment and decreased rates of homelessness. There is significant

need to gain an increased understanding about the dynamics veterans face while transitioning from military service to the civilian sector, specifically how they successfully transition and complete graduate-level programs, which historically lead to an enhanced quality of life.

Background

America's first military branch, identified as the Continental Army, was established on June 14, 1775, and fought and won under General George Washington in the American Revolution (U.S. Army Center of Military History, n.d.). However, it was not until September 29, 1789, that America's first representatives and senators officially established the United States Military (Library of Congress, n.d.). Over time, the U.S. military went on to formally establish the U.S. Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Space Force, all operating under the U.S Department of Defense, to meet the growing complexities of warfare through the ages.

Military Service

Although the U.S. military service branches each have unique and extensive mission sets, the number of personnel serving in the Armed Forces in relation to the rest of the American population is less than 0.5% (1.29 million; Reynolds & Shendruk, 2018). After becoming part of a military service branch, personnel are divided into two paths: enlisted and officer. To be commissioned as an officer in the United States military, members must have already completed a degree of higher education of which the minimum required is a bachelor's degree. Regardless of their chosen path in military service, members are classified as active duty (full-time service member), reservist (part-time, 1 weekend a month, 2 weeks a year, federal missions), guardsman (part-time, 1

weekend a month, 2 weeks a year, state missions), retiree (20+ years of military service), and veteran (any length of military service) depending upon the point in time in which one is referring to the member (Military.com, n.d.).

Similar to the manner in which the U.S. population is grouped by the U.S. Census Bureau by generation, military female service members are grouped by the wars or major conflicts in which they served. For example, female service members who served in World War I or II are World War I Veterans and World War II Veterans; similarly, those who had served in the Vietnam War or in Desert Storm are considered Vietnam War Veterans or Desert Storm Veterans. Those who have served following the September 11th, 2001 attacks, make up the newest generation of veterans identified as post-9/11 veterans (Zogas, 2017). Two of the biggest military conflicts for this generation were identified as OEF and OIF.

According to Ware (2017), 2.6 million United States military veterans have served in these two operations (OEF/OIF) in the war against terrorism. Depending upon the classification under which they were discharged (honorable, general, other than honorable, or dishonorable), these veterans would be eligible for significant postservice benefits. Out of 2.6 million, 1.9 million were considered eligible for benefits provided by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) because of their status of being honorably discharged between 2002-2015 (Zogas, 2017). Furthermore, of the 2.6 million veterans who have served in OEF and OIF, women are considered a subset of post-9/11 veterans, 71% of whom reported experiencing exposure to combat (Villagran, Ledford, & Canzona, 2015).

Women in the U.S. Military

Although the U.S. military is and has been a predominantly male-dominated organization, women have served unofficially in different capacities since its inception and served in a formal and official capacity since 1901 with the establishment of the Army Nurse Corps. Women were subsequently permanently authorized as service members of the United States military after Congress passed the Women's Armed Services Integration Act of 1948. Although this act permanently authorized women to serve, it also limited the proportion of women to men serving in the military to 2% of enlisted members and 10% of officers, a stipulation which was repealed in 1967 (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2017). Women's roles in the military continued to expand, hitting critical milestones such as taking command roles in noncombat units in 1970, combat related-roles in 2001 during the start of the post-9/11 war on terrorism, and full status in 2013 when Defense Secretary Leon Panetta authorized the removal of the military's combat exclusion policy (Evans, 2013). According so Silva, a veterans advocate,

> Women have a larger presence in our military today than ever before. With more than 200,000 women serving in the active-duty military, the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) predicted that by 2020 women veterans will comprise nearly 11 percent of the total veteran population. (p. 1)

In 2019, the U.S. Armed Forces (comprised of the Army, Air Force, Navy, and Marine Corps) found the total number of female service members to be 216,848 (16.64% of their total number of armed forces personnel), an increase from 204,628. A brief

overview and timeline of female service members' history and accomplishments are provided in Appendix A.

Transitional Aid for Veteran's Pursuing Higher Education

There are thousands of means by which adults may gain assistance to pursue higher education with an additional set of programs specifically designed for veterans. To improve the chance of successful transition by military veterans into the civilian sector, the federal government established the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944 to provide military members educational benefits after military service. These benefits have shifted under various programs through the years with the most recent set of postmilitary service educational benefits being the Post-9/11 GI Bill. Kelly et al. (as cited in S. J. Smith et al., 2018) found the Post-9/11 GI Bill to be the most comprehensively and widely utilized postmilitary service educational benefit since the inception of the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944. According to the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics (2018a), use of Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits increased from approximately 34,000 when it was made available in 2010 to over 750,000 in 2013.

Transition Research Foundations

Female service members face many challenges of which their transition from military service to the civilian sector is one. One factor leading to a successful transition from military service to the civilian sector is the obtainment of a college- or graduate-level degree. An examination of several seminal theories regarding transition theory is included in the next section to provide support and insight into this study's theoretical framework and research questions. The theories presented include Bridges's (2004)

transition theory, Quankenbush's (1989) belief system theory, and Schlossberg's (1981) theory of transition.

Bridges's Transition Theory

Bridges (2004) identified three phases of transition: endings, neutral zone, and new beginnings. Transition theory is grounded in the concept of personal development as a natural journey through disorientation and reorientation in which growth is marked by one's turning points. Based upon this premise, change and transition are naturally and frequently occurring, albeit at different key points in time for everyone. As such, this concept of transition serves as a representation of the way individuals develop and change: people deal with endings throughout life and often do so poorly by taking them too seriously or not seriously enough; subsequently, people are found in a confusing period of what seems to be nothingness or a feeling like being lost. Finally, people find themselves at a new beginning and on a new path, but to reach our goals at the end of the new beginning, they must become powerfully motivated, which is dependent on an internal alignment to said goals rather than an external shift. An additional model focused on individual transitions was developed by another researcher known as Quackenbush. Quackenbush's (1989) transition theory was known as the belief system theory and focused on one's internal beliefs and attitudes as the key influencers of one's reactions to transition.

Quackenbush's Belief System Theory

Belief system theory refers to the combined organization of people's internalized beliefs about themselves, their values, and value-related attitudes that form a cognitive map that influence action and behavior (Quackenbush, 1989). Based upon this concept,

individual adaptation or resistance to change are heavily influenced by one's internal view of oneself. Quackenbush (1989) explained this premise as "the need to maintain and enhance self-conceptions and self-presentations of competence and morality provides the basic motivation that can explain not only why people might undergo change but also why they might resist undergoing change" (p. 316). Although individuals feel self-satisfaction, change is not likely to occur because their internalized beliefs will influence them to maintain the sense of self-satisfaction; it is when individuals begin to feel self-dissatisfaction that their internalized beliefs, values, and attitudes will begin to shift to the extent required to bring them back to a sense of self-satisfaction. Although the belief systems theory focuses heavily on the self, one researcher theorized that self is only one of several factors that influence one's acceptance and reaction to transition. This study utilized Schlossberg's theory of transition as its theoretical framework to guide the research questions and interview questions.

Schlossberg's Theory of Transition

According to Schlossberg (1981), there are several major factors that influence one's adaptation to transition: situation, self, social support, and strategies. These factors account for the major characteristics of the pre- and posttransition environment, the individual experiencing the identified transition, and the transition itself. Schlossberg (1981) postulated transition is not so much about the change occurring as it is about the perception of change by the individual experiencing it. Schlossberg (1981) said, "Adaptation depends in part on the degree of similarity or differences in one's assumptions about self and in one's environment (especially the interpersonal support system network of relationships) before and after the transition" (p. 8).

Situation. Schlossberg (1981) described the characteristics of transition in terms of situation as a common set of variables to include time, degree of stress, source, affect, role change, duration, and onset. These variables impact the ease by which one may find oneself able to successfully transition. Furthermore, the variables that make up the characteristics of transition have subsets such as time (on-time or off-time), source (internal or external), affect (positive or negative), role change (gain or loss), duration (permanent, temporary, or uncertain), and onset (gradual or sudden; Schlossberg, 1981).

Self. Schlossberg's (1981) third determinant for individual adaptation to transition consisted of the individual's own characteristics. In particular, Schlossberg (1981) focused on state of health, race-ethnicity, socioeconomic status, psychosocial competence, value orientation, age (and life stages), and past experience with similar transitions. Individuals' characteristics influence their own actions and behaviors (Quackenbush, 1989).

Social support. Pre- and posttransition environments, in this context, refer to the type of support individuals have access to as they experience transition. Schlossberg (1981) specifically highlighted three aspects of environmental support: interpersonal support, institutional support, and physical settings. Interpersonal support systems included intimate relationships, family units, and the individual's network of friends (Schlossberg, 1981). Institutional support systems include community support groups, religious institutions, organizational support, and community programs (Barrera & Ainlay, 1983; Schlossberg, 1981).

Strategies or coping mechanisms. Strategies and coping mechanisms both play a significant role in the ability of an individual to adapt to transitioning to a new phase of

life. The concept of strategy includes intentional decision making, whether it be an intentional decision by the individual to act or to do nothing; furthermore, it includes both perceived and actional options available to the individual, particularly in regard to resiliency and coping mechanisms (Schlossberg, 1981; Wilson, 2015). Coping mechanisms can range from healthy coping mechanisms that can promote resiliency and aid in transition to unhealthy coping mechanisms that, depending on the mechanism being employed by the individual, can lead to a variety of issues or dependencies that may inhibit one's ability to succeed during a transition. Therefore this study will utilize the Schlossberg theory of transition as the theoretical framework guiding the research questions and interview questions to explore the lived experiences and perceptions of the study's participants.

Statement of the Research Problem

Being a U.S. veteran is a status few Americans can lay claim to. Only 1% of Americans have served in the military to preserve national interests in peacetime, war, and in various military conflicts (DoD, 2015). Furthermore, 1.7 million OEF/OIF veterans made the transition from military service to civilian life between 2011 and 2019 (Austin, 2019). Many of these veterans make the transition while also carrying with them life-changing experiences that set them apart from their civilian counterparts. With 71% of the approximate 286,000 OEF/OIF female veterans reporting exposure to combat, the ability to successfully assimilate into civilian culture is as difficult as ever for this subset of veterans (Villagran et al., 2015).

Transition occurs throughout life in a variety of fashions and includes a number of internal and external variables. Veterans are expected to transition throughout their

careers from situation to situation, from one environment to another, and to do so both quickly and successfully. However, these transitions occur with the full support of the military, which acts as a failsafe by providing financial support, housing, medical, and sustenance. Such support is not afforded as members make the transition from the military to the civilian sector.

Schlossberg (1981) explained transition in a manner that portrayed it as less about the transitional event itself and more about one's perception of the transition. This theory of transition was molded into a model that emphasized four important factors: self, situation, support, and strategies (also referred to as coping mechanisms), and is known as Schlossberg's 4-S model of transition. Schlossberg's 4-S model has been used to evaluate different types of transition such as with careers, education, military to civilian, college/trade school to career, and in business (Anderson & Goodman, 2014; Goodman & Anderson, 2012; Schlossberg, 2011).

A large body of research regarding transitions exists, yet research that specifically examines through Schlossberg's 4-S model how female OEF/OIF veterans successfully transition through higher education and graduate does not exist. Given the significant number of veterans who have transitioned between 2011 and 2019 flooding the job market and creating a bottleneck effect, successful completion of higher education for veterans is key to securing gainful employment. This is particularly true for female veterans, and the lack of literature indicates the need for additional exploration.

At some point during their career, U.S. military members transition into the civilian sector (Ahern et al., 2015). Studies have explored individual transitions; there have also been a number of studies regarding military to civilian transitions as they relate

to employment, training, and adaptation (Ahern et al., 2015; Anderson & Goodman, 2014; Hale, 2017; Hart, 2017; Knight, 2014; Stern, 2017; Tatum, 2016). Several studies have investigated veterans, particularly female combat veterans from OEF/OIF and their transitions to the civilian sector (Austin, 2019; Davies, 2017; Hart, 2017; Messer & Greene, 2014; Wilson, 2015).

At the time of this study, there was a lack of research pertaining to female combat veterans who have pursued higher education. This level of education would be identified as degrees at the bachelor's level or higher. Furthermore, there is a lack of research pertaining to the contributing factors that lead female combat veterans to successfully transition into the civilian sector, obtain higher education, and secure an equal or better quality of life than they maintained in the military.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore and describe the transition experiences of female military veterans regarding their graduate-level education program after leaving service using the Schlossberg transition factors of (a) situation, (b) self, (c) support, and (d) and strategy.

Central Research Question

What are the transition experiences of female combat veterans using the Schlossberg transition model factors of situation, self, support, and strategies?

Research Subquestions

1. What were the situational transition experience (situation encompasses the extent, nature, and assumed significance and readiness for change and transition) factors that

female military veterans described experiencing while planning for their graduate-level education after leaving military service?

2. What self-characteristics (one's sense of self, such as one's health, socioeconomic status, psychosocial competence, past experience with similar transitions, and value orientation) do female veterans describe that affected their ability to complete graduate education after leaving military service?
3. What support (interpersonal support, institutional support, and physical settings) do female military veterans describe that helped them to complete their graduate-level education after leaving military service?
4. What were the strategies (intentional and thoughtful action, execution, task completion, and course amendment) that female veterans describe using as they completed a graduate-level education after leaving military service?

Significance of the Problem

Human capital is the most valuable resource and component of any organization and community. Abrams (2016) stated, "The outstanding men and women who defend our nation, and the families supporting them, remain America's most valuable asset. They are resilient and dedicated to accomplishing whatever mission they are given" (p. 3). Since 2011, there have been 1.7 million individuals described by Abrams as "America's most valuable asset," to transition to the civilian sector at an approximate rate of 200,000 service members per year (Austin, 2019; VA, 2016).

This mass exodus from military service is both causing an inundation of the civilian workforce and is also more prevalent than any other previously recorded period of time following a military conflict/war, thereby resulting in a bottleneck effect on

employment opportunities (Davies, 2017; Messer & Greene, 2014). These military veterans are uniquely experienced and trained individuals, yet they have been met with a number of obstacles impacting their successful transition to the civilian sector. They experience difficulty securing gainful employment, particularly as they compete not just with one another but also with their civilian counterparts. Without adequate employment and a similar financial influx to survive on, transitioning members face the inevitable issue of poverty or worse, homelessness.

The federal government and nonprofit agencies have recognized the need to assist veterans in making a smooth transition from service to civilian life. However, despite a significant number of programs designed to aid veterans in successfully transitioning, the country is witnessing more and more veterans who succumb to issues of unemployment, homelessness, and even suicide. Additionally, researchers agree that the issue of unemployment and homelessness among veterans is an epidemic that has dramatically increased over the past decade and is more likely to affect female veterans than their male counterparts at a rate previously unheard of in the past (Tsai et al., 2012, 2014, 2017).

This research could serve as a benefit to all governmental agencies, community support groups, nonprofit agencies, veteran support organizations, and most importantly, female veterans and their families. The findings from the study will assist in the organizations' development and improvement of programs designed to aid veterans in successfully transitioning from military to civilian service. The findings will also contribute to an increased understanding of the target population and how efforts may best be directed, formally and informally, to aid in their successful transition and completion of higher education with the intent to mitigate the risk of unemployment and

homelessness. Once analyzed, the results can be utilized to create training/educational programs for the target population and their support systems and best practices and to improve veteran transition assistance programs. Furthermore, the results can add to the limited body of research regarding female combat veterans as well as the limited body of research on successful transition from veteran to civilian life.

Operational Definitions

The following terms were utilized throughout this study:

Combat. Military action taken to address a conflict between two or more groups of armed forces (Ware, 2017).

Conflict. A confrontation between two or more rival sides employing the use of military force (Tatum, 2016).

Cultural adjustment. The process in which learned behaviors and way of thinking shift to another set of behaviors and way of thinking that is unfamiliar to the individual or group (Kukla et al., 2014).

Culture. Individual's behaviors are developed over time and composed of various characteristics and elements. These behaviors are influenced by the expectations and meaning of the role they have within a sociological group (Katz, 2015; F. Smith, 2016; P. B. Smith & Long, 2006).

Discharge. A discharge refers to the alleviation of a military service member from their military service obligation. Although there are a number of classifications for military discharge, the two most known are honorable and dishonorable. The discharge classification for which military service members are released from their service obligation can significantly impact what services and benefits members are entitled to

after military service (Guina, Rossetter, DeRhodes, Nahhas, & Welton, 2015). The following is a brief listing of the classifications a member may be discharged under:

- Honorable discharge
- General discharge under honorable conditions
- Other than honorable discharge
- Bad conduct discharge
- Dishonorable discharge

Female combat veteran. Those individuals who served in the armed forces as part of a military service obligation and were directly or indirectly involved in military combat or military conflict actions.

Government transition assistance. A transitional assistance program, mandated by Congress, to be provided to all military members prior to discharge (Knight, 2014).

Interpersonal and institutional support. Interpersonal and institutional supports refer to resources, networks, households, providers, and care givers who aid individuals during their transitional experience (Barrera & Ainlay, 1983; Schlossberg, 1981).

Military culture. The unique lifestyle, norms, and values that shape the way female military service members interact and communicate and that are enforced by regulations, policies, and rules, to emphasize concepts of teamwork and structure rather than freedom and individuality (Atuel et al., 2016; Brown, 2009; Coll & Weiss, 2017; Hall, 2011; Strom et al., 2012).

Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). A conflict within the global war on terrorism which occurred throughout the provinces of Afghanistan and the Horn of Africa between 2001 and 2014 (Tatum, 2016).

Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF). A conflict within the global war on terrorism that occurred throughout the provinces of Iraq between 2003 and 2011 (Hart, 2017).

Post-9/11 veteran. Ex-military service members who participated in military conflicts following the September 11, 2001, attacks on the world trade towers in New York City, New York, with the two most significant being Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom (Ganzer, 2016; Van Til et al., 2013).

Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). An individual's diagnosed mental health disorder stemming from experiencing a severe life-altering situation resulting in a high degree of trauma (Chan, 2015; Griffin & Gilbert, 2015).

Retiree. The alleviation of military service members from their military service obligation either because of the completion of at least 20 years of military service or a severe medical disability incurred during the course of their military service obligation.

Separation. The process by which military service members depart from their military service obligation to the civilian sector (Ahern et al., 2015; Ware, 2017; Woodworth, 2015).

Veteran. An individual who served in the United States Armed Forces in active duty, guard, or reserve status (Lopez, 2016; Ware, 2017).

Theoretical Definitions

The following terms from Schlossberg's transition model factors (4-S) were utilized throughout this study:

Self. The individual conceptualizations of one's own character, nature, and persona as it pertains to their perceived identity, ethnicity, and culture (De Munck, 2013;

Schlossberg 1981). The concept of self is a self-derived reflection of how people view their own levels of readiness, willingness, and ability to embrace change.

Situation. The perception and context of the transition, in particular the readiness, nature, significance, and duration for transition (Morin, 2011; Schlossberg, 1981). In regard to this study, situation also refers to the nature and classification of the participants' separation from military service, their family unit, employment status, and finances.

Social support. The network of friends, family members, colleagues, mentors, and professional providers or agencies who contribute to the transition process (Barrera & Ainlay, 1983; Sarason & Sarason, 2006; Schlossberg, 1981; Voydanoff, 2005a, 2005b).

Strategies. The embodiment of preparative steps designed to develop resiliency, information seeking, coping mechanisms, direct action, and inhibitive action with the capability to assess strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (Schlossberg, 1981; Wilson, 2015).

Delimitations

This study was delimited to United States Armed Forces female combat veterans who transitioned from military service to the civilian sector between 2002 and 2021, served in Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, and live within a 75-mile radius of Sacramento, California.

Organization of the Study

This study explored the lived experiences of post-9/11 female combat veterans who transitioned from military service to the civilian sector and successfully completed

graduate-level education using the Schlossberg transition model factors of situation, self, support, and strategies. The findings from this study may aid government and nonprofit veteran support organizations in enhancing their transition programs and resources to ensure this particular population's rate of successfully transitioning from military service to the civilian sector increases. The introduction of this study was designed to identify an issue at the macro level and systematically narrowed down the issue to a micro level through the use of funneling. Therefore, the introduction demonstrated a general assessment of the subject and how it correlates to a larger issue or field of thought.

Chapter II delivers an extensive review of current and relevant literature and background of the main or key research variables and the theoretical foundation. Chapter III describes the methodology, research design, population, target population, sample population, data collection and analysis, and limitations of this study. Chapters IV and V present the findings from the study in conjunction with summaries, conclusions, and recommendations for research to be conducted in the future. The study concludes with a presentation of related appendices and a list of references.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Chapter II introduces a brief background of the U.S. Armed Forces and subsequent description of the process by which service members transition from their military lifestyle into their civilian lifestyle. Then the chapter presents the foundational theories and background related to transition to establish the theoretical framework and proposed theory for this study, Schlossberg's transition theory and 4-S model. Next, the chapter addresses the challenges and opportunities female veterans pursuing higher education experience. Last, Chapter II concludes by depicting the central and subresearch questions within the context of a conceptual framework supported by scholarly research and the gap in research.

United States Armed Forces Background

The U.S. Armed Forces is comprised of six services branches: the U.S. Army (USA), the U.S. Navy (USN), the U.S. Marine Corps (USMC), the U.S. Air Force (USAF), the U.S. Space Force (USSF), and the U.S. Coast Guard (USCG). The USA, USN, USMC, USAF, and USSF fall under the purview and authority of the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD). The USCG falls under the purview and authority of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) with the exception that should the United States go to war, the USCG would then fall under the authority of the DoD. Each service branch under the DoD is separately organized under a military department run by a civilian secretary with the exception of the USMC and USSF; the USMC falls under the U.S. Department of the Navy and the USSF falls under the U.S. Department of the Air Force, each answering to the respective secretaries of the identified departments.

Service Branches and Military Installations

Each military service branch has its own unique inception date. The first branch established was the USA in 1775. That same year, the USN and USMC were also established. The USCG was established in 1790, USAF in 1947 (Redmond et al., 2015), and USSF in 2020. These individual branches each have their own unique set of core values and mission statements, all identified in Table 1.

As previously identified, each military branch falls under the purview of the DoD with the exception of the USCG unless the United States is in a state of war. The DoD's mission is to deliver the forces necessary to wage war as well as secure and maintain peace established by U.S. military installations (S. J. Smith et al., 2018). These forces are dispersed across the country and the world to accomplish the DoD's mission. A listing of the United States' military installations and population by state is provided in Appendix B. California has 32 military installations, the most military installations established within a state or U.S. territory. As of 2018, California was home to approximately 143,023 female combat veterans (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2018b).

Military Rank Structure

Although all six branches of military service share some similarities in their enlisted and officer pay grades, there are differences in the ranks as well as an inclusion or exclusion of warrant office pay grades (S. J. Smith et al., 2018). Pay grades identify varying degrees of authority and responsibility with those in the officer grades having certain minimum requirements such as a 4-year degree. Table 2 consists of a

Table 1

Overview of Military Branches

Branch	Inception date	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.
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.
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.

Table 1 (*continued*)

Branch	Inception date	Service members	Mission	Core values
Space Force	December 20, 2019	Guardians	The USSF is a military service that organizes, trains, and equips space forces in order to protect U.S. and allied interests in space and to provide space capabilities to the joint force. USSF responsibilities include developing Guardians, acquiring military space systems, maturing the military doctrine for space power, and organizing space forces to present to our Combatant Commands.	Integrity first, service before self, and excellence in all we do.

Note. *The terms Coast Guardsmen and Airmen are standard and utilized without regard for gender/sex. 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 (https://doi.org/10.3233/WOR-141987).

comprehensive depiction of military ranks according to each respective branch of service's own unique set of core values and mission statements, all identified in Table 1.

Women in the Military

The military is designed in a hierarchical structure to designate authority with commissioned officers leading each service branch followed by warrant officers, as applicable, and then the enlisted personnel. Officers often serve in managerial roles relative to the enlisted personnel in which they issue orders and operate at the strategic

Table 2

Pay Grades and Ranks by Military Service Branch

Rank	Pay grade	Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Coast Guard	Air Force
Commissioned officers	O10	General	Admiral	General	Admiral	General
	O9	Lieutenant General	Vice Admiral	Lieutenant General	Vice Admiral	Lieutenant General
	O8	Major General	Rear Admiral (upper)	Major General	Rear Admiral (upper)	Major General
	O7	Brigadier General	Rear Admiral (lower)	Brigadier General	Rear Admiral (lower)	Brigadier General
	O6	Colonel	Captain	Colonel	Captain	Colonel
	O5	Lieutenant Colonel	Commander	Lieutenant Colonel	Commander	Lieutenant Colonel
	O4	Major	Lieutenant Commander	Major	Lieutenant Commander	Major
	O3	Captain	Lieutenant	Captain	Lieutenant	Captain
	O2	1st Lieutenant	Lieutenant Junior Grade	1st Lieutenant	Lieutenant Junior grade	1st Lieutenant
	O1	2nd Lieutenant	Ensign	2nd Lieutenant	Ensign	2nd Lieutenant
Warrant officers	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	Chief Warrant Officer 4	N/A
	W3	Chief Warrant Officer 3	Chief Warrant Officer 3	Chief Warrant Officer 3	Chief Warrant Officer 3	N/A
	W2	Chief Warrant Officer 2	Chief Warrant Officer 2	Chief Warrant Officer 2	Chief Warrant Officer 2	N/A
	W1	Chief Warrant Officer 1	N/A	Warrant Officer	N/A	N/A
Enlisted	E9	Sergeant Major	Master Chief Petty Officer	Master Gunnery Sergeant	Master Chief Petty Officer	Chief Master Sergeant
	E8	Master Sergeant	Senior Chief Petty Officer	Master Sergeant	Senior Chief Petty Officer	Senior Master Sergeant
	E7	Sergeant First Class	Chief Petty Officer	Gunnery Sergeant	Chief Petty Officer	Master Sergeant
	E6	Staff Sergeant	Petty Officer First Class	Staff Sergeant	Petty Officer First Class	Technical Sergeant
	E5	Sergeant	Petty Officer Second Class	Sergeant	Petty Officer Second Class	Staff Sergeant
	E4	Corporal or Specialist	Petty Officer Third	Corporal	Petty Officer Third	Senior Airman
	E3	Private First Class	Seaman	Lance Corporal	Seaman	Airman First Class

Table 2 *(continued)*

Rank	Pay grade	Army	Navy	Marine Corps	Coast Guard	Air Force
	E2	Private Second Class	Seaman Apprentice	Private First Class	Seaman Apprentice	Airman
	E1	Private	Seaman Recruit	Private	Seaman Recruit	Airman Basic

level of military operations (USA, n.d.). Officers are designated as either commissioned (specifically only for those in grades O1-O10), warrant (W1-W5), or noncommissioned (E5-E9).

According to Parker, Cillufo, and Stepler (2017), the percentage of women serving each service branch varies significantly: 19% of the number of personnel serving as active-duty USAF, 18% of the USN, 14% of USA, and 8% of the USMC. These statistics demonstrate that the active-duty military service is still largely male dominated with an average of only 14.75% of the DoD's force being female, but there have been significant improvements in the number of females serving in the military. Between 1990 and 2015, the average percentage of active-duty officers who were female across all service branches increased from 12% to 17% (Parker et al., 2017). During that same period of time, the average percentage of female active-duty enlisted personnel increased from 11% to 15% (Parker et al., 2017). Table 3 highlights the most recent report of female participation in military service.

The data presented in Table 3 also demonstrate that between 2017 and 2019 the average number of the DoD's military force increased from 14.75%, as identified by Parker et al. (2017), to approximately 16% (Defense Manpower Data Center [DMDC], n.d.). Table 4 provides a breakdown of women serving in each military service branch by officer (O1-O10) and enlisted (E1-E9) tiers. The most recent statistics provided by the

DoD show that the average percentage of active-duty officers who were female was 18.06% and the average percentage of female active-duty enlisted personnel was 16.34%. According to Reynolds and Shendruk (2018), "When the draft ended in 1973, women represented just 2 percent of the enlisted forces and 8 percent of the officer corps. Today, those numbers are 16 percent and 18 percent respectively, a significant increase" (p. 9).

Table 3

Total Number of Female Active-Duty Service Members by Branch as of January 2019

Branch	Number serving	Percentage of force
Army	69,917	15.01%
Navy	64,942	19.77%
Marine Corps	16,157	8.68%
Air Force	65,832	20.40%

Note. Adapted from DoD Personnel, Workforce Reports & Publications, by Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC), n.d. https://dwp.dmdc.osd.mil/dwp/app/dod-data-reports/workforce-reports).

Table 4

Percentage of Female Service Members by Branch and Career Path as of January 2019

Branch	Officer	Enlisted
Army	17.62%	14.38%
Navy	19.02%	19.92%
Marine Corps	7.88%	8.79%
Air Force	21.33%	20.17%

Note. Adapted from DoD Personnel, Workforce Reports & Publications, by Defense Manpower Data Center (DMDC), n.d. (https://dwp.dmdc.osd.mil/dwp/app/dod-data-reports/workforce-reports).

Women in Combat

According to Engels and Harris (2002), female service members made up approximately 14% of the United States military population. Although the number of female service members has progressively grown, their role within the military has also grown to include involvement in combat. On November 30, 1993, President Bill Clinton signed a Defense Authorization Act repealing the prohibitions against the utilization of female service members on combat vessels. Despite this act by President Clinton, women remained banned from direct combat and from occupying certain combat roles through 2012 and 2015, respectively (MacKenzie, 2012). Specifically, women were unable to hold roles in the Navy SEALS, Marine Corps Infantry, Green Berets, Air Force Pararescue, and Army Rangers on the premise that they would not be able to meet gender-neutral performance requirements and standards (Tilghman, 2015). Under the leadership of the Secretary of Defense, Ash Carter, the DoD lifted every gender-based restriction imposed upon the military services in January 2016.

Military Conflicts

American history is fraught with war and military conflicts. Since its inception in July of 1776, citizens of the United States have taken up arms in the service of their country, supporting the country's initiatives and the protection of its borders. Table 5 delivers a summary of historical conflicts and wars the United States has been actively involved in with a brief reference of recent conflicts relevant to this study. War and military conflicts often include the deployment of service members to foreign lands, which may result in a risk of physical harm because of exposure to a combat

environment, living conditions, and austere weather (Nicholson, 2015; Spelman et al., 2012).

Military Culture

The military culture is a unique experience for those who work and serve within its ranks. Personnel who separate from the military and transition into the civilian workforce and culture may experience a number of challenges (Pease, Billera, & Gerard, 2015). Each service branch has its own set of core values that members are expected to share and embody. Conversely, civilian culture does not have a singular set of shared core values thereby making it difficult for many veterans to find a similar concept in the civilian sector and profit-driven workforce (Anderson & Goodman, 2014). Other veterans have difficulty adjusting to civilian culture because of differences in language. According to Coll and Weiss (2017), the military's language is unique and filled with acronyms and jargon. Therefore, veterans who transition into civilian culture find learning civilian terminology challenging, particularly those terms that are used in both civilian and military culture but hold a different meaning (Parsi, 2017). To aid in their transition, the military enacted a transition assistance program during the OEF/OIF era that all service members must complete prior to leaving military service and entering the civilian sector.

Military Transition to Civilian Life

Each military service branch provides a transition assistance program in which completion is required of all those who are transitioning from military service to the civilian sector. These programs are designed to equip female service members with the necessary job seeking, resume writing, college applying skills to ensure their successful

transition to the civilian sector. Although each military service branch provides some form of preseparation counseling and transition service, the focus seems to be on short-term and initial job search actions (Ware, 2017).

Table 5

Historical Overview of U.S. Wars, Initiatives, and Military Conflicts

War/initiative/military conflict	Initiation date	Termination date
Spanish-American War	April 21, 1898	July 4, 1902
Mexican Border Period	May 9, 1916	April 5, 1917
World War I	April 6, 1917	November 11, 1918
World War II	December 7, 1941	December 31, 1946
Korean Conflict	June 27, 1950	January 31, 1955
Vietnam Era	February 28, 1961	May 7, 1975
Lebanon Conflicts	August 21, 1982	September 29, 1982
Grenada (Operation Urgent Fury)	October 25, 1983	December 15, 1983
Panama	December 21, 1989	February 13, 1990
Persian Gulf War	August 2, 1990	April 6, 1991
Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)	October 7, 2001	December 28, 2014
Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF)	March 19, 2003	August 31, 2010
Operation New Dawn (OND)	September 1, 2010	December 15, 2011
Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) Islamic State	October 15, 2014	
Operation Freedom's Sentinel (OFS)	January 1, 2015	

Note. Adapted from *U.S. Periods of War and Dates of Recent Conflicts,* by B.S. Torreon, 2017, Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service. (https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RS/RS21405/26).

Military transition assistance programs are designed to include both those who are retiring and those who are separating regardless of their particular classification under each (Gaiter, 2015). Although these transition programs are mandatory and designed to be all inclusive regardless of transition status, it was discovered that not all personnel complete this program prior to transitioning from military service to the civilian sector

(*GAO-02-914T: Military and veterans' benefits*, 2002; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Office of the Inspector General, 2007; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2011). Furthermore, there is no standardized program established under the DoD that leaves each service branch to develop a program that differs in scope and participation rates. According to *GAO-05-844T: Military and veterans' benefits* (2005), this oversight of the program has resulted in two key deficiencies: (a) many eligible members do not attend and do not receive the required transition assistance and (b) there is no established manner to effectively ascertain the effectiveness of the mandated services.

Military Life Cycle Transition Preparation Model

During his time as president, President Barack Obama issued an executive order (Executive Order No. 13,518, 2009 [Employment of Veterans in the Federal Government]) to push the government to serve as a model for the employment of veterans with disabilities and to enhance their recruitment, retention, and hiring (White House Office of the Press Secretary, 2016). This shift from solely focusing on mission readiness to also including the effort to return female service members to the civilian sector as high-functioning and quality citizens resulted in the military life cycle transition program model. Figure 1 showcases the phases and objectives of the military member life cycle transition preparation model as outlined by the USMC's Marine for Lifecycle program.

Figure 1. Marine for life cycle model (M4LCM). From "Marine for Lifecycle," by Marine Corps Community Services, p. 1, n.d. (https://usmc-mccs.org/cycle/).

Theoretical Background

The foundational guiding theory serving as one of the lenses utilized for this study is the adult transition theory. According to research by Chickering and Schlossberg (1995), transition is a cyclical process consisting of moving in, moving through, and moving out. This type of transition framework accepts the following as criteria:

1. Transitions are regularly experienced by people.
2. The type of transition (nonevent, unanticipated, and anticipated) impacts how people react to the transition.
3. Their perceptions of the environment or context in which the transition occurs impacts their experience of the transition.
4. A transition is a process, rather than an end, in which one accepts and adapts by moving in, moving through, and moving out (Anderson et al., 2012).

Transition researchers are unable to come to a consensus regarding the cyclical nature of a transition or the linearity of transition (Froggatt, 1997; Glacken, Kernohan, & Coates, 2001; Luborsky, 1994; Martin-McDonald & Biernoff, 2002). However, they

have come to agreements regarding other aspects of transition theory. For example, researchers agree that to have an enhanced understanding of how individuals experience transition, it is important for the nature, resources, and context of the transition to be comprehensively understood, and it is important to understand that individual transition is experienced and managed differently (Diamond, 2012).

One researcher focused on the individual transition experience; Bridges (2004) theorized that transition occurs in three phases: the ending, the neutral zone, and new beginnings. This theory of transition focused on the notion that personal development is a natural journey in which one's turning points mark growth. Bridges's theory thus implies and concurs with other researchers' notions that change and transition are cyclical and frequently occurring. Transition theorist, Quackenbush, focused on the individual's ability to manage these frequently occurring changes and transitions. According to Quackenbush (1989), "The need to maintain and enhance self-conceptions and self-presentations of competence and morality provides the basic motivation that can explain not only why people might undergo change but also why they might resist undergoing change" (p. 316).

Schlossberg's 4-S Model

Anderson and Goodman (2014) highlighted the notion that service members reaching the end of their military career who are facing the prospect of transitioning to the civilian sector often experience feelings of fear, anxiety, and at times, anger. These feelings may arise as a result of the change in service members' perception of what their reality is. The process by which a person forms new relationships and roles as a result of shifting from one reality to another is defined as a transition (Schlossberg, 1984).

Counselors guide individuals through such a process. Counselors serve as providers of information for those undergoing the process and rigors of transition (Schlossberg, 1984). Transition counselors are specialists capable of assisting individuals with strategy development focused on preparing them for success (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012). Table 6 highlights the three types of transition outlined by Schlossberg's transition theory.

Table 6

Schlossberg's Transition Types

Type of transition	Definition
Anticipated	Transitions that come about predictably
Unanticipated	Transitions that are not scheduled or predictable
Nonevents	Transitions that are anticipated but do not come about
Nonevent subcategories	
Personal	Associated with individual aspirations
Ripple	Felt as a result of a nonevent of someone else
Resultant	Caused by an event
Delayed	Expecting an event that might still occur

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

According to Greer (2017), "For women veterans, the transition can be viewed as the period between time of discharge from the military and the time at which she has fully integrated into her civilian role, including appropriate employment" (p. 57). Female veterans have unique experiences with transition from their military service to the civilian sector. Scholars are able to weigh the unique challenges faced by female combat

veterans to create and implement custom development programs and policies by using transition theories as a framework as showcased by Figure 2 (Greer, 2017).

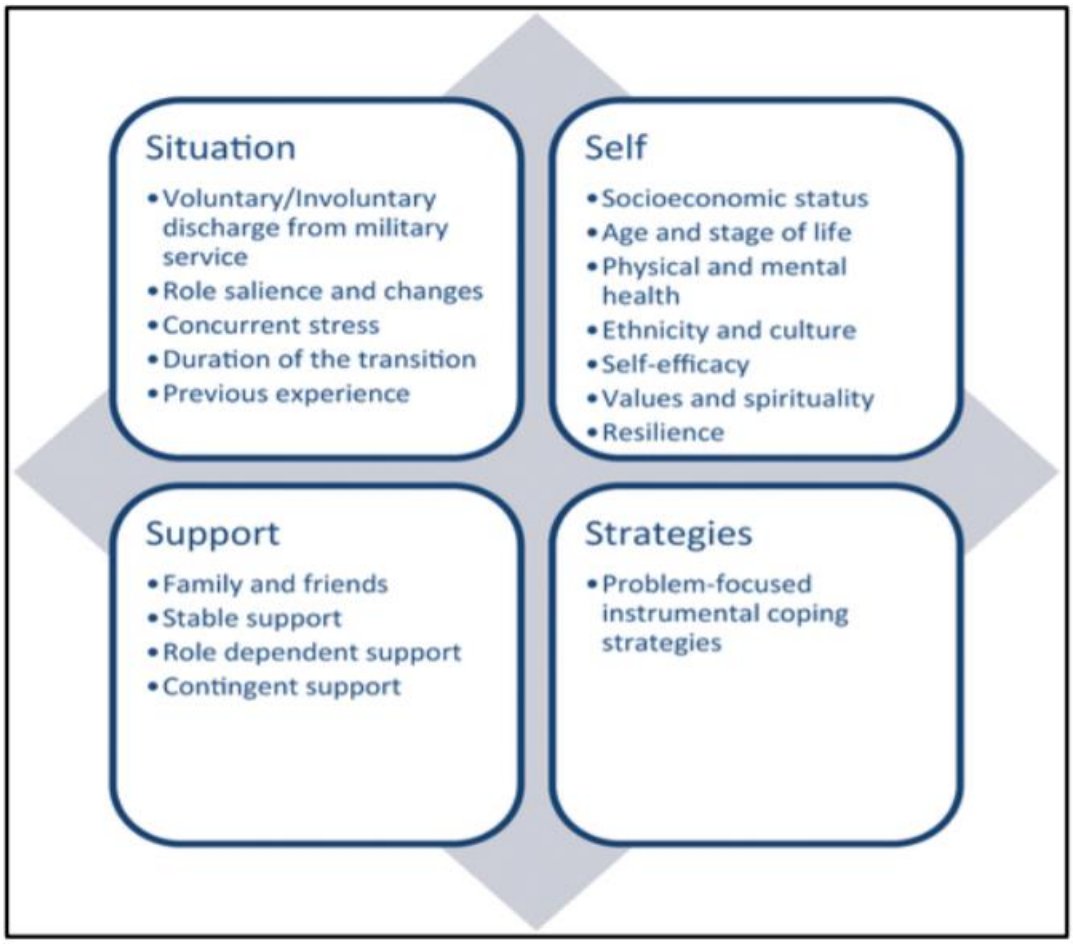

Figure 2. Transition theory applied to women veterans. From "Career Development for Women Veterans: Facilitating Successful Transitions From Military Service to Civilian Employment," by T. W. Greer, 2017, *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, *19*(1), p. 57.

The three primary types of transition, as identified in Table 6, are

1. anticipated
2. unanticipated
3. nonevents.

Chickering and Schlossberg (1995) explained that nonevents are considered anticipated transitions that do not occur. Each type of transition's potential for success depended on its independent assets and liabilities highlighted by the 4-S model. Role changes, triggers, timing, and duration are all factors that must be assessed when considering the degree of potential success for veterans transitioning from military service to the civilian sector (Anderson, et al., 2012). Figure 3 showcases individual transitions in relation to Schlossberg's transition model.

Situation

According to Schlossberg (1981), situation encompasses the extent, nature, and assumed significance and readiness for change and transition. This variable also implies several other subfactors that may impact an individual's ability to succeed through the transition. All service members eventually transition from military service into the civilian sector for a myriad of reasons. Retirement, separation due to the end of their contract, medical disqualification or retirement, and even administrative reasons are several of the causes for service members to transition out of military service. To ensure respondents of this study would comprehend the nature of the inquiry, situation referred to the personal variables serving as a cause of the transition.

Self

One's conceptualization of one's own character, nature, and personality related to origin, individuality, and ethos references self as Schlossberg (1981) defined it. Self is the manner in which individuals perceive their preparedness for transition; for those who experience military culture, this is cultivated over time. Conversely, Hart (2017) posited that the more extensive one's military service is, the more challenging the transition into

the civilian sector tends to be. Despite Hart's assertion, Schlossberg's model focused on several factors regarding the conceptualization of one's sense of self, such as one's health, socioeconomic status, psychosocial competence, past experience with similar transitions, and value orientation. To ensure respondents of this study would comprehend the nature of the inquiry, self-referred to the mental health variables that support or challenge the transition.

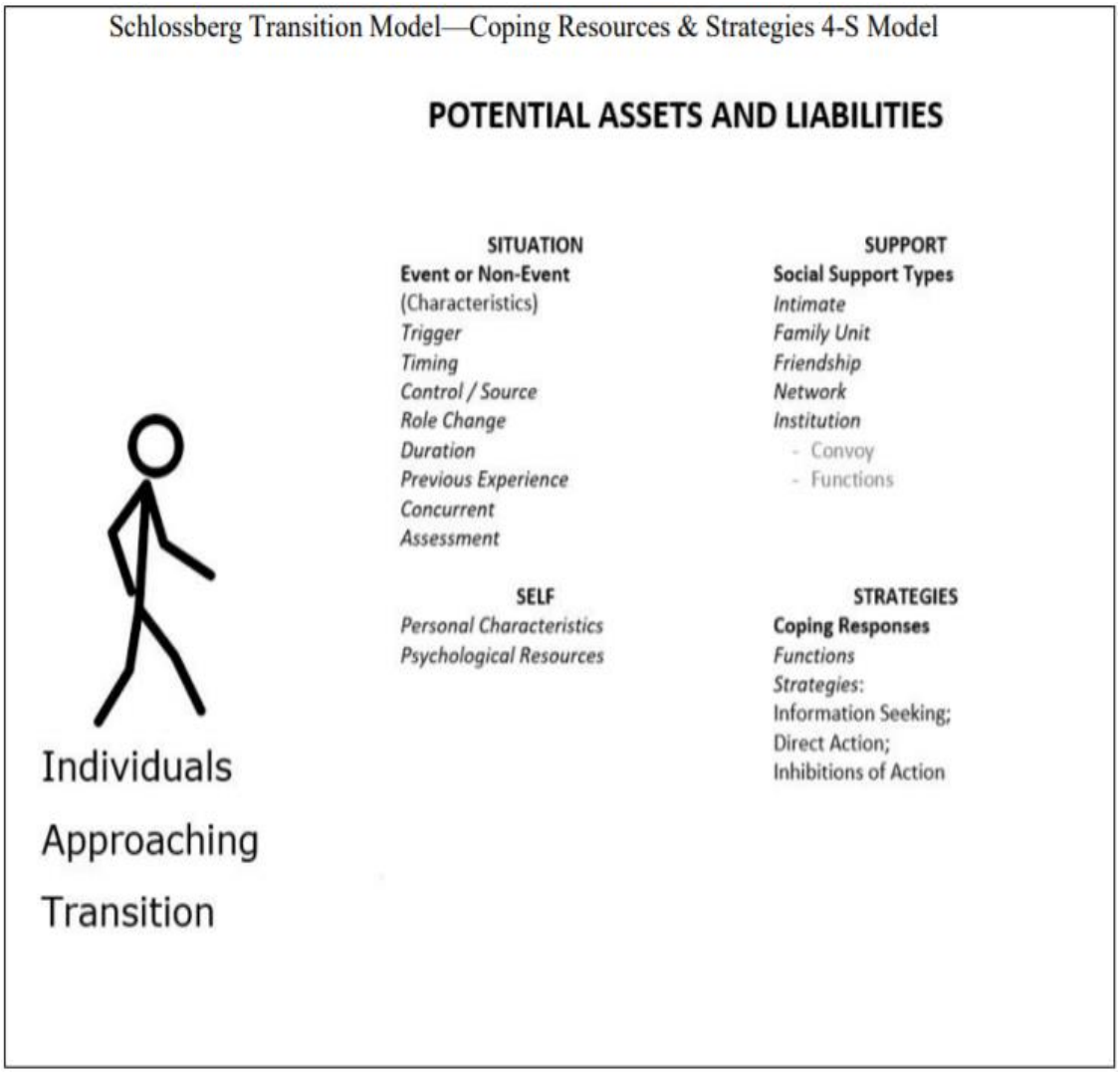

Figure 3. Individual transition coping strategies. Adapted from *Counseling Adults in Transition: Linking Schlossberg's Theory With Practice in a Diverse World* (4th ed.), by M. L. Anderson, J. Goodman, and N. K. Schlossberg, 2012, p. 62, New York, NY: Springer.

Support

Schlossberg (1981) specifically highlighted three aspects of support: interpersonal support, institutional support, and physical settings. Support may refer to those networks, resources, households, and caregivers who aid the individual experiencing a transition (Barrera & Ainlay, 1983; Schlossberg, 1981). Support can come in the form of formal or informal systems, but ultimately it is designed to aid individuals in their journey through the transition. Support systems assist in the mitigation of obstacles one must overcome to successfully transition (Tatum, 2016). One major support system provided by the military to assist service members with a number of transitions is the support and readiness centers located on every military installation across the service branches. Additionally, to ensure respondents of this study would comprehend the nature of the inquiry, support referred to social/cultural/organizational support variables that aid in one's transition.

Strategies

Schlossberg (1981) depicted strategy as intentional and thoughtful action, execution, task completion, and course amendment. Strategies coupled with milestones serve an imperative part of achieving a successful transition. Wilson (2015) highlighted the usefulness of employing strategies as a means of reducing the anxiety of the unknown during a transition. Strategies can range from healthy coping mechanisms that can promote resiliency and aid in transition to unhealthy coping mechanisms which, depending on the mechanism being employed by the individual, can lead to a variety of issues or dependencies that may inhibit one's ability to succeed during a transition. To

ensure respondents of this study would comprehend the nature of the inquire, strategies referred to the tactics used to ensure successful transition.

Gap in Research

After an extensive review and analysis of the literature regarding the lived experience of female combat veterans transitioning into the civilian sector, a gap was identified related to the geographical location of Sacramento, California. Although several studies have occurred over the past decade that explore the lived experiences of veterans who have transitioned into the civilian sector, there has yet to be a study conducted that examines the lived experiences of OEF/OIF female combat veterans in and around Sacramento, California who have completed graduate-level education after military service. The Sacramento region is comprised of numerous active military bases and VA sites to assist approximately 480,000 veterans.

Summary

Chapter II of this qualitative, multicase study provided a literature review that provided a comprehensive analysis or a myriad of authors who researched adult transition theory. Chapter II also employed a synthesis matrix to compare and contrast literature related to the study. The matrix was created from a multitude of online databases such as ProQuest Dissertations, EBSCOhost, Academic Search Premier, and Thesis Global database. Additionally, the author utilized government sites and literary sources to include the DoD, VA, and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. Furthermore, a historical background for the study was provided throughout Chapter II.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Overview

This study examined the transition experiences of female veterans who served in Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) or Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and completed graduate-level education after leaving military service. Insufficient research has been conducted about the tens of thousands of veterans, particularly females, who have honorably served their country and have transitioned from a military organization to the private workforce. Although there are several well-known transition models, this study used Schlossberg's transition model to examine the transition dynamics of situation, self, social support, and strategies. The goal of this research was to inform retired female combat veterans as well as their support providers about ways to improve transitions from the military to civilian life.

This chapter presents the methodology utilized that best supports the purpose of this qualitative multiple case study and corresponding research questions. Furthermore, this chapter explains the rationale and selection of the research design and describes why the most suitable research method was a qualitative research multicase study. Then the chapter presents the population, target population, and sample population, prior to describing the instrumentation, data collection methods, and analysis. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the study's limitations and a summary.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore and describe the transition experiences of female military veterans regarding their graduate-level education program

after leaving service using the Schlossberg transition factors of (a) situation, (b) self, (c) support, and (d) strategy.

Central Research Question

One central research question and four research subquestions guided this study. The central research question was "What are the transition experiences of female combat veterans using the Schlossberg transition model factors of situation, self, support, and strategies?"

Research Subquestions

1. What were the situational transition experience (situation encompasses the extent, nature, and assumed significance and readiness for change and transition) factors that female military veterans described experiencing while planning for their graduate-level education after leaving military service?
2. What self-characteristics (one's sense of self, such as one's health, socioeconomic status, psychosocial competence, past experience with similar transitions, and value orientation) do female veterans describe that affected their ability to complete graduate education after leaving military service?
3. What support (interpersonal support, institutional support, and physical settings) do female military veterans describe that helped them to complete their graduate-level education after leaving military service?
4. What were the strategies (intentional and thoughtful action, execution, task completion, and course amendment) that female veterans describe as using as they completed a graduate-level education after leaving military service?

Research Design

Quantitative research employs the use of statistics and numbers to measure data with an emphasis placed on objectivity (McMillan & Schumacher 2010). Conversely, qualitative research places the emphasis on the personal experiences of the study's population and utilizes the researcher as the primary instrument of inquiry (Patton, 2015). This study employed qualitative research methods because it involved an exploration of multiple perspectives unique to the experiences of the target population. Furthermore, Creswell (2015) described the goal of qualitative research to be the obtainment of a deeper understanding of a given subject of inquiry and "reporting multiple perspectives" (p. 186).

This methodology was most appropriate for the study because as Patton (2015) stated, qualitative methodology "examines human lives through the lens of a narrative, honoring lived experience as a source of important knowledge and understanding" (p. 128). The lived experiences of the target population tell the story of transitioning from military service to civilian life while concurrently pursuing higher education. Furthermore, the information gathered confirms the knowledge, skills, and degree of support these individuals obtained and maintained throughout their transition and pursuit of higher education, which offers an opportunity to others to mirror simple efforts to secure success.

Creswell and Poth (2018) described five types of qualitative approaches that may be utilized in qualitative research: case studies, ethnographic research, grounded research, phenomenological research, and narrative research. Because this study focused on the successful transition through higher education by female combat veterans, this research

used an in-depth examination of female combat veterans who served in OEF or OIF, their support systems, their individual situations, and the strategies they employed.

To answer the study's research questions and obtain an understanding of post-9/11 female combat veterans, a multicase study was determined as the most appropriate method. This method was the most fitting for the researcher in order to cultivate a deeper and richer understanding, through the lens of Schlossberg's transition theory, of the participants' unique experiences. Three justifications for the employment of a multicase study design are (a) ongoing events, such as the transition of female service members from military service, need to be investigated; (b) the "why" and "how" of a phenomenon in the pursuit of research need to be explored; and (c) there are restricted resources and control by the researcher (Yin, 2014).

Furthermore, McMillan and Schumacher (2010) described a case study as "an in-depth analysis of a single entity . . . [or] a bounded system" (p. 344). The term bounded system refers to the limits established around the subject of the study. For this study, the bounded system refers to the participants' period of military service and the situational, social, and personal factors they experienced as they completed a graduate-level education after military service. More specifically, the boundaries of this study pertain to female combat veterans whose period of military service would classify them as post-9/11 veterans, specifically, female combat veterans who served in OEF and OIF. Veterans who have served in multiple periods of war and military conflict are classified into the most recent period they served (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). Stake (1995) had developed this concept of a bounded system to describe a case in which a boundary is established, has working parts, and is an integrated system that includes parts

that may or may not be functioning well toward its purpose. Moreover, the concept is designed to provide the researcher the opportunity to maximize the understandings of both the case and its inner workings.

Population

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), a population is a "group of elements or cases, whether individuals, objects, or events, that conform to specific criteria" (p. 129). Findings in research should be those that can be generalized to the study population. Patten (2017) asserted that the study population is the group of individuals whom researchers are most interested in. According to the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics (2018b) there are approximately 1.9 million combat veterans living within the United States. For this study, the intended population was 143,211 California female combat veterans according to the same source.

Target Population

The target population is a subset of the identified population from which a sample is studied. A target population is identified because of the researcher's limits of time, money, and other resources that make it difficult to study each individual in the population (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Thus, the feasibility of a researcher investigating an entire population for a study is unrealistic. Therefore, researchers identify a portion of the population to be used for the in-depth study and draw a sample from that group to gather data and make inferences about the findings for the population under study. Creswell (2014) defined the target population as the "actual list of sampling units from which the sample is selected" (p. 393). For this study, the intended population was 143,211 California female combat veterans. This population number was too large,

and thus, it was not feasible to interview all potential participants of the study. The narrowing of the population to a target population provided a reasonable and accessible population for the purpose of this study.

A target population was identified by first delimiting the study to post-9/11 female combat veterans currently residing within California, which is 49,893. This number was too large, so the researcher further limited the target population to the greater Sacramento region served by the Veterans Service Office of Sacramento. Within California, there are multiple veterans affairs departments. This department provides veterans with medical, dental, financial, occupational, and educational assistance. The Sacramento Veteran's Services Offices includes the following counties in their scope of responsibility: Alameda, Amador, Calaveras, Colusa, Contra Costa, El Dorado Napa, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Sacramento, San Francisco, San Joaquin, Solano, Stanislaus, Sutter, Yolo, and Yuba. The number of post-9/11 female combat veterans who served in the Sacramento Veteran's Services Offices was 13,925.

Again, this number was not reasonable, so the final target population was delimited to the counties of Sacramento and Solano. In these two counties, there were 5,385 post-9/11 female combat veterans for the final target population.

Sample

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) defined the sample population of a study as "the group of subjects or participants from whom the data are collected" (p. 129). The researcher used purposeful sampling to obtain the sample population. Purposeful sampling derives from the emphasis on in-depth understanding of specific cases: information rich cases (Patton 2015). Information rich cases are described as those from

which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research.

For this study these are the purposeful sampling criteria for this study:

- Post-911 female combat veteran
- Honorably discharged between 2002 and 2021
- Currently working or residing within Sacramento or Solano County or affiliated with a knowledgeable sponsor within that geographic location
- Successfully completed a graduate (master or doctorate) degree while in veteran or retiree status.

Potential participants must have been in active military duty post-9/11 and have been honorably discharged from active military duty between 2002 and 2021. Additionally, the veterans needed to live in Sacramento or Solano County and to be provided services from the Sacramento Veteran's Service Office. Last, participants needed to have recently completed a graduate degree program resulting in a master's or doctorate degree or to be near completion of a graduate degree program leading to a master's or doctorate degree. Research has shown that veterans who have completed a graduate degree have a more positive transition from the military to civilian life.

Sample Size

Several prominent authors have guidelines that researchers use to determine the appropriate number of cases for a particular study. Patton (2015) indicated there is lack of universal guidelines for sample sizes of qualitative studies; however, Yin (2014) emphasized the importance of studying multiple cases rather than a single case because the data collected would be more compelling and robust. The fundamental value in

selecting appropriate cases is to have cases that are information rich with regard to the issues under investigation, thereby justifying the use of purposive sampling (Patton, 2015). Stake (2006) indicated the limited benefits of multiple case studies when than four or more than 10 cases are chosen. He stated that the intent behind the number of cases is to obtain enough information-rich data to ensure the validity of the findings while not overburdening the researcher with so much data. Last, Patton (2015) indicated that insights gained from this form of qualitative research has more to do with level of information richness garnered from the cases selected than actual sample size. To collect data in a feasible and timely manner, a multicase study design for six cases was employed.

Summary of Population: Graphic

Figure 4 highlights the breakdown from the population to the target population to the sample population.

Sampling Method Procedures

To find participants who meet the target population criteria, the researcher used knowledgeable sponsors. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) described this sampling method as an approach in which participants are referred to the researcher by sponsors knowledgeable about this population's selection criteria. By employing these sampling methods, the researcher was provided with sufficient participants who met the selection criteria for this study.

The researcher used sponsors to find cases. He contacted sponsors from the VA, Veteran Services Office and a local military installation that is still servicing veterans. The VA, Veteran Services Office, and Beale Air Force Base provide a variety of services

to veterans including access and support for VA and California benefits, community outreach, and resources to help veterans with medical, educational, and employment needs. Additionally, these organizations provide occupational opportunities, coaching, and connections to veteran support agencies such as Veteran Service Centers. Last, these departments help service members and veterans identify their educational goals, find suitable educational programs, and assist with the application process to these programs.

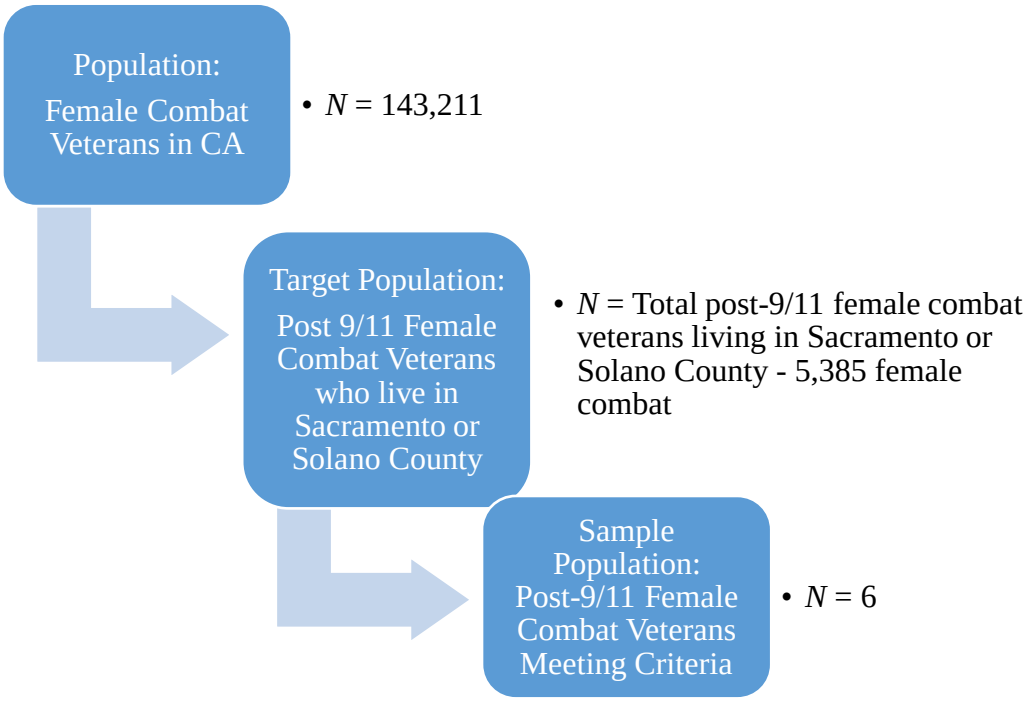

Figure 4. Population, target, and sample.

Three key members of these organizations provided assistance to find participants who met the criteria of the study and who had relevant transition experiences aligned to the purpose of the study. Participating in this study were Rochelle Arnold, Theresa Banks, and Robert King. The aforementioned experts had extensive knowledge of and experience working with veterans transitioning from military service to the civilian

sector, and because of the nature of their professions, they have had contact with veterans pre- and posttransition thereby making them capable of providing information-rich participants.

Rochelle Arnold is the Sacramento County Veteran Service Officer responsible for leading a team of veterans affairs experts dedicated to connecting veterans with all available VA and California benefits, community outreach, and veteran resources designed to help veterans with medical, educational, and employment needs. She has over 20 years of service in the public and military sector during which time she has guided and mentored hundreds of female service members and veterans toward professional and educational goals by connecting them with the necessary tools, information, and resources to be successful.

Theresa Banks works for the military in a civilian capacity as the Community Support Specialist. She is responsible for leading a team that connects military members transitioning from military service to the civilian sector in conjunction with veterans/retirees, occupational opportunities, and veteran support agencies such as VSOs and Veteran Service Centers. She has over 20 years of service in the public and military sector during which time she has guided and connected thousands of female service members and veterans to a variety of resources and services. She has individually been recognized, and her team has been recognized, for exceptional performance in taking care of service members, several times by senior leaders at Beale AFB.

Robert King works for the military in a civilian contractor and Air National Guard reserve capacity. In both capacities he is responsible for leading teams comprised of service members pretransition and veterans posttransition. He has approximately 20

years of service in the public and military sector during which time he mentored hundreds of personnel and connected them to a variety of educational and professional resources designed to help them obtain graduate-level education and professional certifications. Robert has been individually recognized for exceptional service, and many of his mentees have gone on to secure bachelor degrees, graduate degrees, and a number of professional certifications, thereby qualifying them for senior-level positions and ultimately enhancing their overall quality of life.

The researcher requested each of the three sponsors to identify three participants who met the selection criteria and exemplified the four elements of Schlossberg's transition theory and 4-S model. The researcher ensured the sponsors had a fundamental understanding of Schlossberg's transition theory before they nominated any participants. The sponsors provided a total of nine participant referrals for the study. The researcher provided text for the sponsors to use to inquire about the interest of potential participants for the study. The sponsors sent an inquiry to the identified participants to participate in the study. The potential participants were to respond, affirmative or negative, to the nominating sponsor. From this potential participant inquiry and response, the sponsors identified six possible participants for the study. The sponsors notified the researcher about the contact information for the female combat veterans who wished to be included in the study. The researcher then contacted each participant about the study. The participants were provided an invitation to participate in the study and this document is included in Appendix C.

The process for contacting the sample population is outlined as follows:

1. The researcher contacted the identified sponsors to obtain their support to assist with identifying participants for the study.
2. The researcher provided the sponsors with a brief synopsis of the study, the selection criteria, and detailed information regarding the four elements of Schlossberg's transition theory and 4-S model.
3. The three sponsors each identified three potential participants who were added to the prospective participant pool. The sponsors contacted the potential participants to assess their interest in participating in the study.
4. If a potential participant was interested in the study, the sponsor shared the contact information with the researcher.
5. Six study participants were selected via random selection from the potential participant pool, and the remaining four were utilized as a randomized replacement should a study participant need to drop from the study.
6. The researcher contacted the potential participants by phone to explain the purpose of the study as well as the benefits and risks of participating. Questions from the potential participants and terms of their anonymity were clarified by the researcher. An Informational Letter was emailed to potential participants as well (Appendix D).
7. A 60-min interview was scheduled with participants upon their agreement to participate. The allotted amount of time for the interviews ensured the participants' busy schedules could be accommodated.
8. The following documents were emailed to each participant by the researcher once an interview had been scheduled: (a) an Invitation to Participate letter (Appendix C),

(b) a copy of the Research Participant's Bill of Rights (Appendix E), (c) an Informed Consent form for the participant to sign and return to the researcher prior to the interview (Appendix F), (d) an Interview Protocol and Script to be reviewed by participants prior to the interview (Appendix G), and (e) an Audio Release form for participants to sign and return to the researcher prior to the interview (Appendix H).

Instrumentation

To gather different data types to ascertain the lived experiences, support, strategies, and situations that female combat veterans experienced as they completed graduate-level education, the researcher utilized a qualitative multicase study design. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), there are three types of data researchers can obtain while conducting fieldwork.

1. Interviews
2. Observations
3. Artifact reviews

Additionally, they asserted that a researcher's decision on the types of data gathered may be adjusted subsequent to the selection of a site and entry into the field. For example, data gathered from artifact review and subsequent analysis may serve to validate data gathered from interviews.

The instruments of this study, interviews and artifact review, were designed to collect data about the four characteristics of Schlossberg's (1981) transition model. An extensive synthesis of research was conducted about transition models and this model was the best fit for the population and phenomena being studied. This model had four

components including situation, self, social support, and strategies. The four transition components of this model included the following:

1. Situation, which encompasses the extent, nature, and assumed significance and readiness for change and transition
2. Self, which includes areas such as one's health, socioeconomic status, psychosocial competence, past experience with similar transitions, and value orientation)
3. Support, which includes interpersonal support, institutional support, and physical settings)
4. Strategies, which include intentional and thoughtful action, execution, task completion, and course amendment).

To ensure that key elements of Schlossberg's transition model were identified and discussed during the interview, the researcher constructed 12 interview questions to inform and address this study's four research questions (see Appendix A). To verify that the interview questions assessed the four components of this model (situation, self, social support, and strategies), an organizational development specialist with a doctorate and with experience in conducting qualitative studies was consulted to verify the validity of the interview instrument. Based on the content expert's review, the research questions were modified to align to the needs of the study. Additionally, after the interview instrument review, a mock interview was held to validate the effectiveness of the interview questions and the interview process.

To collect qualitative data, this study primarily utilized interviews with support by a review of artifacts. Critical artifacts relevant to the central and subresearch questions were reviewed by the researcher in addition to the use of semistructured interviews.

Findings from both types of data were utilized to answer the central and subresearch questions and were compared against the literature reviewed in this study. Although McMillan and Schumacher (2010) indicated observations as one type of data researchers can obtain while conducting field work, data from observations were not collected during this study. Collection of this type of data did not occur as the subjects of the study had to already have completed graduate-level education; therefore, observing the subject during this endeavor was not possible.

Interviews

Patton (2015) described how qualitative research methodology gathers information-rich data about a target population's experiences and perspectives to effectively address the study's research questions. The researcher employed semistructured interview questions to explore and obtain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of the study's subjects. For this study, the researcher employed an interview guide consisting of semistructured interview questions focused on key variables identified within Schlossberg's transition theory and 4-S model factors of situation, self, social support, and strategies to enable participants to share their lived experiences of completing graduate-level education.

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), "The investigator usually acts as an observer in the setting that is being studied, either as the interviewer, the observer, or the person who studies artifacts" (p. 322). Interview best practices as prescribed by Patton (2015) and McMillan and Schumacher (2010) were utilized. Qualitative in-depth interviews are known for (a) being genuine; (b) maintaining eye contact; (c) using their probes and pauses; (d) establishing trust; and (e) conveying through voice tone, phrasing,

and cadence the researcher both hears and connects with the participant, elicits more legitimate data than a stiff approach.

Interviews were comprised of semistructured questions in conjunction with probes to gather in-depth information from participants regarding their opinions, feelings, knowledge, and experiences (Patton, 2015). Interviews were recorded to ensure the information collected included direct quotations from participants with ample context to be interpretable. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), participant responses can be clarified, probed, elaborated upon, and followed up in order for the researcher to obtain specific and accurate responses.

Interview Guide

The list of questions the researcher intends to ask participants during an interview, often in a particular order which supports the research questions, is described as the interview guide (Merriam & Tisdale, 2016). The researcher developed a guide that contained an introduction of the research study's purpose in conjunction with a copy of the questions to be asked during the interview and provided the guide to the participants in advance of the interview. Furthermore, participants were provided the key terms and definitions of Schlossberg's 4-S model prior to the interview. The first two questions were focused on the motivators for participants to pursue graduate-level education after military service and to ascertain their understanding of the key terms and elements of completed graduate-level education. Subsequently, 11 questions were asked, broken down by three questions per 4-S element/research question with a correlating follow-up question. The researcher's semistructured interview approach and interview guide utilized to minimize the variation between the participants' understanding of the

interview questions. This allowed the interview to be time efficient and focused as a result of the consistent format and participant participation, which led to a richer analysis.

Artifacts

To provide supplementary perspective and context to qualitative research, Patton (2015) recommended that researchers review existing artifacts. The researcher participated in fieldwork prior to the interview to collect archival data from female combat veterans in Northern California. Artifact analysis provides supplementary context to the qualitative research (Patton, 2015). By including artifact review, this study provided triangulation to the interview data, which then enabled the researcher to cross reference the interviews with the artifacts for each research question. The cross referencing of data helped to strengthen the validity of the themes and findings for the study. Artifacts provide various indications of materials and take on different forms to supplement interview transcriptions.

Artifacts that were based on the research questions were included in the study if they were found to inform the research questions. Participants were asked to either provide artifacts or direct the researcher to potential artifacts that would be incorporated into the study. All artifacts collected and utilized in the study were entered into the NVivo™ qualitative coding software for analysis. This study's artifacts were gathered by direct discovery by the researcher or by provision from the participant. Numerous artifacts were studied to obtain data and supply context for the experiences of female combat veterans matching the study's criteria as they as they completed their graduate education after military service. Some of the artifacts included in the study are documents such as participants' summary of benefits letter from the VA, VA disability

compensation charts, participants' graduate school's educational program overview (specifically highlighting course load—full-time/part-time credit amount, and learning method—online, on-campus, hybrid), and participants' GI Bill certificate of eligibility, which helped identify situational factors and social support provided to participants as the completed graduate-level education. Additionally, any photos that speak to familial settings, strategies, or organizational support such as cohort meetings, resumes, or memos that indicate participants' occupation during their time in graduate school (e.g., resumes, hiring forms, discharge paperwork, employee handbooks, etc.), and official files that help to shape the context of the participants' lives all helped add to the context of the participants' situational, social, personal, or strategic factors as they completed their graduate education after military service.

Researcher as the Instrument of Study

According to Patton (2015), a researcher serves as the primary instrument of data collection in qualitative research studies. Therefore, a high level of proficiency in the practice of interviewing with a keen awareness of any potential bias is imperative to ensure the integrity of the data is protected (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Some potential bias of the researcher in this particular study is that the researcher is a post-9/11 veteran who served in OEF, who was honorably discharged between 2002 and 2021, currently resides in Northern California, and successfully completed a graduate-level educational program while in veteran status.

For this reason, Patton (2015) emphasized the importance of mindfulness throughout the interview proceedings. Patton explained mindfulness as being intrinsically nonjudgmental and the access point to empathy. In this multiple case study,

the researcher served as the main instrument utilizing semistructured interviews to collect data.

Validity

According to Creswell (2015) and Patton (2015), validity is defined as an indication of how efficient the test instrument gauges what it was intended to. Strong validity is necessary for the instrument's credibility. Patton (2015) referenced the term "face validity" (p. 26) to describe whether, with credibility and confidence, the instrument will gauge what it is meant to gauge. The first layer of validity was used for this study based on a synthesis of literature on transition models. After considering various transition models, the Schlossberg transition model was the best fit for the purpose and research questions under examination. This validity of instruments used by researchers is pertinent to the credibility of answers to research questions. Patton (2015) stated, "Qualitative analysis is driven by the capacity for astute pattern recognition from beginning to end" (p. 653). Data collection from participants included a precise dictation of the recorded interviews, and all supplemental information written was provided.

The research design incorporated strategies for improving the qualitative validity of the study. Additionally, the researcher incorporated six strategies for improving the qualitative validity of the study as outlined by McMillan and Schumacher (2010):

1. Prolonged and persistent fieldwork: In this multiple case study, the researcher spent many hours examining multiple case studies about the lived experiences of female veterans transitioning from military service. Additionally, the researcher meticulously analyzed artifacts that supported the research questions. To provide

validity to the key findings of this study, the researcher employed cross validation of analysis of the study's artifacts.

2. Mutual meaning: The terminology of the research and semistructured interview questions have a mutually understood meaning achieved between the researcher and each participant. Each participant was provided the same semistructured interview questions by the researcher, thereby ensuring there was no variance in this integral part of the study. Furthermore, the researcher's development of the study's semistructured interview questions enabled participants to convey their stories and describe their lived experiences. Last, the participants and researcher agreed on the description or composition of events and in particular, the meanings of said events (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).
3. Multimethod strategies: For this study, the researcher employed semistructured interview questions and probes to enable him to observe the verbal and nonverbal behavior of participants through the interview process. Additionally, the researcher analyzed relevant artifacts and devoted a significant amount of time with each of the study's participants to develop an enhanced understanding of the participants' experiences and to ensure the study was in a relatively natural surrounding for the participant. Furthermore, the researcher cross-referenced the research questions with the semistructured interview questions and relevant artifacts to make certain sufficient data had been collected to achieve the study's purpose.
4. Pilot testing and interview critiques by observers: The researcher was enabled to identify semistructured interview questions that were not directly correlated with the researcher questions.

5. Member interview checking and participant review: The researcher verified with each participant the accuracy and validity of the transcript from their respective interviews. To improve the accuracy of the interview, the interviewee is permitted to check the interviewer's perceptions. The interview gets transcribed by the interviewer who sends the transcript to the interviewee to review for accuracy. The respondent can review the transcript and make modifications to the script for clarity, accuracy, and validity.
6. Negative or discrepant data inclusion: The researcher worked to identify, record, analyze, and report negative or discrepant data that are exceptions to patterns or alter patterns found in the data, which could suggest findings are inconsistent with emerging themes.

Field-Testing

Field-testing is yet one more research technique that increases validity. Specifically, Creswell and Poth (2018) explained that it affirms "content validity of scores on an instrument to provide an initial evaluation of the internal evaluation of the internal consistency of the items and to improve questions, format and instructions" (p. 154). Interview questions for the study were created and refined to provide sufficient response to the study's research questions, and nonparticipating administrators field-tested the interview questions. Furthermore, these interview questions were reviewed by University of Massachusetts Global doctoral program professors.

Performing a pilot test may also serve as a means to improve the reliability of information collection according to McMillan and Schumacher (2010). The researcher rehearses the interview process with a participant who is not included in the actual study.

Furthermore, McMillan and Schumacher explained the goal of field-testing is to approximate the circumstances of the interviews utilized in a study to determine appropriate timing as well as the quality of information that may be gathered. Pilot testing was conducted by the researcher before entering the field. A subject who met the same sample criteria for the study consented to being the participant for the pilot interview. Additionally, a third-party observer experienced in qualitative interviewing consented to monitor the pilot interview. The observer and interview participant were both asked to provide feedback subsequent to the pilot interview utilizing the field-test interview feedback prompt (see Appendix I). Feedback was employed as a means to refine the researcher's interview techniques before taking the study live in the field.

Two nonparticipating administrators conducted a review of the first draft of the interview questions. This review was focused on the interview questions' context toward an appropriate response to the research questions, providing recommendations to the researchers, and an increased understanding for participants. Subsequent to receiving feedback from the two nonparticipating administrators, a third nonparticipating administrator was utilized for a mock interview held with the researcher. The mock interview between the nonparticipating administrator and the researcher was observed by a third party for the purpose of gathering feedback on the pacing, timing, and flow of the interview process and questions. Upon completion of the field test, the researcher collected feedback from both the observer and the interviewee regarding suggested changes to the interview process or questions. This feedback was used to develop the final draft of the interview questions (Appendix J).

Reliability

Roberts (2010) stated, "Reliability is the degree to which your instrument consistently measures something from one time to another" (p. 151). Creswell (2015), McMillan and Schumacher (2010), and Patton (2015) all defined reliability, as it relates to research studies, as the ability to replicate results in the absence of change. Therefore, the reliability of this study would be measured, if repeated, by its ability to garner similar findings while conditions remained unchanged. Patton (2015) explained that the reliability of a study can be assessed by reviewing the data collection, entry, and analysis methods. Additionally, Bloomberg and Volpe (2018) explained qualitative reliability as the ability for the same observations and findings to be derived from two researchers separately studying the same phenomenon. The researcher ensured the study contained significant evidence that the descriptions and analysis were truly representative of the phenomenon and population studied as Bloomberg and Volpe have stressed the importance of data and analysis credibility.

The researcher employed an interview guide for the semistructured interview questions that increased reliability of this study. Data collected from the interviews were provided consistency through the use of the interview guide. Furthermore, the interview protocol was field-tested prior to entry into the field. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) emphasized the need to field-test data collection instruments to assist in confirming that inquiries were both clear and yielded similar answers from participants.

Intercoder Reliability

Creswell (2015) described intercoder agreement as the process of researchers employing peer analysis to validate the plausibility of data analysis as findings begin to

emerge by cross-checking data codes. When two or more analysts concur on the codes utilized for the same written data sets, such as artifacts and interview transcripts, intercoder agreement is established. For this study, the researcher recruited an external coder proficient in social science research who has a doctoral degree and familiarity with NVivo™ qualitative coding software to conduct a cross-check of the data codes. The external coder was provided 20% of the collected data to obtain 80% intercoder reliability. Prior to coding, a .80 level of reliability was established (Lombard, Snyder-Duch, & Bracken, 2002). To extrapolate themes from the data collected, the research utilized NVivo™ qualitative coding software. Subsequently, the researcher analyzed the themes, refined them until a list of codes was established, and once the codes were established, involved the external coder. Creswell (2015) and McMillan and Schumacher (2010) indicated once the intercoding process is accomplished, codes revealing a .80 or higher level of reliability are utilized to identify patterns.

Data Collection

Human Subject Consideration

Before data collection can be initiated, University of Massachusetts Global's Internal Review Board (IRB) must approve the design of the study, to include the standardization of interview scripts. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), to guard human subjects being researched and verifying researcher compliance with federal regulations and ethical considerations, IRB policies are necessary. Subsequent to the study's approval, subjects were contacted to formally invite them to participate in the study. Specifically, participants were provided a Research Participant's Bill of Rights, a formal letter inviting them to participate in the study, and an informed consent letter.

Additionally, when contacted, participants were provided the researcher's background and contact information, an overview of the study, the requested time commitment estimated for the study, an informed consent letter, a consent form authorizing the researcher to conduct a recording of the interview with the option to review the transcript at a later point in time, and a statement highlighting the interview as a completely voluntary process. The researcher provided copies of the consent forms to participants and reaffirmed their willingness to participate in conjunction with their consent to be recorded. All participants consented to the recording and requested copies of the transcripts.

Participants' privacy was further safeguarded as the researcher secured all data gathered subsequent to each interview (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010; Patton, 2015). Additionally, the dissertation chair and researcher were the only individuals who had knowledge of the participants' identities. Participants' identities were concealed throughout the study through the use of pseudonyms, and documents containing transcriptions of the interviews, along with other related data, were destroyed.

Interview Process

Researchers such as Creswell (2015), McMillan and Schumacher (2010), and Patton (2015), recommended the use of semistructured, standardized, face-to-face virtual via Zoom sessions for qualitative studies. In doing so, the researcher ensures that participants are empowered to convey relevant experiences to the specific phenomenon under study. To ensure the data were manageable, a finite number of interview questions was developed. Documentation, consent, and an overview of the study was provided to

participants in advance of the interview. Documentation of consent was accomplished by participants prior to meeting with the researcher.

All participants consented to both the interview and the recording of the interview. All interviews were conducted virtually to protect participants' privacy and health because of travel restrictions implemented as a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic. Interview protocols, including the semistructured interview questions, were identical for each interview. Every interview began with a brief discussion reiterating the researcher's background, purpose of the study, and a review of their consent paperwork. At the conclusion of the introductory discussion and prior to the interview, participants were reminded of the voluntary nature of the interview and informed that premature termination of the interview and declination to any inquiry remained within their purview.

Initially, the interview began with inquiries regarding the participants' demographic information. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) explained, "Some researchers prefer to obtain this [demographic] data at the beginning of the interview to establish rapport and focus attention" (p. 359). Afterwards, participants were questioned about their background experience leading them to pursue graduate-level education. All remaining semistructured interview questions pertained to participants' lived experiences in regard to Schlossberg's 4-S model. Patton (2015) identified semistructured interviews as "by far the most widely used type of measure for collecting data for qualitative research" (p. 163). Furthermore, his method of study provided the researcher the opportunity to employ "interview probes" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010, p. 358). For

this study, interviews ranged between 45 min and 60 min. As interviews concluded, the researcher expressed gratitude to participants for their time and contributions.

Artifact Review

To increase qualitative data gathered during the study and expand upon triangulation procedures, the researcher collected documents and artifacts relative to the study (Creswell, 2014; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). Artifacts serve as a means for the researcher to obtain pertinent information written in the dialect of the participants. According to Creswell (2015), artifacts can provide data in the form of the words and means of communication of the participants. Furthermore, data can be gathered from artifacts in a variety of forms. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), there are three specific types of artifacts: objects, official artifacts, and personal artifacts. Artifacts for this study included official documents and public items such as VA certificates of eligibility, VA summary of benefits letters, and VA disability compensation tables. Furthermore, the study included artifacts that highlighted the participants' employment history or lack thereof during graduate school as well as any financial assistance (e.g., Free Application for Federal Student Aid [FAFSA®], GI Bill, etc.) programs provided during their graduate school experience. Last, the artifacts of this study included personal artifacts such as photos highlighting familial support or organizational support (such as from cohort meetings), hobbies, and documentation of strategies such as gym memberships.

Data Analysis

Interviews

Patton (2015) stated, "Qualitative analysis aims to make sense of qualitative data: detecting patterns, identifying themes, answering the primary questions framing the study, and presenting substantively significant findings" (p. 658). To analyze the data effectively, the researcher utilized NVivo software to code and organize data from the interviews into codes and themes as well as track selected data with related themes. Furthermore, to expedite access to specific quotes associated with the narrative of the study, the researcher accessed reports generated from NVivo.

To mitigate researcher bias, the following interview protocols were employed:

- Uniform, semistructured interview questions enabled participants to elaborate upon their responses or delve deeper into their stories.
- A virtual platform, Zoom, because of COVID-19 safety protocols, was utilized for each interview.
- Data were recorded as presented to limit the risk of researcher interpretations because the researcher was the instrument of study.
- Member checking was used to provide participants the opportunity to verify transcriptions against recordings for accuracy (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Member checking did not include findings for verification purposes (Patton, 2015). All data, descriptions, and qualifiers were organized in tables for presentation in Chapter IV. The researcher repeatedly reviewed the data to capture the themes that best answered each research question.

The researcher developed a frequency table for each research question. The themes with the highest frequency of comments and artifacts were listed in the table, from highest to lowest frequency. Specifically, the researcher created tables that listed data in the following columns: the number of participants who described an identified theme; the number of times participants mentioned that particular theme during their interviews; and the number of artifacts found for each theme. Last, the researcher listed the sum of interviews and artifacts interactions for each theme in the last column.

Artifacts

If the artifacts reviewed addressed the study's purpose and research questions, they were included. The artifacts included addressed the situational factors, social support factors, personal characteristics, and strategies participants employed and experienced as they completed graduate-level education after leaving military service. In an attempt to describe the lived experiences of female combat veterans who served in Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, transitioned from military service to the civilian sector, and completed graduate-level education after military service, the data were collected and analyzed. The analysis of the case study "followed a pattern matching procedure" such that the "role of theory was to specify the descriptive differences" in addition to the similarities of participants' experiences (Yin, 2012, p. 39). Artifacts assume various forms and supply supplemental information to add to the data gathered from interview transcripts. To analyze and process the artifacts that address the study's purpose and research questions, the researcher utilized NVivo software. Artifacts found relevant to each research question and relative to identified themes were presented in conjunction with the semistructured interview analysis.

Data Representation

The researcher examined the data repeatedly to identify themes that best answered each of the study's research subquestions. The data were presented in two ways, data frequency tables and representative participant comments. To provide a visual data representation for each research question, the researcher provided a frequency table for each theme supporting all four research questions. The tables include the number of participants whose interview comments aligned with an identified theme, the frequency that a particular theme was mentioned during the participants' interviews, and the frequency of artifacts provided by participants for the identified theme. Last, the researcher provided the total frequency of participant comments and artifacts for each theme. In another section of the data analysis, representative comments from participants were shared for each theme. Themes identified for the central research question and research subquestions are presented at the conclusion of Chapter IV and ordered from highest frequency to lowest.

Triangulation of Data

The use of several types of data to enhance the credibility and validity of findings is referred to as triangulation. McMillan and Schumacher (2010) explained that triangulation occurs when multiple methods of inquiry are employed or when multiple data sources are analyzed. There are several types of triangulation that researchers may utilize to enhance the reliability of their findings. Patton (2015) described four specific types of triangulation: theory triangulation, investigator triangulation, methodological triangulation, and data triangulation. For the purpose of this study, the researcher focused on data triangulation. Data triangulation was described by Patton as "the use of a variety

of data sources in a study" (p. 316). Therefore, data were collected via interviews conducted by the researcher in conjunction with artifacts and documents collected to triangulate the data.

Researchers such as Creswell and Poth (2018), McMillan and Schumacher (2010), and Patton (2015) have acknowledged the importance of data triangulation as a means of strengthening the reliability and validity of findings from studies. Coded themes from analyzing the artifacts and interview transcripts were utilized in the triangulation of data. Furthermore, the comprehensiveness of data collected was added to by an extensive literature review. The study's reliability was improved through (a) thorough review of artifacts, (b) guaranteeing the sample population qualified for the study per the selection criteria, and (c) field-testing the interview questions.

Limitations

Through comprehensive depictions of the veterans' experiences, the participants provided the researcher their individual perspectives. Furthermore, a thorough review of artifacts provided by participants was also utilized. However, as with all studies, there were limitations. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), the term limitations refers to aspects of a study over which the researcher has no control that may have a detrimental impact upon the results. Some potential limitations the researcher identified in this study were

1. The data collected by participants' self-reported experiences and perceptions could have been biased by other unaccounted for factors or events.
2. Participants' participation could have been limited due to timing and availability constraints.

3. The sample was only from a 75-mile radius of Sacramento and the results may not be indicative of female combat veterans in California.
4. Although the researcher endeavored to remain unbiased throughout the process, there is still the possibility of the researcher's own bias being unconsciously injected into the study.
5. The research was constrained by a necessarily small sample size, impacting the generalizability of the results.

Summary

Chapter III began with a reiteration of the study's purpose, the centralized research question, and subresearch questions. Furthermore, the chapter provided sections describing the research methodology and design, population, target population, and sampling process. Last, the chapter also provided a comprehensive review and description of the instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, and recognized limitations of the study.

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Chapter IV outlines this study's process including data collection and the findings. The purpose statement and research questions were reviewed and aligned utilizing an alignment chart (Appendix K) then followed by a discussion of the population, sample, and demographics. The primary focus of this chapter is the presentation of the data findings, specifically qualitative data pertaining to the lived experiences of post-9/11 female combat veterans. Furthermore, data findings are presented according to the four elements of Schlossberg's transition theory: situation, self, support, and strategies.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore and describe the transition experiences of female military veterans regarding their graduate-level education program after leaving service, using the Schlossberg transition factors of (a) situation, (b) self, (c) support, and (d) strategy.

Central Research Question

One central research question and four research subquestions guided this study: The central research question was "What are the transition experiences of female combat veterans using the Schlossberg transition model factors of situation, self, support, and strategies?"

Research Subquestions

1. What were the situational transition experience (situation encompasses the extent, nature, and assumed significance and readiness for change and transition) factors that

female military veterans described experiencing while planning for their graduate-level education after leaving military service?

2. What self-characteristics (one's sense of self, such as one's health, socioeconomic status, psychosocial competence, past experience with similar transitions, and value orientation) do female veterans describe that affected their ability to complete graduate education after leaving military service?
3. What support (interpersonal support, institutional support, and physical settings) do female military veterans describe that helped them to complete their graduate-level education after leaving military service?
4. What were the strategies (intentional and thoughtful action, execution, task completion, and course amendment) that female veterans describe as using as they completed a graduate-level education after leaving military service?

Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures

A qualitative multiple case study was utilized to describe the lived experiences of post-9/11 female combat veterans who served in Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom as they completed graduate-level education subsequent to military service. In-depth interviews were conducted by the researcher with six veterans who met specific criteria and were identified by knowledgeable sponsors. Interviews were conducted via Zoom to maximize convenience for the participants and to ensure public health precautions because of the COVID-19 pandemic and were recorded with the permission of the participants. All data obtained for the study were securely stored by the researcher.

Population

According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), a population is a "group of elements or cases, whether individuals, objects, or events, that conform to specific criteria" (p. 129). In research, the study population is the group for which the findings of the study will be generalized. For this study, the intended population was California female combat veterans. According to the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics (2018b), there are approximately 143,211 California female combat veterans.

Target Population

A target population is identified because the researcher's limits of time, money, and other resources make it difficult to study each individual in the population (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). As such, the target population serves as a subset of the identified population from which a sample will be studied and the findings generalized. For the purpose of this study, the researcher established the following criteria to identify the target population: female combat veterans identified by knowledgeable sponsors functioning in the counties of Sacramento and Solano in which there are 5,385 post-9/11 female combat veterans.

Sample

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) defined the sample population of a study as "the group of subjects or participants from whom the data are collected" (p. 129). The researcher used purposeful sampling to obtain the sample population. Because of the number of female veterans identified in Sacramento and Solano counties, the researcher also utilized knowledgeable sponsors to identify members meeting the specific criteria of the study. The following criteria are listed as the sampling criteria of this study:

- Post-911 female combat veteran
- Honorably discharged between 2002 and 2021
- Currently working or residing within Sacramento or Solano County or affiliated with a knowledgeable sponsor within that geographic location
- Successfully completed a graduate (master or doctorate) degree while in veteran or retiree status.

Demographic Data

This study included six participants who met the eligibility criteria and signed informed consent forms. To describe the participants, the researcher collected specific demographic information such as participants' ethnicity or race, years of service prior to leaving the military, and the type of graduate degree participants completed. Participants were identified by numbers from one to six, and correlating demographic for each participant is represented in Table 7.

Table 7

Participant Demographics

Participant number	Gender	Ethnicity/race	Years of service	Degree type
Participant 1	Female	Hispanic/Pacific Islander	5	Information technology management
Participant 2	Female	African American	20	Organizational management
Participant 3	Female	Caucasian	4	Psychology
Participant 4	Female	Caucasian	4	Information technology management
Participant 5	Female	African American	10	Public health
Participant 6	Female	Hispanic	4	Management

Intercoder Reliability

Intercoder reliability measures were utilized for this study to reduce errors and ensure reliable data. Intercoder agreement is described by Creswell (2015) as the process of researchers employing peer analysis to validate the plausibility of data analysis as findings begin to emerge by cross-checking data codes. Having two or more analysts concur on the codes utilized for the same written data sets decreases the risk of potential bias and increases the reliability of the data. Consequently, the researcher shared 20% of the current study's qualitative data with two other expert researchers to be coded. Creswell and Poth stated that the minimum threshold for "good qualitative reliability" (p. 202) is 80%. Intercoder reliability for this study was found to be above 80%, which verified intercoder agreement was evident and that intercoder reliability was at an acceptable level, thereby verifying the qualitative results were valid.

Presentation and Analysis of Data

The data collected and analyzed by the researcher came from six participants in an attempt to elicit their lived experiences of pursuing graduate-level education after military service. Artifacts and semistructured interviews composed of open-ended questions guided by the theoretical framework were employed by the researcher to gather said data. Data gathered were intended to address the research questions.

Data Analysis for Central Research Question

The study comprised one central research question and four subresearch questions. The central research question for this study was conveyed in the following way: "What are the transition experiences of female combat veterans using the Schlossberg transition model factors of situation, self, support, and strategies?" The

interview questions posed to participants were designed to obtain key information relevant to the central research question through the lens of Schlossberg's transition theory factors of situation, self, support, and strategies.

The subresearch questions were developed for each of the aforementioned transition theory factors: situation, self, support, and strategies. The themes coded from the qualitative data gathered from interviews with the six participants and relevant artifacts are displayed in the tables listed in the following data analysis sections. The correlating subsections highlight specific responses that support the identified themes.

Data Analysis for Subresearch Question 1

Subresearch Question 1 for this study was conveyed in the following way: "What were the situational transition experience (situation encompasses the extent, nature, and assumed significance and readiness for change and transition) factors that female military veterans described experiencing while planning for their graduate-level education after leaving military service?" The transition factor "situation," addressed by Subresearch Question 1, yielded two primary themes identified in Table 8. The themes affiliated with Schlossberg's transition factor "situation" comprised 11 artifacts, 110 interview frequencies and accounted for 32.5% of the total coded material.

Table 8

Theme, Participants, Sources, and Frequency—Subresearch Question 1

Themes	P	I	A	Total
1. Perceived impact to their future socioeconomic was significant to their transition	6	48	5	53
2. Readiness to change from the fluidity of military service to the perceived stability of civilian life	6	62	6	68

Note. P = participants, I = interviews, A = artifacts.

Theme 1: Perceived impact to their future socioeconomic was significant to their transition. Regarding Subresearch Question 1, analysis of the data led to the discovery of the study's first theme. This theme was noted in six of six face-to-face interviews with a frequency of 48 (Table 9).

Table 9

Theme, Participants, Source, and Frequency— Perceived Impact to Their Future Socioeconomic Was Significant to Their Transition

Theme	P	I	A	Total
1. Perceived impact to their future socioeconomic was significant to their transition	6	48	5	53

Note. P = participants, I = interviews, A = artifacts.

All six of the study participants discussed the assumed significance of obtaining their graduate degree subsequent to serving in the military as a venture to enact a potentially positive impact on their lives. Participants shared comments such as wanting a "better paying job," needing "more education to get the jobs I'm looking to get," and to "open the doors up for different job opportunities." While sharing their experiences, similarities regarding the perceived impact a graduate degree would have on their future were increased pay and enhanced career opportunities.

Five of the six participants highlighted specific career paths as a particular influence for pursuing graduate-level education. For these participants, a graduate degree was necessary for career growth in their chosen industry. Participant 3 provided an example of the necessity of a graduate degree for her particular profession. Her passion for helping people led her to obtain a bachelor's degree in psychology. She said, "I went

for my BA in psychology and then it just so happened that once I was going to graduate, I realized there's not much you could do with a BA."

In other words, because she had chosen to work in the field of psychology, she could not execute the type of duties and responsibilities that inspired her choice of profession unless she went and accomplished graduate school. Participant 5 discussed her need for a graduate degree to elevate their position in their profession. She highlighted her efforts in the field of public health and her desire to not become complacent in her position as many of her past colleagues in the military had. She referenced observing past colleagues who had grown complacent: "Their career and their educational level they were, they were okay with it, but I wasn't okay with mine so just seeing how comfortable they were was motivation for me to, you know, continue my . . . my schooling."

Furthermore, Participant 2's perception regarding the requirements to promote into a leadership role like she had held during her time in military service also mentioned by her. She discussed the concerns she had about retiring and the types of positions she had hoped for employment. She stated, "Thought I needed, most likely, a masters to me to get the level of work that I was looking to get."

Theme 2: Readiness to change from the fluidity of military service to the perceived stability of civilian life. Further analysis of the data for Subresearch Question 1 led to the discovery of the study's second theme. This theme was noted in six of six face-to-face interviews with a frequency of 62 (Table 10).

All six of the study participants discussed the assumed significance of pursuing graduate-level education subsequent to military service and readiness for that pursuit in

regard to their quality of life. Four of the six participants referenced their family as a significant consideration for leaving military service prior to pursuing graduate-level education. Sharing their experiences, participants listed several common threads that emerged included having children, stability for their family, and balancing the competing priorities in their lives.

Table 10

Theme, Participants, Source, and Frequency— Readiness to Change From the Fluidity of Military Service to the Perceived Stability of Civilian Life

Theme	P	I	A	Total
2. Readiness to change from the fluidity of military service to the perceived stability of civilian life	6	62	6	68

Note. P = participants, I = interviews, A = artifacts.

Participant 2 made comments regarding stability. She stated a desire to keep her "family grounded in the area that we were located in" as a contributing factor to retiring from the military and then pursuing a graduate degree. Participant 1 also made comments regarding stability as a contributing factor for ending her military service and then pursing a graduate degree. During the interview she indicated that she did not want to deal with the stress of another "PCS or even a deployment; I wasn't really comfortable with it once I had my son, so I wanted to find a stable job" and then plan to attend graduate school.

Data Analysis for Subresearch Question 2

Subresearch Question 2 for this study was conveyed in the following way: "What self-characteristics (one's sense of self, such as one's health, socioeconomic status,

psychosocial competence, past experience with similar transitions, and value orientation) do female veterans describe that affected their ability to complete graduate education after leaving military service?" The transition factor "self," addressed by Subresearch Question 2, yielded two primary themes identified in Table 11. The themes affiliated with Schlossberg's transition factor "self" comprised 11 artifacts, 50 interview frequencies and accounted for 16.4% of the total coded material.

Table 11

Theme, Participants, Sources, and Frequency—Subresearch Question 2

Themes	P	I	A	Total
3. Sought paths to lead and manage just as the military trained them to do	4	12	3	15
4. Know and understand their ingrained values which shape personal decisions	6	38	8	46

Note. P = participants, I = interviews, A = artifacts.

Theme 3: Sought paths to lead and manage just as the military trained them to do. Regarding Subresearch Question 2, analysis of the data led to the discovery of the study's third theme. This theme was noted in four of six face-to-face interviews with a frequency of 12 (Table 12).

Table 12

Theme, Participants, Source, and Frequency— Sought Paths to Lead and Manage Just as the Military Trained Them to Do

Theme	P	I	A	Total
3. Sought paths to lead and manage just as the military trained them to do	4	12	3	15

Note. P = participants, I = interviews, A = artifacts.

Four of six participants shared information indicative of a predilection for servant leadership. Participants shared sentiments such as "managerial positions were more befitting for me" and that "I think it's very similar, I think that it's about helping people at the end of the day." While sharing their experience, participants voiced several common threads identified as the desire to lead/manage personnel and the desire to help others.

Four of the six participants specifically highlighted a desire for a managerial or supervisory role as an influence for pursuing graduate-level education and their degree type. Participant 1 shared the reasons for pursuing a graduate degree with one of the primary reasons being that she specifically wanted "managerial positions" within her chosen profession. She elaborated by discussing her past experiences in the military and her desire to bring that experience into her new profession.

Participant 2 also discussed her past experiences in the military in relation to the influence those experiences had on her decision to pursue graduate-level education. Participant 2 stated, "When I was in the military, personally any education honestly was based on me moving higher up in and showing that, you know, I can maintain my work status as well, as you know, work on my personal goals for education." She went on to discuss how she took a position working with the military as a civilian contractor while pursuing her graduate degree, which brought her a sense of familiarity tracking back to when she was in the military pursuing a bachelor's degree.

Theme 4: Know and understand their ingrained values, which shape personal decisions. Further analysis of the data for Subresearch Question 2 led to the

discovery of the study's fourth theme. This theme was noted in six of six face-to-face interviews with a frequency of 38 (Table 13).

Table 13

Theme, Participants, Source, and Frequency— Know and Understand Their Ingrained Values Which Shape Personal Decisions

Theme	P	I	A	Total
4. Know and understand their ingrained values which shape personal decisions	6	38	8	46

Note. P = participants, I = interviews, A = artifacts.

Six of six study participants indicated having a strong sense of their identity when deciding to pursue graduate-level education and while completing it. Participants' sense of identity was relative to Subresearch Question 2, particularly regarding their value orientation and experiences with significant transitions. Four of six study participants highlighted family and friends as a strong social value orientation.

Participant 2 discussed the loss of a family member and the importance of her duty to the family while balancing her responsibilities for her graduate degree. She elaborated by discussing the term she took off to fly out and be there for her family as a pillar strength and as a sister. Her statements highlighted she placed value on family and her role in her family above her own desires and academic pursuits, but she did indicate that it was short term and she returned to resume her pursuit of a graduate degree at the next semester.

Participant 5 spoke about herself as a leader within her family. She elaborated that none of her family had achieved a graduate degree before. She highlighted that she

saw her friends and family as "stuck" and essentially directionless, and she wanted to ensure that she did not become as stuck and directionless, that she accomplished something none of them ever had, and that she could use her experience to demonstrate how they could also succeed in obtaining a graduate degree.

Data Analysis for Subresearch Question 3

Subresearch Question 3 for this study was conveyed in the following way: "What support (interpersonal support, institutional support, and physical settings) do female military veterans describe that helped them to complete their graduate-level education after leaving military service?" The transition factor "support," addressed by Subresearch Question 3, yielded two primary themes identified in Table 14. The themes affiliated with Schlossberg's transition factor "support" comprised 10 artifacts, 77 interview frequencies, and accounted for 23.3% of the total coded material.

Table 14

Theme, Participants, Sources, and Frequency—Subresearch Question 3

Themes	P	I	A	Total
5. Female veterans described institutional support as essential	6	41	5	46
6. Female veterans described interpersonal support as essential	6	36	5	41

Note. P = participants, I = interviews, A = artifacts.

Theme 5: Female veterans described institutional support as essential.

Regarding Subresearch Question 3, analysis of the data led to the discovery of the study's fifth theme. This theme was noted in six of six face-to-face interviews with a frequency of 41 (Table 15).

Table 15

Theme, Participants, Source, and Frequency— Female Veterans Described Institutional Support as Essential

Theme	P	I	A	Total
5. Female veterans described institutional support as essential	6	41	5	46

Note. P = participants, I = interviews, A = artifacts.

All six of the study participants discussed the support they received from institutions such as the VA, their specific employment, and their colleges. Participants shared positive experiences regarding the support they received from these institutions such as the paying the educational expenses, providing flexibility for work-school-life balance, and assisting with establishing settings conducive to their pursuit of a graduate degree. Participants provided comments about the formal support they received such as "the environment that I was in it was very helpful and it was able to give me a better understanding of what I was going to school for," "the fact that Northrop Grumman paid for it was the reason why I got my masters," and "the school played a big role in supporting me."

Five of the six participants spoke at length of the impact these formal institutions had on their journey to obtain their graduate degrees. For these participants, this support was critical to their success. Participant 5 specifically highlighted how these formal support systems provided the much-needed flexibility for her schedule in order for her to succeed. While discussing her efforts to balance competing priorities, she said, "There were several times when I needed to ask for extensions on projects to get it done because

I was a full-time employee and my job, my instructors, they were very lenient and understanding."

Participant 5 made it abundantly evident that flexibility played a critical role in her ability to accomplish the tasks required of the school, to effectively maintain a work-school-life balance, and to maintain her overall sense of resiliency throughout her journey. Flexibility was a reoccurring factor in this theme, and the professionals in participants' employment agencies and schools were highlighted with a frequency of 28 out of the total 372 frequencies identified in the study. As an example, Participant 4 discussed the role her supervisor and company played in her obtaining her graduate degree. She indicated how they emphasized how important it was for her to get a graduate degree and went as far as to say, "My supervisor, they actually forced me to get my masters." Her supervisor went as far as to secure funding through the company which was a major factor in Participant 4's pursuit of a graduate degree. She explained that "the fact Northrop Grumman paid for it was the reason why I got my masters."

Theme 6: Female veterans described interpersonal support as essential. Further analysis of the data for Subresearch Question 3 led to the discovery of the study's sixth theme. This theme was noted in six of six face-to-face interviews with a frequency of 36 (Table 16).

Six of six participants discussed their experiences with informal support systems such as friends and family as a much-needed aid to completing graduate-level education. Participants shared comments such as "all my family was very supportive," "my husband's very supportive," and "my friends were very supportive." While sharing their experiences, similarities regarding the way family and friends supported participants

were taking on some of the participants' responsibilities in life such as caring for the participants' children and mentoring or advising participants through the challenges and obstacles they faced during their journey toward obtaining their graduate degree.

Table 16

Theme, Participants, Source, and Frequency— Female Veterans Described Interpersonal Support as Essential

Theme	P	I	A	Total
6. Female veterans described interpersonal support as essential	5	36	5	41

Note. P = participants, I = interviews, A = artifacts.

Four of the six participants highlighted the various ways their family supported them related to their children. For these participants, their spouses, siblings, and parents provided relief regarding competing priorities. Specifically, participants discussed the ways in which their family helped them care for the participants' children to include taking them to events participants could not take the children to such as cheer, baseball, and school.

Furthermore, four of the six participants discussed how others outside of their family, such as friends or mentors, were critical to their successfully obtaining a graduate degree. Participants described the emotional support they received from their friends as well as patience and understanding for the participants' absence from events important to their friends and the significant amount of time the participants had taken away. Participants also discussed how their friends who had also pursued graduate degrees would serve as mentors and help them gain a better understanding of the course material or work through various obstacles the participants encountered as a result of their own

experiences in graduate school; this also included struggling with competing priorities. Participant 5 stated, "I had other friends that were pursuing their master's degree as well, so they were able to help when I got overwhelmed. They were able to, you know, talk me down and help me manage my workload a little better." Participant 5 went on to explain she also had friends in similar graduate programs that she were able to collaborate with and share ideas about similar topics of study. Peer support in relation to course study, time management, and competing priorities remained as reoccurring factors lending to this theme throughout the interviews with participants.

Data Analysis for Subresearch Question 4

Subresearch Question 4 for this study was conveyed in the following way: "What were the strategies (intentional and thoughtful action, execution, task completion, and course amendment) that female veterans describe as using as they completed a graduate-level education after leaving military service?" The transition factor "strategies," addressed by Subresearch Question 4 yielded two primary themes identified in Table 17. The themes affiliated with Schlossberg's transition factor "strategies" comprised zero artifacts, 103 interview frequencies and accounted for 27.7% of the total coded material.

Table 17

Theme, Participants, Sources, and Frequency—Subresearch Question 4

Themes	P	I	A	Total
7. Female veterans described the management of stress as a critical strategy	6	65	0	65
8. Female veterans described the management of time as a critical strategy	6	38	0	38

Note. P = participants, I = interviews, A = artifacts.

Theme 7: Female veterans described the management of stress as a critical strategy. Regarding Subresearch Question 4, analysis of the data led to the discovery of the study's seventh theme. This theme was noted in six of six face-to-face interviews with a frequency of 65 (Table 18).

Table 18

Theme, Participants, Source, and Frequency— Female Veterans Described the Management of Stress as a Critical Strategy

Theme	P	I	A	Total
7. Female veterans described the management of stress as a critical strategy	6	65	0	65

Note. P = participants, I = interviews, A = artifacts.

All six of the study participants discussed the significance of managing stress throughout their pursuit of a graduate degree. Participants shared comments such as "learn how to take breaks," "exercise," and "being able to talk to the people that were in the group with me or our study groups." While sharing their experiences, participants revealed similarities regarding stress management such as exercise, spending time for self-care, and group discussions.

Three of six participants emphasized the use of exercise as a means of stress management to successfully complete graduate school. For these participants, exercise served as a healthy coping mechanism to combat the stress of the transition and competing priorities of school, work, and life. Participant 4 provided examples of various ways she exercised to reduce stress and mitigate burnout during her pursuit of her graduate degree. She highlighted several methods of exercising she found to be most

useful such as general exercises, running, and yoga. She emphasized running multiple times as a particular form of exercise that was particularly beneficial to her overall management of stress.

Although exercise was a frequently mentioned factor of managing stress, group discussions with peers and friends served as an equally important factor. Regarding group discussions with peers, Participant 5 stated, "It just felt good to know that we weren't, you weren't the only one going through an issue." Participant 5 elaborated by sharing that her study groups did not only focus their discussions on coursework, but also issues and obstacles in general (work, school, life) each of them were facing that week.

Furthermore, although exercising and group discussions served as two methods of managing stress, both overlapped highlighting a third factor expressed by participants: establishing and spending time on self-care. For example, Participant 6 discussed the time she made available specifically on traveling as a means of self-care. Participant 5 talked about how she "spent a lot of time with good people and traveled." Participant 2 provided an example of how she would "take a break, take a step back."

Theme 8: Female veterans described the management of time as a critical strategy. Further analysis of the data for Subresearch Question 3 led to the discovery of the study's eighth theme. This theme was noted in six of six face-to-face interviews with a frequency of 38 (Table 19).

Six of six participants emphasized the criticality of time management when pursuing a graduate degree. Participants shared comments such as "set up a schedule," "because it can be stressful, definitely making sure your time management is on point," and "really setting down chunks of time to really push myself to stay focused." While

sharing their experiences, they revealed similarities regarding the method in which they managed their time in the development of a schedule they adhered to.

Table 19

Theme, Participants, Source, and Frequency— Female Veterans Described the Management of Time as a Critical Strategy

Theme	P	I	A	Total
8. Female veterans described the management of time as a critical strategy	6	38		38

Note. P = participants, I = interviews, A = artifacts.

All six participants shared how they would block out chunks of time for their competing priorities whether it was for work, school, family, or a stress management activity. These participants highlighted the importance of a schedule or of scheduling blocks of time for specific activities as a major contribution to the successful completion of graduate school. While sharing her experience regarding strategies utilized to successfully complete graduate school, Participant 3 discussed how she had to "restructure how I learned and really scheduled time, especially when it came to my dissertation and really setting down chunks of time to really push myself to stay focused." She later mentioned her use of time management not just for school but also to ensure she had time for exercising and other healthy coping mechanisms.

Furthermore, Participant 5 provided detailed insight into how she structured her journey through graduate school and maximized the management of her time. Participant 5 stated she would "start working on some of the assignments ahead of time, so anything that was quick, something that I can knock out really fast that was due I will get that done

first." She went on to discuss how her efforts to maximize her time required a lot of scheduling, a practice she did not limit to her academic life. Participant 5 shared that she also "had to prioritize what was more important when it came to my job, and when it came to my . . . my work; I had to prioritize what activities I do first and make sure I got everything done in a timely manner." While sharing her experience, Participant 6 also discussed the importance of making "sure during that time management you're putting in a slot there for you to decompress."

Summary

This chapter provided a detailed review of the purpose statement, the central and subresearch questions, and the methodology. A comprehensive analysis and presentation of findings including data collected from six interview participants with supporting evidence from artifact review was supplied. This study was designed to explore the experiences post-9/11 female combat veterans as they completed graduate-level education using Schlossberg's 4-S model. Eight themes emerged from the data regarding the post-9/11 female combat veterans' experiences as examined through the lens of Schlossberg's theory of transition. Table 20 showcases the data aligned with the research questions.

Chapter V presents a final summary of the research study including major key findings, unexpected findings, and conclusions resulting from the study. The findings and conclusions are followed by implications for action, recommendations for further research, and closing remarks and reflections.

Table 20

Research Questions, Themes, Participants, and Frequency

Subresearch Question	Theme	Participants	Freq.
Research Question 1	1. Perceived impact to their future socioeconomic was significant to their transition	6	53
	2. Readiness to change from the fluidity of military service to the perceived stability of civilian life	6	68
Research Question 2	3. Sought paths to lead and manage just as the military trained them to do	4	15
	4. Sought paths to lead and manage just as the military trained them to do	6	46
Research Question 3	5. Female veterans described institutional support as essential	6	46
	6. Female veterans described interpersonal support as essential	5	41
Research Question 4	7. Female veterans described the management of stress as a critical strategy	6	65
	8. Female veterans described the management of time as a critical strategy	6	38

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The major findings, conclusions, and recommendations are presented in this final chapter of the research study. Key findings and unexpected findings are reported; subsequently, conclusions drawn from the findings are presented. A discussion regarding the implications for action highlights strategies that can be utilized while pursuing graduate-level education to enhance the likelihood of female combat veterans successfully transitioning into the civilian sector with a graduate-level degree. Furthermore, there are recommendations for additional future research that would add to the depth and/or breadth of knowledge regarding the topic of transition experiences of female combat veterans. Chapter V concludes with the researcher's final remarks and reflections.

Methodology Review

A qualitative multiple case study was used to describe the transition experiences of female military veterans regarding their graduate-level education program after leaving military service through the lens of Schlossberg's transition theory and 4-S model. The methodology was designed to answer this central research question, "What are the transition experiences of female combat veterans using the Schlossberg transition model factors of situation, self, support, and strategies?"

The methodology was designed to answer this central research question and the following subresearch questions:

1. What were the situational transition experience (situation encompasses the extent, nature, and assumed significance and readiness for change and transition) factors that

female military veterans described experiencing while planning for their graduate-level education after leaving military service?

2. What self-characteristics (one's sense of self, such as one's health, socioeconomic status, psychosocial competence, past experience with similar transitions, and value orientation) do female veterans describe that affected their ability to complete graduate education after leaving military service?
3. What support (interpersonal support, institutional support, and physical settings) do female military veterans describe that helped them to complete their graduate-level education after leaving military service?
4. What were the strategies (intentional and thoughtful action, execution, task completion, and course amendment) that female veterans describe as using as they completed a graduate-level education after leaving military service?

A qualitative multiple case study was utilized to describe the lived experiences of post-9/11 female combat veterans who served in Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom as they completed graduate-level education subsequent to military service. In-depth interviews were conducted by the researcher with six veterans who met specific criteria and were identified by knowledgeable sponsors. Interviews were conducted via Zoom to maximize convenience for the participants and to ensure public health precautions because of the COVID-19 pandemic and were recorded with the permission of the participants. The researcher securely stored the data collected for the study.

For this study, the intended population was California female combat veterans. Because a database of California female combat veterans who completed graduate degrees after military service does not exist, purposeful and reputational sampling was

utilized to identify and select female combat veterans identified by knowledgeable sponsors functioning in the counties of Sacramento and Solano. From the pool of eligible participants, six were selected and available to participate in the study.

Key Findings

To establish key findings for this study regarding the transition experiences of female post-9/11 veterans, qualitative data were compiled and analyzed into themes. The qualitative data consisted of six comprehensive interviews conducted via Zoom with a review of artifacts utilized as supporting evidence. The researcher established that within the qualitative data, having 12 or more occurrences with at least four of six participants in the collected responses was considered a theme. The transition experiences through the lens of situation, self, support, and strategies were all considered when identifying the key findings.

Key Finding 1

Develop and adhere to a schedule that includes time for self-care.

Participants referred to the need to develop and adhere to a schedule repeatedly during interviews, validated by a frequency count of 68 in Theme 2, 65 in Theme 7, and 38 in Theme 8. All six participants experienced the impact managing their time and stress had on their quality of life. Three participants mentioned the importance of deliberately scheduling blocks of time for self-care activities such as exercising as a means to reduce stress and ultimately improve their quality of life while pursuing their graduate-level education. Participant 2 stated, "I started by walking my dog and then running more, so it's the way that I started managing the stress." Three participants discussed the importance of using exercise to manage their stress, and Participant 4

described the ways in which she used exercise to manage stress such as “I always run” and “do yoga and stretching and all that other stuff.”

Veterans are well-versed in a structured schedule that includes the specific blocks of time to exercise as a means of staying healthy and managing stress; however, this schedule is often provided to the veteran, and adherence is a military requirement not personally developed and internally driven. Two of the three themes included in this finding answered Subresearch Question 4 regarding Schlossberg’s transition factor of strategies with a frequency count of 103. According to Boyd-Sinkler et al. (2019), Schlossberg’s transition factor of strategies refers to “positive and negative techniques or coping strategies that an individual uses to resolve a situation” (p. 4). This study’s participants discussed time management and stress management as they impacted their quality of life and shared the various positive and healthy coping strategies they implemented to manage stress. Additionally, the themes that this key finding is composed of highlight this key finding as the most significant finding of the study with a total frequency count of 171.

Key Finding 2

Know yourself both as you are and what you aspire to be.

Participants referred to their desire to lead and manage in the civilian sector in relation to their experiences in the military and their established role as a veteran as well as to serve as a leader and pillar of strength within their family, repeatedly during interviews, validated by a frequency count of 53 in Theme 1, 15 in Theme 3, and 46 in Theme 4. Throughout their interviews, all six participants conveyed a firm understanding of their role within their individual community units (family and employment

organization). Four participants also expressed the intent behind pursuing graduate-level education as a means to transition their role in their organization into a leadership and managerial one. Participant 6 expressed they had "got used to a certain lifestyle" and obtaining a graduate degree and a managerial role would help to reflect the type of lifestyle they had in the military. Participant 2 expressed a similar sentiment: "my concern for getting a job after I retired, in the area of a supervisor or program manager" was an influencing factor for pursuing a graduate degree.

The research highlights that study participants were motivated to pursue a graduate degree as a means of ensuring they retained the reputation of a subject matter expert and leader within their professions. The literature supports the notion that participants were motivated to initiate and see their transition through to completion in part because of their desire to preserve their own image of themselves as they are and what they could be. Quackenbush (1989) stated, "The need to maintain and enhance self-conceptions and self-presentations of competence and morality provides the basic motivation that can explain not only why people might undergo change but also why they might resist undergoing change" (p. 316).

Key Finding 3

Identify and maximize the usage of any and all available support.

Participants referred to various types of support they received during their journey repeatedly during interviews, validated by a frequency count of 46 in Theme 5 and 41 in Theme 6. All six participants expressed receiving some kind of formal support from a governmental organization or their own employment agency. Five participants discussed how imperative it was to have the support of their professors to succeed. While sharing

her experiences of completing her graduate program, specifically in regard to her dissertation, Participant 3 stated, “My chair finally sat me down and we went through it and fixed it.” Participant 1 expanded on the notion of support provided by her professors and cohort mentors by stating, “My mentor would also check upon me, so I’d have to schedule out calls with because he’d want to know about my progress that I made that week or every 2 weeks.”

Team efforts and the mitigation of obstacles are obtained through the assistance of support systems (Tatum, 2016). Support can take the form of official or informal structures, but it is ultimately intended to assist individuals in their shift. Support can also relate to the networks, resources, houses, and caregivers that assist a person going through a transition (Barrera & Ainlay, 1983; Schlossberg, 1981).

Unexpected Finding

An analysis of the qualitative data led to one unexpected finding emerging from the study: VA disability compensation rating did not play a factor in participants’ ability to successfully accomplish graduate-level education.

Five of the six study participants relayed that they did not have a VA disability rating throughout their journey to obtain a graduate degree. One of the six study participants relayed they had a VA disability rating of 10% that did not help or hinder their efforts to obtain a graduate degree. A VA disability rating results in compensation being provided to military veterans because of injuries they sustained while in service to the military. Participants indicated at a frequency count of 13 that they received little to no compensation for any injuries they sustained in the military, which indicated having a

VA disability rating did not play a factor in their ability to complete graduate-level education.

Conclusion

The key findings resulted in three conclusions regarding the transition experiences of post-9/11 female veterans as they pursued graduate-level education. Evidence to support the three conclusions was drawn from existing literature as well as from the qualitative data gathered from this study.

Conclusion 1

It can be concluded that female veterans who develop and adhere to a schedule that includes time carved out for self-care are able to successfully manage the stress that accompanies completing a graduate-level program. It can also be concluded that time management is a critical skill which, if not mastered, poses one of the most substantial obstacles that members face in their pursuit of a graduate degree. Time management is a skill to be executed utilizing a related strategy. Boyd-Sinkler et al., (2019) highlighted Schlossberg's transition factor of strategy specifically as intentional efforts individuals utilize to resolve a situation. To be fully successful in their journey to obtain a graduate degree, female veterans should employ a simple yet powerful strategy such as the creation and utilization of a schedule with blocks of time portioned out for each of their competing priorities. The following evidence supports this conclusion:

Theme 2, heavily influenced by Themes 7 and 8, added evidence with all six participants, and a frequency count of 171 highlighted the importance a schedule and time management had on their overall stress management, quality of life, and the impact the aforementioned had on their ability to successfully complete their graduate program.

More specifically, Theme 2 (quality of life) was the most present theme in the interviews with the highest frequency at a count of 68. This indicates one's current and perceived potential lifestyle are significant influences on the efforts to pursue and obtain a graduate degree.

Conclusion 2

It can be concluded that female veterans who are well-grounded in their own values have understanding about their role in their various communities and the capacity to prioritize said roles are enabled to succeed. According to Bridges (2004) and Quackenbush (1989), individuals experience changes and transitions frequently, and it is their need to maintain the conception of themselves as competent that explains why they successfully undergo change or experience significant resistance. Because change and transitions can be both planned and unplanned, eliminating preexisting variables can significantly improve the chances of success.

Prioritization of people's values lends to the determination of their self-conceptions and perceived role within their particular communities. Therefore, as transition happens, whether planned or unplanned, individuals enter and proceed through the stages of transition with the capability of executing competing priorities in an order based upon their established values and perceived roles. This helps the individual by eliminating internal confusion and ultimately increasing efficiency. The following evidence supports this conclusion:

With a frequency count of 46 over six interviews, giving an average of over seven mentions per interview, the theme of "strong sense of identify" was a prominent factor. Female veterans maintained and elaborated on how their sense of identity as leaders

within their organizations, family, and friend groups helped them with their prioritization of values and competing priorities, ultimately leading them to a successful completion of their graduate program.

Conclusion 3

It can be concluded that successful female veterans identify and utilize support systems available to them. Conversely, it can also be concluded that although having a VA disability rating could provide additional financial support, having a low rating or no rating did not pose as an obstacle or a strength toward obtaining a graduate degree. Support can relate to the networks, resources, houses, and caregivers that assist a person going through a transition (Barrera & Ainlay, 1983; Schlossberg, 1981). Support might take the form of official or informal structures, but it is always intended to assist individuals in their shift. Support systems aid in the mitigation of difficulties that must be addressed to transition smoothly (Tatum, 2016). The following evidence supports this conclusion:

1. With a frequency count of 87 generating two themes, support, whether informal or formal, was a strong factor in participants' ability to successfully complete a graduate-level education.
2. Informal and formal support generated frequency counts, respectively, close to an equal dispersion with a frequency count of 46 for formal support and a frequency count of 41 for informal support.

Implication for Action

Implication for Action 1

Based on the conclusion that female veterans must develop and adhere to a schedule that includes time carved out for self-care to successfully manage the stress that accompanies completing a graduate-level program, it is recommended that academic advisors and cohort mentors at the university level work with students to develop a structured schedule. Transition counselors are experts who can help people build strategies that will help them succeed in the future (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012). Throughout the study, time management served as both a leading strength for completing a graduate program for those who were skilled in it and a significant obstacle for those who were not.

Further, military service branches should implement a segment on time management into their mandatory transition assistance programs that female service members must complete prior to separating from military service no less than 6 months prior to their separation with a follow-up, voluntary program extended up to 6 months beyond their separation from military service. Participants would also be responsible for biannual check-ins with designated professionals. This segment should also include examples and templates for female service members to develop and adhere to throughout the course as practice. Although time management alone does not guarantee success in completing a graduate program, the findings from this study indicate that when mastered, it can significantly improve one's chances.

Implication for Action 2

Based on the conclusion that female veterans must be well-grounded in their own values and understanding about their role in their various communities and have the capacity to prioritize said roles in a manner that enables them to succeed, it is recommended that all veterans meet with a military one source representative prior to departing the military as well as prior to beginning their selected graduate program to discuss their sense of self, their roles within their family and organization, and the impact pursuing a graduate degree will have on the other competing priorities. According to Erika Myers (as cited in Raypole, 2020),

> Having a well-developed sense of self is hugely beneficial in helping us make choices in life. From something as small as favorite foods to larger concerns like personal values, knowing what comes from our own self versus what comes from others allows us to live authentically. (Why It's So Important, para. 3)

Throughout the study, participants routinely touched on various choices they were faced with, how they impacted their ability to successfully complete their graduate program and to what degree, and how their perception of their role in those situations influenced their choices.

Implication for Action 3

Based on the conclusion that successful female veterans identify and utilize support systems available to them, there are two sets of recommendations, one for each of the following systems:

1. formal support systems that include pre- and postseparation programs, veteran support groups such as the VA or State Veterans Department, and universities; and

2. informal support systems that include family, friends, current and former military social media platforms as a support group, and military or nonmilitary businesses that provide hiring preference to prior military.

In regard to formal support systems, military service branches should establish postservice forums on popular social media platforms to share information with and connect other female service members to those who have traveled the path before them. In this regard, services would be rendered in a similar fashion as a "big sister" program in which members are paired with volunteers who have completed a similar journey toward success. This program could be added to or used supplementally in a voluntary manner to current military service branches' transition assistance programs that are a requirement for attendance prior to departure from service. Academic institutions should also establish support groups for veterans to aid in their transition from military service that are populated by those who have gone before them within the first 12 months of separating from military service or beginning their academic journey (veterans from the area and have a unique understanding to bond with those newly transitioning) for approval or continued approval of their GI benefits.

Regarding informal support systems, individuals who are assisting members in an unofficial capacity to complete a graduate-level education qualify as an informal support system. Five of six participants conveyed having support from individuals whom they identified as friends or family. Participants 1, 2, 3, and 6 highlighted their spouse and family as a significant support system that contributed to their success in completing graduate-level education. Having this form of support in which informal support members aided in childcare, child transportation, and the day-to-day activities highlighted

a primary competing priority that participants were able to bypass as an obstacle in large part because of those serving in this capacity. Military service branches, universities at various levels, friends, and family should be educated to provide the necessary support veterans require to make the transition. Specifically, military service branches and educational institutions should be required to provide group counseling opportunities to those transitioning and those they identify as an informal support system.

Recommendations for Future Research

The current study added findings and conclusions to the literature regarding female veterans as they transition into and complete graduate-level education. Although this study was a snapshot of the lived experiences of these female veterans, it has the potential for researchers to further explore the complexities of transitioning from military service into the civilian sector and completing graduate-level education. Based on the data collected and analyzed from the current study, the following are recommendations for future research.

Recommendation 1

This study utilized a multiple case study to gather qualitative data from the lived transition experiences of female combat veterans who pursued and completed graduate-level educations after military service. In the future, a qualitative multiple case study that includes data gathered from both male and female combat veterans would add depth and breadth to the data. An improved narrative understanding the transition experiences of both male and female veterans would provide additional insight into the support, strategies, and tools utilized by each group to successfully complete graduate-level

education to highlight commonalities that could be used to improve military transition assistance programs and veteran transition experiences.

Recommendation 2

A comparative qualitative multiple case study examining female veterans' lived transition experiences while pursuing graduate-level education after military service who failed to complete their graduate-level education after military service is recommended for examination. This comparative study would provide additional insight into the services, support, and strategies veterans use throughout their transition. Additionally, it would provide an increased understanding of the influences for pursuing higher level education and obstacles this particular group faces.

Recommendation 3

This study examined United States female veterans' lived transition experiences while pursuing graduate-level education after military service. Comparing the findings to a study repeated for foreign military service branches would provide a deeper perspective regarding the degree to which the United States prepares veterans for a successful transition into the civilian sector.

Recommendation 4

A comparative qualitative multiple case study examining female veterans' lived transition experiences while pursuing undergraduate-level education after military service is recommended for examination. This comparative study would provide additional insight into the services, support, and strategies veterans use throughout their transition. Additionally, it would provide an increased understanding of the influences for pursuing higher level education and obstacles this particular group faces.

Recommendation 5

This study focused on female combat veterans referred by knowledgeable sponsors located in the California counties of Sacramento and Solano. An expansion to include additional populations would increase the strength and validity to the implications and conclusions of this multiple case study. For consideration, additional populations from other large, veteran-centric counties and/or states could be researched.

Concluding Remarks and Reflections

This multiple case study concludes with my closing remarks and reflections regarding the research process. Pursuing my doctorate and working through the dissertation process provided me a unique opportunity to explore one particular area of interest: *An Exploration of Northern California's Post-9/11 Female Combat Veterans Who Completed Graduate School After Military Service*. The sacrifices, commitment, and energy spent getting to this point have been extremely worth what I gained. I will forever owe a debt of gratitude to my family, friends, mentors, professors, and colleagues who made this endeavor a possibility. This gratitude was amplified exponentially because of the number of personal court cases in which I repeatedly faced losing my children, my ability to fund my education, and the erosion of my resiliency to continue in the pursuit of such a prestigious degree.

I was completely blown away by the demand dissertation research can place on a person because of its varying level of complexity and can fully appreciate the importance it brings to the academic and practical world. Each paragraph, section, and chapter presented a unique opportunity to expand my critical thinking and analysis capabilities. The experience provided lifelong gains in a number of skills, both personal and

professional, with a significant appreciation for those who embark on the research journey while continuing to support the demands family and employment placed upon them.

The female veteran participants in this study are immensely inspiring and serve as a reminder to readers and others who may be approaching a similar transition that success is possible if they remember to take care of themselves, plan, and remain true to who they are. The USAF has three core values: "integrity first, service before self, and excellence in all we do." Many of the themes and findings demonstrated that these core values were reflected in participant experiences in transitioning and completing graduate-level education. "Integrity first" was reflected throughout the interviews and was included in the second key finding as were "service before self," and "excellence in all we do" reflected in participants' successful completion of their graduate program.

REFERENCES

Abrams, R. B. (2016, September 8). Efforts still expanding to meet land force needs. Retrieved from https://www.army.mil/article/174784/efforts_still_expanding_to_meet_land_force_needs

Ahern, J., Worthen, M., Masters, J., Lippman, S. A., Ozer, E. J., & Moos, R. (2015). The challenges of Afghanistan and Iraq veterans transition from military to civilian life and approaches to reconnection. *PLoS One, 10*(7), e0128599. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0128599

Anderson, M. L., & Goodman, J. (2014). From military to civilian life: Applications of Schlossberg's model for veterans in transition. *Career Planning & Adult Development Journal*, *30*(3), 40-51.

Anderson, M. L., Goodman, J., & Schlossberg, N. K. (2012). *Counseling adults in transition: Linking Schlossberg's theory with practice in a diverse world* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Springer.

Atuel, H. R., Keeling, M., Kintzle, S. M., Hassan, A., & Castro, C. A. (2016). Veteran employment in the 21st century. In L. Hicks, E. L Weiss, & J. E. Coll (Eds.), *The civilian lives of U.S. Veterans: Issues and identities* (pp. 161-179). Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.

Austin, T. (2019). *G.I. Jane 'fem'eteran goes corporate: An exploration of post-9/11 female combat veterans' transitioning to a civilian career* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertation and Theses Global database. (UMI No. 13885867)

Barrera, M., Jr., & Ainlay, S. L. (1983). The structure of social support: A conceptual and empirical analysis. *Journal of Community Psychology*, *11*(2), 133.

Bloomberg, L., & Volpe, M. (2008). *Completing your qualitative dissertation: A roadmap from beginning to end*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Boyd-Sinkler, K., Waters, R. C., Sikder, Y. Y., Taylor, A. R., Artiles, M. S., Coso Strong, A., & Lee, W. C. (2019). Work-in-progress: Applying transition theory to an exploration of the high school-to-college transition experiences of students from underrepresented ethnic/racial groups. Retrieved from http://www.scopus.com/inward/record.url?scp=85096982998&partnerID=8YFLogxK

Bridges, W. (2004). *Transitions* [Kindle book]. Retrieved from http://amazon.com

Brown, T. T. (2009). Societal culture and the new veteran. *International Journal of Scholarly Academic Intellectual Diversity*, *11*(19). Retrieved from http://www.slideshare.net/Will1945/toni-brown-national-forumjournals-houstontexas

Chan, C. S. (2015). Introduction to the special section: Research on psychological issues and interventions for military personnel, veterans, and their families, Part II. *Professional Psychology, Research and Practice*, *46*(2), 81-82.

Chickering, A., & Schlossberg, N. (1995). *Getting the most out of college*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Coll, J. E., & Weiss, E. L. (2017). Military culture and veteran transition. In J. Beder (Ed.), *Caring for the military* (pp. 10-20). New York, NY: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group.

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J. W. (2015). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Davies, M. (2017, November 1). Abandoning the stereotypes. *USA Today*, pp. 30-31.

Defense Manpower Data Center. (n.d.). DoD personnel, workforce reports & publications. Retrieved from https://dwp.dmdc.osd.mil/dwp/app/dod-data-reports/workforce-reports

De Munck, V. C. (2013). A theory explaining the functional linkage between the self, identity and cultural models. *Journal of Cognition & Culture, 13*(1-2), 179-200. https://doi.org/10.1163/15685373-12342091

Diamond, A. M. (2012). *The adaptive military transition theory: Supporting military students in academic environments* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global database. (UMI No. 3504491)

Engels, D. W., & Harris, H. L. (2002). Career counseling with military personnel and their dependents. In S. G. Niles (Ed.), *Adult career development: Concepts, issues and practices* (3rd ed., pp. 253-266). Columbus, OH: National Career Development Association.

Evans, B. (2013, January 28). Defense Department to remove female combat exclusion policy. Independent Voter News. Retrieved from https://ivn.us/2013/01/28/military-to-remove-female-combat-exclusion-policy/

Evans, N. J., Forney, D. S., & Guido-DiBrito, F. M. (1998). *Student development in college: Theory, research, and practice*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Exec. Order No. 13,518, 3 C.F.R. 58533 (2009). Retrieved from https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/executive-order-veterans-employment-initiative

Froggatt, K. (1997). Rites of passage and the hospice culture. *Mortality*, *2*(2), 123-136.

Gaiter, S. L. (2015). *Veterans in transition: A correlational investigation of career adaptability, confidence, and readiness* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses database. (UMI No. 3684652).

Ganzer, C. A. (2016). Veteran women: Mental health-related consequences of military service. *American Journal of Nursing, 116*(11), 32-40.

GAO-02-914T: Military and veterans' benefits: Observations on the transition assistance program: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Benefits, Committee on Veterans' Affairs, House of Representatives, 107th Cong. 3 (2002) (testimony of Cynthia A. Bascetta). Retrieved from https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-02-914t.pdf

GAO-05-844T: Military and veterans' benefits: Improvements needed in transition assistance services for Reserves and National Guard: Hearing before the Subcommittee on Economic Opportunity, Committee on Veterans' Affairs, House of Representatives, 109th Cong. 1 (2005) (testimony of Cynthia A. Bascetta). Retrieved from https://www.gao.gov/assets/120/111859.pdf

Glacken, M., Kernohan, G., & Coates V. (2001) Diagnosed with hepatitis C: A descriptive exploratory study. *International Journal of Nursing Studies, 38*(1), 107-116.

Goodman, J., & Anderson, M. L. (2012). Applying the Schlossberg 4S transition model to retirement. *Career Planning & Adult Development Journal*, *28*(2), 10-20.

Greer, T. W. (2017). Career development for women veterans: Facilitating successful transitions from military service to civilian employment. *Advances in Developing Human Resources, 19*(1), 54-65.

Griffin, K. A., & Gilbert, C. K. (2015). Better transitions for troops: An application of Schlossberg's transition framework to analyses of barriers and institutional support structures for student veterans. *Journal of Higher Education, 86*(1), 71-97.

Guina, J., Rossetter, S. R., DeRhodes, B. J., Nahhas, R. W., & Welton, R. S. (2015). Benzodiazepines for PTSD: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Journal of Psychiatric Practice, 21*(4), 281-303.

Hale, J. (2017, June 14). Translating military culture to the civilian workplace. Retrieved from https://dod.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/1213804/translating-military culture-to-the-civilian-workplace/

Hall, L. K. (2011). The importance of understanding military culture. *Social Work in Health Care, 50*(1), 4-18. https://doi.org/10.1080/00981389.2010.513914

Hart, F. (2017). *Transitioning enlisted military veterans seeking civilian employment* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertation and Theses Global database. (UMI No. 10746853)

Katz, L. (2015). [Review of the book Culture and social behavior, by H. C. Triandis]. Retrieved from http://www.leadershipcrossroads.com/mat/Culture%20 and%20Social%20Behavior.pdf

Knight, J. L. (2014). *A study of military personnel's preparation for transition from military to civilian life* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertation and Theses Global database. (UMI No. 3586985)

Kukla, M., Bonfils, K. A., & Salyers, M. P. (2014). Factors impacting work success in veterans with mental health disorders: A veteran-focused mixed methods pilot study. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation, 43,* 51-66.

Library of Congress. (n.d.) An act for the establishment of troops. Retrieved from https://www.loc.gov/item/today-in-history/september-29/

Lombard, M., Snyder-Duch, J., & Bracken, C. C. (2002). Content analysis in mass communication: Assessment and reporting of intercoder reliability. *Human Communication Research, 28,* 587-604. http://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2958.2002.tb00826.x

Lopez, L. M. (2016). *The veteran perception: Exploring the role of veterans benefits on the transition from service member to civilian* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global database. (UMI No. 10128475)

Luborsky, M. R. (1994). The retirement process: Making the person and cultural meanings malleable. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly, 8*(4), 411-429.

MacKenzie, M. H. (2012). Let women fight: Ending the U.S. military's female combat ban. *Foreign Affairs, 91*(6), 32-42.

Marine Corps Community Services. (n.d.). Marine for life cycle. Retrieved from https://usmc-mccs.org/cycle/

Martin-McDonald, K., & Biernoff, D. (2002). Initiation into a dialysis-dependent life: An examination of rites of passage. *Nephrology Nursing Journal, 29*(4), 347-352

McMillan, J. H., & Schumacher, S. (2010). *Research in education: Evidence-based inquiry.* New York, NY: Pearson

Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey Bass.

Messer, M., & Greene, J. (2014, Fall). Development of the veterans and military occupations finder (VMOF): A new career counseling tool for veterans and military personnel. *Career Planning and Adult Development Journal*, 136-153.

Military.com. (n.d.). U.S. Armed Forces overview. Retrieved from https://www.military.com/join-armed-forces/us-military-overview.html

Miller, M. R. (2015). *Experiences of VA therapists treating OEF/OIF/OND veterans with combat PTSD* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global database. (UMI No. 3707299)

Morin, R. (2011). The difficult transition from military to civilian life. Retrieved from http://www.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2011/12/The-DifficultTransition-from-Military-to-Civilian-Life.pdf

National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics. (2016, May). Profile of post-9/11 veterans: 2014. Retrieved from https://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/SpecialReports/Post_911_Veterans_Profile_2014.pdf

National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics. (2017, February). The past, present and future of women veterans. Retrieved from https://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/specialreports/women_veterans_2015_final.pdf

National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics. (2018a). *Department of Veterans Affairs education program beneficiaries: FY 2000-FY 2016.* Retrieved from https://www.va.gov/vetdata/Utilization.asp

National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics. (2018b). *Department of Veterans Affairs: Veteran population tables.* Retrieved from https://www.va.gov/vetdata/Veteran_Population.asp

Nicholson, W. F., Jr. (2015). *Qualitative study of the United States Marine Corps wounded warrior regiment* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global database. (UMI No. 3703034)

Parker, K., Cilluffo, A., & Stepler, R. (2017, April 13). 6 facts about the U.S. military and its changing demographics. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from http://www.pewresearch.org/facttank/2017/04/13/6-facts-about-the-us-military-and-its-changing-demographics/

Parsi, N. (2017, January). Ready for a new mission. *PM Network, 31*(1), 54-61.

Patten, M. L. (2017). *Understanding research methods: An overview of the essentials* (9th ed.). Glendale, CA: Pyrczak.

Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Pease, J. L., Billera, M., & Gerard, G. (2015). Military culture and the transition to civilian life: Suicide risk and other considerations. *Social Work, 61*(1), 83-86.

Quackenbush, R. L. (1989). Comparison and contrast between belief system theory and cognitive theory. *Journal of Psychology*, *123*(4), 315-328. https://doi.org/10.1080/00223980.1989.10542988

Raypole, C. (2020, June 17). 'Who am I?' How to find your sense of self. Retrieved from https://www.healthline.com/health/sense-of-self

Redmond, S. A., Wilcox, S. L., Campbell, S., Kim, A., Finney, K., Barr, K., & Hassan, A. M. (2015). A brief introduction to the military workplace culture. *Work*, *50*(1), 9-20. https://doi.org/10.3233/WOR-141987

Reynolds, G. M., & Shendruk, A. (2018, April 24). Demographics of the U.S. military. Council on Foreign Relations. Retrieved from https://www.cfr.org/article /demographics-us-military

Sarason, B. R., & Sarason, I. G. (2006). *Close relationships and social support: implications for the measurement of social support*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Schlossberg, N. K. (1981). A model for analyzing human adaptation to transition. *The Counseling Psychologist*, *9*(2), 2-18.

Schlossberg, N. K. (1984). *Counseling adults in transition: Linking practice with theory*. New York, NY: Springer.

Schlossberg, N. K. (2011). The challenge of change: The transition model and its applications. *Journal of Employment Counseling*, *48*(4), 159-162.

Silva, J. M. (n.d.). Women in the military: Through the decades. Women have a larger presence in our military today than ever before. Retrieved from https://veteransview.com/news/women-in-the-military-through-the-decades#:~:text=Women%20have%20a%20larger%20presence%20in%20our%20military,nearly%2011%20percent%20of%20the%20total%20veteran%20population

Smith, F. (2016). The shifting self: Social identity in retirement. *Kentucky Journal of Communication, 35*(1), 4-20.

Smith, P. B., & Long, K. M. (2006). Social identity theory in cross-cultural perspective. In R. Brown & D. Capozza (Eds.), *Social identities: Motivational, emotional and cultural influences* (pp. 153–169). Hove, United Kingdom: Psychology Press/Taylor & Francis.

Smith, S. J., Farra, S. L., Ulrich, D. L., Franco, S., Keister, K. J., & Chatterjee, A. (2018). The veteran student experience: Lessons for higher education. *Journal of Military Learning.* Retrieved from https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/journal-of-military-learning/Archives/SMITH-Veteran-Student-Exp.pdf

Spelman, J. F., Hunt, S. C., Seal, K. H., & Burgo-Black, A. L. (2012). Post deployment care for returning combat veterans. *Journal of General Internal Medicine, 27*(9), 1200-1209

Stake, R. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Stake, R.E. (2006) *Multiple case study analysis*. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Stern, L. (2017). Post 9/11 veterans with service-connected disabilities and their transition to the civilian workforce: A review of the literature. *Advances in Developing Human Resources, 19*(1), 66-77. https://doi.org/10.1177/1523422316682928

Strom, T. Q., Gavian, M. E., Possis, E., Loughlin, J., Bui, T., Linardatos, E., Leskela, J., & Siegel, W. (2012). Cultural and ethical considerations when working with military personnel and veterans: A primer for VA training programs. Training and *Education in Professional Psychology, 6*(2), 67-75. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0028275

Tatum, C. E. (2016). *A qualitative study on the challenges United States army soldiers in North Central Texas face as they transition to the civilian workforce* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertation and Theses Global database. (UMI No. 10247956)

Tilghman, A. (2015, December 3). All combat jobs open to women in the military. Military Times. Retrieved from https://www.militarytimes.com/2015/12/03/allcombat-jobs-open-to-women-in-the-military/

Torreon, B. S. (2017). *U.S. periods of war and dates of recent conflicts*. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service. Retrieved from https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/RS/RS21405/26

Tsai, J., Hoff, R. A., & Harpaz-Rotem, I. (2017). One-year incidence and predictors of homelessness among 300,000 U.S. veterans seen in specialty mental health care. *Psychological Services, 14*(2), 203-207.

Tsai, J., Kasprow, W. J., Kane, V., & Rosenheck, R. A. (2014). National comparison of literally homeless male and female VA service users: Entry characteristics, clinical needs, and service patterns. *Women's Health Issues, 24*(1), e29-e35. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.whi.2013.09.007

Tsai, J., Rosenheck, R. A., & McGuire, J. F. (2012). Comparison of outcomes of homeless female and male veterans in transitional housing. *Community Mental Health Journal*, *48*(6), 705-710.

U.S. Army. (n.d.). Careers & jobs. Retrieved from https://www.goarmy.com/careers-and jobs/become-an-officer/army-officer-faqs.html#difference

U.S. Army Center of Military History. (n.d.). The U.S. Army birthday: America's senior service. Retrieved from https://history.army.mil/html/faq/birth.html

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2017). *Employment situation of veterans summary* (Report No. USDL-17-0354). Retrieved from https://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/vet_03222017.pdf

U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2018). *Employment situation of veterans summary*. Retrieved from https://www.bls.gov/news.release/archives/vet_03222018.htm

U.S. Department of Defense. (2015). Demographics: Profile of the military community. Retrieved from http://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Reports/2015 Demographics-Report.pdf

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. (2015). Date and names of conflicts. Retrieved from https://www.va.gov/vetsinworkplace/docs/em_datesNames.asp

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Office Inspector General. (2007). Audit of vocational rehabilitation and employment program operations. Retrieved from https://www.va.gov/oig/52/reports/2008/VAOIG-06-00493-42.pdf

U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2011, October). Number of veterans receiving care, barriers faced, and efforts to increase access. Retrieved from https://www.gao.gov/assets/590/585745.pdf

Van Til, L., Fikretoglu, D., Pranger, T., Patten, S., JianLi, W., Wong, M, & Pedlar, D. (2013). Work reintegration for veterans with mental disorders: A systematic literature review to inform research. *Physical Therapy, 93*(9), 1163-1174. https://doi.org/10.2522/ptj.20120156

Villagran, M., Ledford, C., & Canzona, M. (2015). Women's health identities in the transition from military member to service veteran. *Journal of Health Communication*, *20*, 1125-1132.

Voydanoff, P. (2005a). Social integration, work-family conflict and facilitation, and job and marital quality. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, *67*(3), 666-679.

Voydanoff, P. (2005b). Toward a conceptualization of perceived work-family fit and balance: A demands and resources approach. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 67*(4), 822-836.

Ware, T. D. (2017). *From war to home: The systematic issues operation enduring and Iraqi freedom veterans face transitioning with PTSD* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global database. (UMI No. 10687431)

War Related Illness & Injury Study Center. (2014). Operation Ensuring Freedom, Operation Iraqi Freedom, and Operation New Dawn. Retrieved from http://www.warrelatedillness.va.gov/education/local-offerings/slides /2014/dcwriisc-OperationEnduringFreedomAndOperationIraqiFreedom Jan2014.pdf

White House Office of the Press Secretary. (2016, November 11). Fact sheet: Ensuring veterans have the tools to succeed. Retrieved from https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2016/11/11/fact-sheet-ensuring-veterans-have-tools-succeed

Wilson, P. A. (2015). *The experience of enlisted female veterans transitioning from the military to the civilian workforce* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (UMI No. 3687617)

Woodworth, J. (2015, March 1). Transitioning from active duty to civilian employment. *EP Magazine*, 66-68.

Yin, R. K. (2012). *Applications of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.

Zivin, K., Yosef, M., Levine, D. S., Abraham, K. M., Miller, E. M., Henry, J., & Valenstein, M. (2015). Employment status, employment functioning, and barriers to employment among VA primary care patients. *Journal of Affective Disorders, 193*, 194-202.

Zogas, A. (2017, February). *US military veterans' difficult transitions back to civilian life and the VA's response*. Providence, RI: Costs of War, Watson Institute, Brown University. Retrieved from http://watson.brown.edu/costsofwar/files/cow/imce/papers/2017/Zogas_Veterans%27%20Transitions_CoW_2.1.17.pdf

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Synthesis Matrix

Prospectus Synthesis Matrix	**Themes**	Educational Status	Support	Situational Factors	Individual Factors	Adaptation	Impact of Education
References							
Abrams, R. B. (2016, September 8). Efforts still expanding to meet land force needs. Retrieved from https://www.army.mil/article/174784/efforts_still_expanding_to_meet_land_force_needs					X		
Ahern, J., Worthen, M., Masters, J., Lippman, S. A., Ozer, E. J., & Moos, R. (2015). The challenges of Afghanistan and Iraq veterans transition from military to civilian life and approaches to reconnection. PLoS One, 10(7), e0128599. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0128599			X	X	X	X	
Anderson, M. L. & Goodman, J. (2014). From military to civilian life: Applications of Schlossberg's model for veterans in transition. Career Planning & Adult Development Journal, 30(3), 40-51.		X			X	X	
Anderson, M. L., Goodman, J., & Schlossberg, N. K. (2012). Counseling adults in transition: Linking Schlossberg's theory with practice in a diverse world (4th ed.). New York, NY: Springer.		X			X		
Austin, T. (2019). G.I. Jane fem veteran goes corporate: An exploration of post 9/11 female combat veterans transitioning to a civilian career (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from Brandman Digital Repository. (262)				X	X	X	
Bridges, W. (2004). Transitions. Hachette Books. Kindle Edition.				X			

Davies, M. (2017, November 1). Abandoning the stereotypes. USA Today, 30-31.						X	
Hale, J. (2017, June 14). Translating military culture to the civilian workplace. Retrieved from https://dod.defense.gov/News/Article/Article/1213804/translating-military culture-to-the-civilian-workplace/						X	
Hart, F. (2017). Transitioning enlisted military veterans seeking civilian employment. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertation and Theses Global Database. (UMI No. 10746853)					X	X	
Knight, J. L. (2014). A study of military personnel's preparation for transition from military to civilian life. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertation and Theses Global Database. (UMI No. 3586985)				X		X	
Messer, M,. & Greene, J. (2014). Development of the veterans and military occupations finder (VMOF): A new career counseling tool for veterans and military personnel. Career Planning and Adult Development Journal, Fall, 136-153.			X				X
Metraux, S., Byrne, T. H., Cusack, M., Hunt-Johnson, N., & True, G. (2017). Pathways into homelessness among post-9/11-era veterans. Psychological Services, 14(2), 229-237. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/ser0000136		X	X	X	X		
Quackenbush, R.L. (1989). Comparison and Contrast Between Belief System Theory and Cognitive Theory. The Journal of Psychology. 123:4, 315-328, DOI: 10.1080/00223980.1989.10542988					X		

Reynolds, G. M., & Shendruk, A. (2018, April 24). Demographics of the U.S. military. Council on Foreign Relations. Retrieved from https://www.cfr.org/article/demographics-us-military		X			X		
Schlossberg, N. K. (1981). A model for analyzing human adaptation to transition. The Counseling Psychologist, 9(2), 2-18.			X	X	X	X	
Schlossberg, N. K. (2011). The challenge of change: The transition model and its applications. Journal of Employment Counseling, 48(4), 159-162.			X	X	X	X	
Smith, S.J., Farra, S.L., Ulrich, D.L., Franco, S., Keister, K.J., & Chatterjee, A. (2018). The Veteran Student Experience: Lessons for Higher Education. Journal of Military Learning. Retrieved from https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/journal-of-military-learning/Archives/SMITH-Veteran-Student-Exp.pdf		X	X				
Stern, L. (2017). Post 9/11 veterans with service-connected disabilities and their transition to the civilian workforce: A review of the literature. Advances in Developing Human Resources, 19(1), 66-77. Retrieved from https://doi.org/10.1177/1523422316682928			X		X	X	
Tatum, C. E. (2016). A qualitative study on the challenges united states army soldiers in North Central Texas face as they transition to the civilian workforce. (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertation and Thesis Global Database. (UMI No. 10247956)				X	X	X	X

Tsai, J., Kasprow, W. J., Kane, V., & Rosenheck, R. A. (2014). National comparison of literally homeless male and female VA service users: Entry characteristics, clinical needs, and service patterns. Women's Health Issues, 24(1), e29-e35. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.whi.2013.09.007					X		X
Tsai, J., Rosenheck, R. A., & McGuire, J. F. (2012). Comparison of outcomes of homeless female and male veterans in transitional housing. Community Mental Health Journal, 48(6), 705-710.			X		X		X
U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2014, March 22). Employment situation of veterans Summary, USDL-17-0354. Retrieved from http://www.bls.gov/news.release/vet.nr0.htm				X			X
U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2018). Employment Situation of Veterans Summary. Retrieved from https://www.bls.gov/news.release/vet.nr0.htm				X	X		X
U.S. Department of Defense. (2015). Demographics: Profile of the military community. Retrieved from http://download.militaryonesource.mil/12038/MOS/Reports/2015 Demographics-Report.pdf		X			X		
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. (2016a, March). Profile of veterans in poverty: 2014. National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics. Retrieved from https://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/SpecialReports/Profile_of_Veterans_In_Poverty_2014. Pdf				X	X		

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. (2016b, May). Profile of post-9/11 veterans: 2014. National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics. Retrieved from https://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/SpecialReports/Post_911_Veterans_Profile_2014.pdf				X	X		
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. (2018). Department of Veterans Affairs Education Program Beneficiaries: FY 2000-FY 2016. National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics. Retrieved from https://www.va.gov/vetdata/Utilization.asp			X		X		
U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. (2018). Department of Veterans Affairs: Veteran population Tables. National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics. Retrieved from https://www.va.gov/vetdata/Veteran_Population.asp					X		
Villigran, M., Ledford, C., & Canzona, M. (2015). Women's health identities in the transition from military member to service veteran. Journal of Health Communication, 20, 1125-1132.				X	X		
Wilson, P. A. (2015). The experience of enlisted female veterans transitioning from the military to the civilian workforce (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (UMI No. 3687617)				X	X		
Wright, L. D. (2013). A phenomenological study of soldiers in the U.S. Army Warrior Transition Unit (WTU) (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertation and Thesis Global database. (UMI No. 3552649)			X		X	X	

APPENDIX B

U.S. Military Installations Population by State

United States Installation Population by State

United States Installation Population by State

This table presents United States Active Duty military bases organized by state. For each base, the zip code, nearest metro city, miles to nearest metro city, and total number of sponsors, dependents, and personnel are presented. The data in this table are based on the "duty locations" of the Sponsor only. There are instances where sponsors and dependents are co-located, but dependents may not be located at these installations.

Base*	Service Branch	Zip Code	Nearest Metro City (NMC)**	Miles to NMC***	Total Sponsors	Total Dependents	Total Personnel
ALABAMA							
Fort Rucker	Army	36362	Dothan	26	3,665	6,044	9,709
Maxwell AFB (Incl. Gunter)	Air Force	36112	Montgomery	2	2,768	4,700	7,468
Redstone Arsenal	Army	35898	Huntsville	1	635	1,630	2,265
Other					897	2,020	2,917
Alabama Total					**7,965**	**14,394**	**22,359**
ALASKA							
Eielson AFB	Air Force	99702	Fairbanks	26	1,743	2,157	3,900
Elmendorf AFB	Air Force	99506	Anchorage	2	5,442	7,146	12,588
Fort Jonathan Wainwright	Army	99703	Fairbanks	1	7,571	9,670	17,241
Fort Richardson	Army	99505	Anchorage	8	4,228	5,343	9,571
Other					83	193	276
Alaska Total					**19,067**	**24,509**	**43,576**
ARIZONA							
Davis-Monthan AFB	Air Force	85707	Tucson	0	5,848	7,099	12,947
Fort Huachuca	Army	85613	Tucson	75	4,018	4,817	8,835
Luke AFB	Air Force	85309	Phoenix	20	3,839	4,923	8,762
Yuma MCAS	Marine Corps	85369	Yuma	27	4,838	4,858	9,696
Yuma Proving Ground	Army	85365	Yuma	30	145	391	536
Other					729	1,557	2,286
Arizona Total					**19,417**	**23,645**	**43,062**
ARKANSAS							
Little Rock AFB	Air Force	72099	Little Rock	18	3,400	4,551	7,951
Other					140	336	476
Arkansas Total					**3,540**	**4,887**	**8,427**
CALIFORNIA							
29 Palms MC Air/Ground Combat Center	Marine Corps	92278	Palm Springs	60	10,651	7,467	18,118
Beale AFB	Air Force	95903	Sacramento	35	3,897	4,620	8,517
Camp Pendleton	Marine Corps	92055	San Diego	35	38,441	32,146	70,587
China Lake NAVWEAPCEN	Navy	93555	Los Angeles	140	538	772	1,310
Coronado NAV AMPHIB Base	Navy	92155	San Diego	5	5,579	7,602	13,181
Edwards AFB	Air Force	93524	Los Angeles	95	2,131	2,792	4,923
El Centro NAF	Navy	92243	El Centro	7	237	290	527

* Bases with fewer than 100 Active Duty Sponsors are included in the Other category for their State.
** Nearest Metro City listed has population greater than 50,000.
*** "NMC" stands for Nearest Metro City.
**** United States Other includes personnel within the United States, but with unknown base and state.
Note: The Sponsor column includes all Active Duty military personnel at each base. "C" refers to bases that have been closed. The number following "C" refers to the base realignment and closure (BRAC) round in which the base was closed.

Base*	Service Branch	Zip Code	Nearest Metro City (NMC)**	Miles to NMC***	Total Sponsors	Total Dependents	Total Personnel
Fleet ASW Training Center Pacific	Navy	92147	San Diego	7	1,358	2,350	3,708
Fort Irwin	Army	92310	San Bernardino	70	3,984	6,046	10,030
Lemoore NAS	Navy	93246	Fresno	40	6,005	7,240	13,245
Los Angeles AFB	Air Force	90245	Los Angeles	10	1,416	1,988	3,404
March AFB	Air Force	92518	San Bernardino	21	289	513	802
MCAS Miramar	Marine Corps	92145	San Diego	10	8,206	7,622	15,828
Naval Medical Center San Diego	Navy	92134	San Diego	0	3,552	4,480	8,032
Naval Postgraduate School	Navy	93943	Monterey	0	769	1,252	2,021
North Island NAS	Navy	92135	San Diego	4	8,465	10,665	19,130
Port Hueneme NCBC	Navy	93043	Los Angeles	60	3,105	4,307	7,412
Presidio of Monterey	Army	93944	Monterey	0	3,485	2,855	6,340
Pt Mugu NAS	Navy	93042	Oxnard	7	1259	1,689	2,948
San Diego MC Recruit Depot	Marine Corps	92140	San Diego	2	6,906	2,549	9,455
San Diego NAVSTA	Navy	92136	San Diego	0	30,255	33,228	63,483
San Diego NAVSUBBASE	Navy	92106	San Diego	5	1,325	2,156	3,481
San Diego NSC	Navy	92136	San Diego	0	242	425	667
Seal Beach NAVWEAPSTA	Navy	90740	Long Beach	1	217	354	571
Travis AFB	Air Force	94535	San Francisco	45	6,375	7,723	14,098
USMC Mountain Warfare Training	Marine Corps	93517	Sacramento	100	176	267	443
Vandenberg AFB	Air Force	93437	Santa Barbara	55	2,456	3,105	5,561
(C2) Sacramento Army Depot	Army	95828	Sacramento	0	278	643	921
Other					4,748	6,517	11,265
California Total					**156,345**	**163,663**	**320,008**
COLORADO							
Buckley AFB	Air Force	80011	Aurora	0	2,434	3,192	5,626
Fort Carson	Army	80913	Colorado Springs	6	24,373	34,790	59,163
Peterson AFB	Air Force	80914	Colorado Springs	6	3,590	6,247	9,837
Schriever AFB	Air Force	80912	Colorado Springs	10	1,805	2,388	4,193
USAF Academy	Air Force	80840	Colorado Springs	8	1,941	3,189	5,130
Other					1,039	2,056	3,095
Colorado Total					**35,182**	**51,862**	**87,044**
CONNECTICUT							
New London NAVSUBBASE	Navy	06349	Hartford	50	6,249	7,511	13,760
Other					174	361	535
Connecticut Total					**6,423**	**7,872**	**14,295**
DELAWARE							
Dover AFB	Air Force	19902	Dover	5	3,402	4,256	7,658
Other					30	60	90
Delaware Total					**3,432**	**4,316**	**7,748**

* Bases with fewer than 100 Active Duty Sponsors are included in the Other category for their State.

** Nearest Metro City listed has population greater than 50,000.

*** "NMC" stands for Nearest Metro City.

**** United States Other includes personnel within the United States, but with unknown base and state.

Note: The Sponsor column includes all Active Duty military personnel at each base. "C" refers to bases that have been closed. The number following "C" refers to the base realignment and closure (BRAC) round in which the base was closed.

Base*	Service Branch	Zip Code	Nearest Metro City (NMC)**	Miles to NMC***	Total Sponsors	Total Dependents	Total Personnel
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA							
Fort Lesley J McNair	Army	20319	Washington D.C.	0	985	2,415	3,400
Joint Base Anacostia-Bolling	DoD	20332	Washington D.C.	0	2,265	3,665	5,930
Marine Barracks, Washington, D.C.	Marine Corps	20390	Washington D.C.	0	1,489	1,865	3,354
Walter Reed Army Medical Center	Army	20307	Washington D.C.	0	232	458	690
Washington NAVDIST HQ	Navy	20374	Washington D.C.	0	3,200	5,239	8,439
Other					2,637	2,955	5,592
District of Columbia Total					**10,808**	**16,597**	**27,405**
FLORIDA							
Blount Island	Marine Corps	32226	Jacksonville	0	122	235	357
Corry Station NTTC	Navy	32511	Pensacola	5	2,416	1,601	4,017
Eglin AFB	Air Force	32542	Pensacola	40	8,354	12,319	20,673
Hurlburt Field	Air Force	32544	Pensacola	35	7,897	10,348	18,245
Jacksonville NAS	Navy	32212	Jacksonville	9	6,733	9,709	16,442
Key West NAS	Navy	33040	Miami	150	770	1,103	1,873
Macdill AFB	Air Force	33621	Tampa	5	5,627	10,147	15,774
Mayport NAVSTA	Navy	32228	Jacksonville	10	9,063	12,790	21,853
Nav Coastal Systems Ctr	Navy	32407	Panama City	0	513	854	1,367
Naval Hospital Pensacola	Navy	32512	Pensacola	0	798	1,006	1,804
NSA Orlando	Navy	32826	Orlando	0	149	316	465
Patrick AFB	Air Force	32925	Orlando	45	1,479	2,286	3,765
Pensacola NAS	Navy	32508	Pensacola	8	7,189	5,671	12,860
Southern Command	Army	33172	Miami	0	762	1,510	2,272
Tyndall AFB	Air Force	32403	Panama City	12	3,426	4,510	7,936
Whiting Field NAS	Navy	32570	Pensacola	30	1,078	961	2,039
(C3) Homestead AFB	Air Force	33039	Miami	30	320	560	880
Other					2,391	4,685	7,076
Florida Total					**59,087**	**80,611**	**139,698**
GEORGIA							
Albany MCLB	Marine Corps	31704	Albany	3	293	621	914
Fort Benning	Army	31905	Columbus	5	20,416	21,038	41,454
Fort Gordon	Army	30905	Augusta	12	11,764	15,141	26,905
Fort Stewart	Army	31314	Savannah	35	19,691	27,890	47,581
Kings Bay NAVSUBBASE	Navy	31547	Jacksonville, FL	40	2,699	3,833	6,532
Moody AFB	Air Force	31699	Valdosta	10	4,426	5,540	9,966
Robins AFB	Air Force	31098	Macon	15	3,368	4,915	8,283
Other					1,306	2,788	4,094
Georgia Total					**63,963**	**81,766**	**145,729**
HAWAII							
Camp H. M. Smith	Marine Corps	96861	Honolulu	10	1,197	2,418	3,615
Fort Shafter	Army	96858	Honolulu	7	3,071	5,762	8,833
Hickam AFB	Air Force	96853	Honolulu	9	5,204	7,399	12,603

* Bases with fewer than 100 Active Duty Sponsors are included in the Other category for their State.
** Nearest Metro City listed has population greater than 50,000.
*** "NMC" stands for Nearest Metro City.
**** United States Other includes personnel within the United States, but with unknown base and state.
Note: The Sponsor column includes all Active Duty military personnel at each base. "C" refers to bases that have been closed. The number following "C" refers to the base realignment and closure (BRAC) round in which the base was closed.

Base*	Service Branch	Zip Code	Nearest Metro City (NMC)**	Miles to NMC***	Total Sponsors	Total Dependents	Total Personnel
MCBH Kaneohe Bay	Marine Corps	96863	Honolulu	14	8,580	7,317	15,897
Naval Base Pearl Harbor	Navy	96860	Honolulu	6	10,470	12,064	22,534
Navcams E. Pacific	Navy	96786	Honolulu	21	593	549	1,142
Schofield Barracks	Army	96857	Honolulu	20	15,922	21,243	37,165
Tripler Army Medical Center	Army	96859	Honolulu	3	1,802	2,788	4,590
Other					719	1,214	1,933
Hawaii Total					**47,558**	**60,754**	**108,312**
IDAHO							
Mountain Home AFB	Air Force	83648	Boise	50	3,303	3,861	7,164
Other					131	316	447
Idaho Total					**3,434**	**4,177**	**7,611**
ILLINOIS							
Naval Station Great Lakes	Navy	60088	Chicago	30	15,005	6,184	21,189
Rock Island Arsenal	Army	61201	Davenport, IA	4	361	890	1,251
Scott AFB	Air Force	62225	St. Louis, MO	23	4,557	7,738	12,295
Other					704	1,541	2,245
Illinois Total					**20,627**	**16,353**	**36,980**
INDIANA							
DFAS Indianapolis Center	DoD	46226	Indianapolis	14	129	266	395
(C2) Fort Benjamin Harrison	Army	46216	Indianapolis	14	346	932	1,278
Other					433	933	1,366
Indiana Total					**908**	**2,131**	**3,039**
IOWA							
Other					212	463	675
Iowa Total					**212**	**463**	**675**
KANSAS							
Fort Leavenworth	Army	66027	Kansas City	30	3,435	7,432	10,867
Fort Riley	Army	66442	Topeka	50	15,651	20,682	36,333
McConnell AFB	Air Force	67221	Wichita	6	2,908	3,586	6,494
Other					171	398	569
Kansas Total					**22,165**	**32,098**	**54,263**
KENTUCKY							
Fort Campbell	Army	42223	Nashville	50	27,532	38,441	65,973
Fort Knox	Army	40121	Louisville	25	4,977	7,053	12,030
Other					431	1,045	1,476
Kentucky Total					**32,940**	**46,539**	**79,479**
LOUISIANA							
Barksdale AFB	Air Force	71110	Shreveport	1	5,214	6,900	12,114
Fort Polk	Army	71459	Alexandria	60	7,944	10,821	18,765
New Orleans NAS JRB	Navy	70143	New Orleans	0	368	504	872

* Bases with fewer than 100 Active Duty Sponsors are included in the Other category for their State.
** Nearest Metro City listed has population greater than 50,000.
*** "NMC" stands for Nearest Metro City.
**** United States Other includes personnel within the United States, but with unknown base and state.
Note: The Sponsor column includes all Active Duty military personnel at each base. "C" refers to bases that have been closed. The number following "C" refers to the base realignment and closure (BRAC) round in which the base was closed.

Base*	Service Branch	Zip Code	Nearest Metro City (NMC)**	Miles to NMC***	Total Sponsors	Total Dependents	Total Personnel
Other					910	1,612	2,522
Louisiana Total					**14,436**	**19,837**	**34,273**
MAINE							
Other					226	489	715
Maine Total					**226**	**489**	**715**
MARYLAND							
Aberdeen Proving Ground	Army	21005	Baltimore	23	903	1,935	2,838
Andrews AFB	Air Force	20762	Washington D.C.	10	4,205	5,839	10,044
Annapolis NS (Incl. USNA)	Navy	21402	Annapolis	0	1,282	1,901	3,183
Fort Detrick	Army	21702	Washington D.C.	50	1,013	1,954	2,967
Fort George G. Meade	Army	20755	Baltimore	15	11,206	15,637	26,843
Indian Head NAV ORD STA	Navy	20640	Washington D.C.	25	566	620	1,186
NNMC Bethesda	Navy	20889	Washington D.C.	1	3,993	5,672	9,665
Patuxent River NAS	Navy	20670	Washington D.C.	65	2,254	4,215	6,469
(C4) White Oak NSWC Dahlgren	Navy	20903	Washington D.C.	5	571	865	1,436
Other					1,465	2,358	3,823
Maryland Total					**27,458**	**40,996**	**68,454**
MASSACHUSETTS							
Hanscom AFB	Air Force	01731	Boston	20	809	1,105	1,914
Westover ARB AFB	Air Force	01022	Springfield	10	151	251	402
(C4) South Weymouth NAS	Navy	02190	Boston	0	267	393	660
Other					660	1,227	1,887
Massachusetts Total					**1,887**	**2,976**	**4,863**
MICHIGAN							
Detroit Arsenal	Army	48092	Warren	0	125	342	467
Other					805	1,808	2,613
Michigan Total					**930**	**2,150**	**3,080**
MINNESOTA							
Fort Snelling	Army	55111	Minneapolis	0	257	559	816
Other					232	573	805
Minnesota Total					**489**	**1,132**	**1,621**
MISSISSIPPI							
Camp Shelby	Air Force	39407	Hattiesburg	10	311	869	1,180
Columbus AFB	Air Force	39710	Columbus	10	1,351	1,358	2,709
Gulfport NCBC	Navy	39501	New Orleans	70	2,672	3,579	6,251
Keesler AFB	Air Force	39534	Biloxi	0	4,951	4,416	9,367
Meridian NAS	Navy	39309	Meridian	15	939	686	1,625
Pascagoula NAVSTA	Navy	39595	Mobile, AL	30	549	840	1,389
Other					773	1061	1834
Mississippi Total					**11,546**	**12,809**	**24,355**

* Bases with fewer than 100 Active Duty Sponsors are included in the Other category for their State.
** Nearest Metro City listed has population greater than 50,000.
*** "NMC" stands for Nearest Metro City.
**** United States Other includes personnel within the United States, but with unknown base and state.
Note: The Sponsor column includes all Active Duty military personnel at each base. "C" refers to bases that have been closed. The number following "C" refers to the base realignment and closure (BRAC) round in which the base was closed.

Base*	Service Branch	Zip Code	Nearest Metro City (NMC)**	Miles to NMC***	Total Sponsors	Total Dependents	Total Personnel
MISSOURI							
Fort Leonard Wood	Army	65473	Springfield	85	12,567	11,048	23,615
Naval Research Center St. Louis	Navy	63044	St. Louis	10	290	550	840
Whiteman AFB	Air Force	65305	Kansas City	60	3,737	4,512	8,249
Other					585	1106	1691
Missouri Total					**17,179**	**17,216**	**34,395**
MONTANA							
Malmstrom AFB	Air Force	59402	Great Falls	2	3,223	3,672	6,895
Other					101	234	335
Montana Total					**3,324**	**3,906**	**7,230**
NEBRASKA							
Offutt AFB	Air Force	68113	Omaha	8	6,120	8,738	14,858
Other					166	400	566
Nebraska Total					**6,286**	**9,138**	**15,424**
NEVADA							
Fallon NAS	Navy	89496	Reno	70	883	1,080	1,963
Nellis AFB	Air Force	89191	Las Vegas	8	9,786	12,206	21,992
Other					188	446	634
Nevada Total					**10,857**	**13,732**	**24,589**
NEW HAMPSHIRE							
Pease AGB	Air Force	03801	Portsmouth	0	124	229	353
Portsmouth Naval Shipyard	Navy	03804	Portsmouth	0	1075	1,349	2,424
Other					91	188	279
New Hampshire Total					**1,290**	**1,766**	**3,056**
NEW JERSEY							
Earle NAVWEAPSTA	Navy	07722	Newark	50	239	404	643
Fort Dix	Army	08640	Trenton	17	827	1,775	2,602
McGuire AFB	Air Force	08641	Trenton	18	4,321	5,329	9,650
Picatinny Arsenal	Army	07806	Newark	30	124	273	397
(C4) Lakehurst Naval Air Engineering Center	Navy	08733	Philadelphia, PA	57	276	469	745
Other					269	525	794
New Jersey Total					**6,056**	**8,775**	**14,831**
NEW MEXICO							
Cannon AFB	Air Force	88103	Clovis	7	4,681	4,950	9,631
Holloman AFB	Air Force	88330	Las Cruces	50	3,897	4,599	8,496
Kirtland AFB	Air Force	87117	Albuquerque	4	3,287	4,336	7,623
White Sands Missile Range	Army	88002	El Paso, TX	45	375	566	941
Other					184	415	599
New Mexico Total					**12,424**	**14,866**	**27,290**

* Bases with fewer than 100 Active Duty Sponsors are included in the Other category for their State.
** Nearest Metro City listed has population greater than 50,000.
*** "NMC" stands for Nearest Metro City.
**** United States Other includes personnel within the United States, but with unknown base and state.
Note: The Sponsor column includes all Active Duty military personnel at each base. "C" refers to bases that have been closed. The number following "C" refers to the base realignment and closure (BRAC) round in which the base was closed.

Base*	Service Branch	Zip Code	Nearest Metro City (NMC)**	Miles to NMC***	Total Sponsors	Total Dependents	Total Personnel
NEW YORK							
1st Marine Corps District	Marine Corps	11530	New York	25	384	656	1,040
Fort Drum	Army	13602	Watertown	8	15,136	18,612	33,748
Fort Hamilton	Army	11252	New York	0	184	396	580
Scotia Naval Admin Ballston	Navy	12302	Schenectady	3	1,789	1,293	3,082
Stewart Newburgh USARC	Army	12550	New York	60	230	266	496
Watervliet Arsenal	Army	12189	Troy	1	119	287	406
West Point MILRES	Army	10996	New York	50	1,518	2,863	4,381
Other					942	1,839	2,781
New York Total					**20,302**	**26,212**	**46,514**
NORTH CAROLINA							
Camp Lejeune MCB	Marine Corps	28542	Jacksonville	3	37,084	33,092	70,176
Cherry Point MCAS	Marine Corps	28533	Moorehead City	20	6,400	6,403	12,803
Cherry Point Naval Aviation	Navy	28533	Moorehead City	20	305	440	745
Fort Bragg	Army	28307	Fayetteville	10	45,379	66,627	112,006
New River MCAS	Marine Corps	28545	Jacksonville	2	5,763	5,588	11,351
Pope AFB	Air Force	28308	Fayetteville	12	1,616	2,356	3,972
Seymour Johnson AFB	Air Force	27531	Raleigh	50	4,378	5,160	9,538
Other					1,767	2,899	4,666
North Carolina Total					**102,692**	**122,565**	**225,257**
NORTH DAKOTA							
Grand Forks AFB	Air Force	58205	Grand Forks	15	1,679	1,859	3,538
Minot AFB	Air Force	58705	Minot	13	5,564	5,551	11,115
Other					46	106	152
North Dakota Total					**7,289**	**7,516**	**14,805**
OHIO							
Columbus Def Depot	Army	43216	Columbus	0	203	451	654
Wright-Patterson AFB	Air Force	45433	Dayton	10	5,410	8,429	13,839
Other					928	2,087	3,015
Ohio Total					**6,541**	**10,967**	**17,508**
OKLAHOMA							
Altus AFB	Air Force	73523	Oklahoma City	120	1,333	1,691	3,024
Fort Sill	Army	73503	Oklahoma City	90	11,739	12,636	24,375
Tinker AFB	Air Force	73145	Oklahoma City	12	5,868	7,862	13,730
Vance AFB	Air Force	73705	Oklahoma City	90	1,248	1,192	2,440
Other					267	567	834
Oklahoma Total					**20,455**	**23,948**	**44,403**
OREGON							
Other					**532**	**1,035**	**1,567**
Oregon Total					532	1035	1,567

* Bases with fewer than 100 Active Duty Sponsors are included in the Other category for their State.
** Nearest Metro City listed has population greater than 50,000.
*** "NMC" stands for Nearest Metro City.
**** United States Other includes personnel within the United States, but with unknown base and state.
Note: The Sponsor column includes all Active Duty military personnel at each base. "C" refers to bases that have been closed. The number following "C" refers to the base realignment and closure (BRAC) round in which the base was closed.

Base*	Service Branch	Zip Code	Nearest Metro City (NMC)**	Miles to NMC***	Total Sponsors	Total Dependents	Total Personnel
PENNSYLVANIA							
Carlisle Barracks	Army	17013	Harrisburg	18	515	1,430	1,945
Defense Distribution Depot Susquehanna	Army	17070	Philadelphia	60	260	591	851
Defense Supply Ctr Philadelphia	DoD	19111	Philadelphia	0	362	721	1083
Navy Ships Parts Control Center	Navy	17055	Harrisburg	10	148	293	441
Pittsburgh MEPS / ENDIST	Army	15222	Pittsburgh	0	282	530	812
Other					703	1,524	2,227
Pennsylvania Total					**2,270**	**5,089**	**7,359**
RHODE ISLAND							
Naval Station Newport	Navy	02841	Newport	0	2,920	3,956	6,876
Other					156	387	543
Rhode Island Total					**3,076**	**4,343**	**7,419**
SOUTH CAROLINA							
Beaufort MCAS	Marine Corps	29904	Savannah, GA	40	3,386	3,756	7,142
Charleston AFB	Air Force	29404	Charleston	10	3,541	4,489	8,030
Fort Jackson	Army	29207	Columbia	0	11,183	8,799	19,982
Navy Weapons Station, Charleston	Navy	29445	Charleston	25	5,938	3,931	9,869
Parris Island MCRD	Marine Corps	29905	Savannah, GA	43	7,063	2,868	9,931
Shaw AFB	Air Force	29152	Sumter	10	5,024	6,988	12,012
(C3) Charleston NAVSTA	Navy	29408	Charleston	0	242	456	698
Other					1,032	790	1,822
South Carolina Total					**37,409**	**32,077**	**69,486**
SOUTH DAKOTA							
Ellsworth AFB	Air Force	57706	Rapid City	3	3,286	3,768	7,054
Other					73	172	245
South Dakota Total					**3,359**	**3,940**	**7,299**
TENNESSEE							
Naval Support Activity Mid-South	Navy	38053	Memphis	22	575	1,184	1,759
Other					1,456	3,304	4,760
Tennessee Total					**2,031**	**4,488**	**6,519**
TEXAS							
Corpus Christi NAS	Navy	78419	Corpus Christi	10	1,335	1,213	2,548
Dyess AFB	Air Force	79607	Abilene	6	4,409	5,511	9,920
Fort Bliss	Army	79916	El Paso	0	25,291	34,907	60,198
Fort Hood	Army	76544	Killeen	0	35,308	47,995	83,303
Fort Sam Houston	Army	78234	San Antonio	0	10,735	15,695	26,430
Goodfellow AFB	Air Force	76904	San Angelo	2	3,291	2,705	5,996
Kingsville NAS	Navy	78363	Corpus Christi	50	255	435	690
Lackland AFB	Air Force	78236	San Antonio	5	21,024	19,315	40,339
Laughlin AFB	Air Force	78843	Del Rio	6	1,282	1,134	2,416

* Bases with fewer than 100 Active Duty Sponsors are included in the Other category for their State.
** Nearest Metro City listed has population greater than 50,000.
*** "NMC" stands for Nearest Metro City.
**** United States Other includes personnel within the United States, but with unknown base and state.
Note: The Sponsor column includes all Active Duty military personnel at each base. "C" refers to bases that have been closed. The number following "C" refers to the base realignment and closure (BRAC) round in which the base was closed.

Base*	Service Branch	Zip Code	Nearest Metro City (NMC)**	Miles to NMC***	Total Sponsors	Total Dependents	Total Personnel
NAS JRB Fort Worth	Navy	76127	Fort Worth	0	875	1,303	2,178
Randolph AFB	Air Force	78150	San Antonio	5	2,736	4,720	7,456
Sheppard AFB	Air Force	76311	Wichita Falls	5	6,522	3,938	10,460
Other					3,632	7,401	11,033
Texas Total					**116,695**	**146,272**	**262,967**
UTAH							
Hill AFB	Air Force	84056	Ogden	6	3,866	5,664	9,530
Other					321	781	1,102
Utah Total					**4,187**	**6,445**	**10,632**
VERMONT							
Other					127	202	329
Vermont Total					**127**	**202**	**329**
VIRGINIA							
Dam Neck Training Center Atlantic	Navy	23461	Virginia Beach	4	3,373	5,137	8,510
Fort Belvoir	Army	22060	Washington D.C.	10	4,430	8,683	13,113
Fort Eustis	Army	23604	Newport News	13	5,242	8,100	13,342
Fort Lee	Army	23801	Petersburg	3	9,004	9,424	18,428
Fort Myer	Army	22211	Washington D.C.	1	2,090	2,863	4,953
Fort Story	Army	23459	Virginia Beach	3	8,149	12,375	20,524
Headquarters, Marine Corps	Marine Corps	22214	Washington D.C.	1	139	212	351
Langley AFB	Air Force	23665	Hampton Roads	2	7,005	9,383	16,388
Little Creek Nav Amphib Base	Navy	23521	Norfolk	0	1,073	932	2,005
MCCDC Quantico VA	Marine Corps	22134	Washington D.C.	35	7,981	10,567	18,548
Naval Medical Center Portsmouth	Navy	23708	Norfolk	2	2,646	3,622	6,268
NAVSURFWEAPCEN Dahlgren	Navy	22448	Fredericksburg	23	741	1,025	1,766
Norfolk Naval Base	Navy	23505	Norfolk	0	46,687	55,785	102,472
Norfolk Naval Safety Center	Navy	23511	Norfolk	0	476	577	1,053
Norfolk Naval Shipyard	Navy	23709	Norfolk	3	105	213	318
NSA Northwest Annex	Navy	23322	Chesapeake	0	560	720	1,280
Oceana NAS	Navy	23460	Virginia Beach	0	5,547	6,708	12,255
Pentagon	DoD	20301	Washington D.C.	2	7,604	17,448	25,052
Richmond Defense Depot	Army	23297	Richmond	0	282	533	815
Yorktown Navy Weapon Station	Navy	23691	Newport News	2	1,134	1,624	2,758
Other					6,547	12,866	19,413
Virginia Total					**120,815**	**168,797**	**289,612**
WASHINGTON							
Fairchild AFB	Air Force	99011	Spokane	18	2,954	3,765	6,719
Fort Lewis	Army	98433	Tacoma	12	26,883	38,887	65,770
McChord AFB	Air Force	98438	Tacoma	9	2,893	3,715	6,608
Naval Base Kitsap-Bangor	Navy	98315	Bremerton	16	5,864	7,481	13,345
Naval Base Kitsap-Bremerton	Navy	98337	Bremerton	0	7,011	6,951	13,962

* Bases with fewer than 100 Active Duty Sponsors are included in the Other category for their State.

** Nearest Metro City listed has population greater than 50,000.

*** "NMC" stands for Nearest Metro City.

**** United States Other includes personnel within the United States, but with unknown base and state.

Note: The Sponsor column includes all Active Duty military personnel at each base. "C" refers to bases that have been closed. The number following "C" refers to the base realignment and closure (BRAC) round in which the base was closed.

Base*	Service Branch	Zip Code	Nearest Metro City (NMC)**	Miles to NMC***	Total Sponsors	Total Dependents	Total Personnel
Naval Hospital Bremerton	Navy	98312	Bremerton	1	671	882	1,553
Naval Station Everett	Navy	98207	Seattle	25	2,118	2,576	4,694
Whidbey Island NAS	Navy	98278	Seattle	80	6,906	8,330	15,236
Other					912	1,956	2,868
Washington Total					**56,212**	**74,543**	**130,755**
WEST VIRGINIA							
Other					122	264	386
West Virginia Total					**122**	**264**	**386**
WISCONSIN							
Fort McCoy	Army	54656	La Crosse	43	265	687	952
Other					416	913	1,329
Wisconsin Total					**681**	**1,600**	**2,281**
WYOMING							
Francis E Warren AFB	Air Force	82005	Cheyenne	0	3,075	3,802	6,877
Other					64	122	186
Wyoming Total					**3,139**	**3,924**	**7,063**
UNITED STATES							
United States Other**					5,963	5,003	10,966
United States Total					**1,141,358**	**1,435,655**	**2,577,013**

Source: DMDC Active Duty Family Sponsors & Eligible Dependents Report by Base (September 2017)

* Bases with fewer than 100 Active Duty Sponsors are included in the Other category for their State.
** Nearest Metro City listed has population greater than 50,000.
*** "NMC" stands for Nearest Metro City.
**** United States Other includes personnel within the United States, but with unknown base and state.
Note: The Sponsor column includes all Active Duty military personnel at each base. "C" refers to bases that have been closed. The number following "C" refers to the base realignment and closure (BRAC) round in which the base was closed.

APPENDIX C

Invitation to Participate

Study: From the Battlefield to the Classroom: An Exploration of Northern California's Post-9/11 Female Combat Veterans Who Completed Graduate School After Military Service

June ____, 2021

Dear Prospective Study Participant:

You are invited to participate in a multiple case study to explore the lived experiences of female military veterans who served in Operation Enduring Freedom or Operation Iraqi Freedom and completed graduate level education after leaving service subsequent to between 2002 and 2021 with respect to Schlossberg's transition theory focused on situation, self, support, and strategies. The main investigator of this study is Arthur Littler III, Doctoral Candidate in University of Massachusetts Global Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership program. You were chosen to participate in this study because you meet the aforementioned criteria.

Six veterans 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 OF STUDY: The purpose of this multiple case study is to explore and describe the lived experiences of female military veterans who served in Operation Enduring Freedom or Operation Iraqi Freedom and completed graduate level education after leaving service, using the Schlossberg transition model factors of situation, self, support, and strategies.

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 [redacted]@mail.umassglobal.edu. You can also contact Dr. Timothy McCarty by email at tmccarty@umassglobal.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, University of Massachusetts Global, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, (949) 341-7641.

Respectfully,

Arthur Littler III

Arthur Littler III
Doctoral Candidate, University of Massachusetts Global

APPENDIX D

Informational Letter for Research Subjects

25 May 2021

Dear Study Participant:

I am a doctoral candidate at University of Massachusetts Global, who is conducting a study on how female combat veterans transitioned from military service and successfully completed graduate level education. This study will be explored using Schlossberg's Transition Theory and 4-S model focusing on situation, self, support, and strategies.

I am asking your assistance in the study by participating in an interview which will take from 30 to 60 minutes and will be set up at a time convenient for you. If you agree to participate in an interview, you may be assured that it will be completely confidential. No names will be attached to any notes or records from the interview. All information will remain in locked files accessible only to the researcher. No one else will have access to the interview or information. You will be free to stop the interview and withdraw from the study at any time. Further, you may be assured that the researcher is not in any way affiliated with your applicable supervisory organization.

The research director, Arthur Littler III, is available in office at [redacted], to answer any questions you may have. Your participation would be greatly valued.

Sincerely,

Arthur Littler III

Arthur Littler III, MPA

University of Massachusetts Global Doctoral Candidate

APPENDIX E

Research Participant's Bill of Rights

BRANDMAN University Chapman University System

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

Informed Consent

UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTES GLOBAL
16355 LAGUNA CANYON ROAD
IRVINE, CA 92618

RESEARCH STUDY TITLE: From the Battlefield to the Classroom: An Exploration of Northern California's Post-9/11 Female Combat Veterans Who Completed Graduate School After Military Service
RESPONSIBILITY INVESTIGATOR: Arthur Littler III, Doctoral Candidate
TITLE OF CONSENT FORM: Consent to Participate in Research
PURPOSE OF STUDY: The purpose of this multiple case study is to explore and describe the lived experiences of female military veterans who served in Operation Enduring Freedom or Operation Iraqi Freedom and completed graduate-level education after leaving service, using the Schlossberg transition model factors of situation, self, support, and strategies.
PROCEDURES: In participating in this research study, I agree to partake in an audio recorded, semi-structured interview. The interview will take place virtually via Zoom 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 to 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 virtually 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 Arthur Littler III, University of Massachusetts Global Doctoral Candidate. I understand that Mr. Littler may be contacted by phone at [redacted] or email at [redacted]@mail.umassglobal.edu. The dissertation chairperson may also answer questions: Dr. Timothy McCarty at [redacted]@umassglobal.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, University of Massachusetts Global, 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**

University of Massachusetts Global IRB 2021

APPENDIX G

Interview Script

Interviewer: Arthur Littler III

Interview time planned: Approximately one hour

Interview place: Virtually Private Zoom meeting

Recording: Zoom Recording

Written: Field and observational notes

Interview Script

My name is Arthur Littler and I am a doctoral candidate at University of Massachusetts Global in the area of Organizational Leadership. As part of my dissertation, I am interviewing post-9/11 female combat veterans who completed graduate-level education post military service. The purpose of the interview is to help describe the lived experiences of post-9/11 female combat veterans as they completed graduate school based on Schlossberg's Transition Theory. This interview will e.

The questions are written to elicit this information. The interview will take approximately one hour and will include 10 main questions with some follow-up questions, as needed. I am conducting approximately 6 interviews with post-9/11 female combat veterans to understand their lived experiences while they completed graduate-level education. The information you provide, along with historical and archival data, will provide a better understanding of the situation you faced, your perceived conceptualization of self, the support your received, and strategies you employed to complete graduate-level education and will add to the body of research currently available, of which there is very little regarding post-9/11 female combat veterans who hold graduate degrees.

Furthermore, the questions I will be asking are the same for everyone participating in the study. I will be reading most of what I say. The reason being is to ensure and guarantee, as much as possible, that my interviews with all 6 participants will be conducted in a consistent manner.

I want to thank you for participating in this interview.

Informed Consent (required for Dissertation Research)

Leading to this interview we conversed over the phone to determine your willingness to participate and whether you met the criteria to be a participant in this study. Once we confirmed you met the criteria to be a participant in this study, you then received an invite letter via email outlining the interview process. I understand that some of the responses might be sensitive, but I assure you that your answers will be confidential for the purpose of this study. We will begin with reviewing the Interview Process, Informed Consent Form, University of Massachusetts Global 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 Zoom recording, to ensure accurate recording of your responses, 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 Zoom recording of the interview. Finally, I will stop the recording and conclude our interview session. After your interview is transcribed, you will receive a copy of the complete transcripts to ensure I have accurately captured your thoughts and ideas prior to the data being analyzed. The digital recording will be erased following review and approval of the transcription. 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?

I would like to remind you any information that is obtained in connection to this study will remain confidential. All of the data will be reported without reference to any individual(s) or any institution(s). If needed, pseudonyms will be used. After I record and transcribe the data, I will send it to you via email so that you can check to make sure that I have accurately captured your thoughts and ideas.

You receive the Informed Consent and University of Massachusetts Global Bill of Rights in an email I sent you and responded with your approval to participate in the interview. Is this still correct? Before we start, do you have any questions or need clarification about either document? If you do not have questions, would you be so kind to sign the hard copy of the IRB requirements for me to collect?

We have scheduled an hour for the interview. At any point during the interview, you may ask that I skip a particular question or stop the interview altogether. For ease of our discussion and accuracy I will record our conversation as indicated in the Informed Consent.

As I ask you these questions about the lived experiences of your journey to completing graduate-level education, you can reflect upon the four factors of Schlossberg's Transition Theory: situation, self, support, and strategies.

Do you have any questions before we begin? Okay, let's get started, and once again, I thank you very much for your time.

Interview Questions:

I'd like to give you some context for the purpose of this study. This study is focusing on the lived experiences of post-9/11 female combat veterans as they completed graduate-level education through the lens of the 4-S model. The 4-S model is specifically referring to Schlossberg's Transition Theory and the factors of situation, self, support, and strategies. For the purpose of this study: situation encompasses the extent, nature, and assumed significance and readiness for change and transition; self encompasses one's health, socioeconomic status, psychosocial competence, past experience with similar transitions, and value orientation; support encompasses interpersonal support, institutional support, and physical settings; and strategies refers to intentional and thoughtful action, execution, task completion, and course amendment, all whilst completing graduate-level education.

WARM-UP QUESTION: What motivated you to pursue graduate-level education after leaving military service?

Interview Question 1: What conditions served as a critical factor in your decision to complete graduate-level education?
Probe 1: What factors contributed to your choice of graduate school and degree?
Interview Question 2: What were the circumstances that played the most significant role in your decision to separate from military service and pursue your goal of completing graduate school rather than completing graduate school while still serving in the military?
Probe 2: Can you describe your employment situation during graduate school and its impact on completing your graduate-level education?
Interview Question 3: Describe the environment or settings which helped or served as an obstacle to your completion of graduate school.
Probe 3: What steps did you take to establish an effective learning environment for yourself?
Interview Question 4: What role did your social support systems have in your pursuit of completing graduate-level education?
Probe 4: What type of support system did you find to be the most impactful and why?
Interview Question 5: Can you share some examples of how you utilized these support systems to accomplish graduate school?
Probe 5: Were there any support systems that were made available to you that you did not use? Please explain.
Interview Question 6: Describe any assistance you received from a mentor, agency, or specialist that contributed to your completion of graduate school?
Probe 6: Were there any programs or support systems that you felt could have made your journey easier, but were not permitted to use?
Interview Question 7: What were your individual motivators for completing graduate-level education?
Probe 7: Can you provide more insight about your response?
Interview Question 8: What steps did you take during the time between leaving military service and completing your graduate-level education to ensure your success?
Probe 8: How did you develop the skills and knowledge necessary to accomplish graduate school?
Interview Question 9: In what capacity did a service-connected disability play in completing your graduate-level education?
Probe 9: What are some specific examples?
Interview Question 10: What did you do to manage stress throughout your journey to ensure you completed graduate school?
Probe 10: What do you think was the most helpful and why?

Interview Question 11: What were the strategies you used to overcome obstacles to your completion of graduate school?
Probe 11: Were some of these strategies or coping mechanisms more difficult to implement or adhere to than others? If so, please explain.
Interview Question 12: How did you develop your personal sense of resiliency needed to complete graduate school?
Probe 12: Can you provide some specific examples?

End of the Interview

This concludes our interview. Once again thank you for volunteering for this study. Do you have any other information that you would like to add or share you feel are relevant to this study? Before data is analyzed you will receive the transcription of our interview via email. After reviewing the transcription, if you see the need to correct or add information, you can email that to me as soon as possible. Thank you very much for your time and support in completing my research!

APPENDIX H

Audio Recording Release & Consent Form

INFORMATION ABOUT: From the Battlefield to the Classroom: An Exploration of Northern California's Post-9/11 Female Combat Veterans Who Completed Graduate School After Military Service

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Arthur Littler III, MPA, Doctoral Candidate

RELEASE: I understand that as part of this study, I am participating in an interview which will be audio recorded as a digital file, per the granting of my permission.
I do not have to agree to have the interview audio recorded. In the event that I do agree to have myself audio recorded, the sole purpose will be to support data collection as part of this study.

The digital audio recording will only be used for this research. Only the researcher and the professional transcriptionist will have access to the audio file. The digital audio file will be destroyed at the end of the study. The written transcription of the audio file will be stored in a locked file drawer and destroyed three years following completion of this study.

I understand that I may refuse to participate in or I may withdraw from this study at any time without any negative consequences. Also, the investigator may stop the study at any time. I also understand that 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 so informed and my consent obtained.

I understand that 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 Vice Chancellor Academic Affairs, University of Massachusetts Global, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618 Telephone (949) 341-7641.

I acknowledge that I have received a copy of this form and the Research participant's Bill of Rights.

CONSENT: I hereby give my permission to Julie Corona to use audio recorded material taken of me during the interview. As with all research consent, I may at any time withdraw permission for audio recording of me to be used in this research study.

Signature of Participant: _____Date: _____

Signature of Principal Investigator: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX I

Field-Test Interviewee Feedback Questions

While conducting the interview, the interviewer should take notes of their clarification request or comments about not being clear about the question. After you complete the interview ask your field-test interviewee the following clarifying questions. **Try not to make it another interview; just have a friendly conversation**. Either script or record their feedback so you can compare with the other two members of your team to develop your feedback report on how to improve the interview questions.

1. How did you feel about the interview? Do you think you had ample opportunities to describe what you do as a leader when working with your team or staff?

2. Did you feel the amount of time for the interview was ok? Was the pace okay?

3. Were the questions by and large clear or were there places where you were uncertain what was being asked?

4. Can you recall any words or terms being asked about during the interview that were confusing?

5. And finally, did I appear comfortable during the interview . . . (I'm pretty new at this)?

APPENDIX J

Interview Feedback Reflection Questions for Both the Interviewer and the Observer

Conducting interviews is a learned skill and research experience. Gaining valuable insight about your interview skills and affect with the interview will support your data gathering when interviewing the actual participants. Complete the form independently from each other, then discuss your responses. Sharing your thoughts will provide valuable insight into improving the interview process.

1. How long did the interview take? Did the time seem to be appropriate? Did the respondents have ample opportunities to respond to questions?

2. Were the questions clear or were there places where the interviewees were unclear?

3. Were there any words or terms used during the interview that were unclear or confusing to the interviewees?

4. How did you feel during the interview? Comfortable? Nervous? For the observer: How did the interviewer appear during the interview? Comfortable? Nervous?

5. Did you feel prepared to conduct the interview? Is there something you could have done to be better prepared? For the observer: From your observation did the interviewer appear prepared to conduct the interview?

6. What parts of the interview went the most smoothly and why do you think that was the case?

7. What parts of the interview seemed to struggle and why do you think that was the case?

8. If you were to change any part of the interview, what would that part be and how would you change it?

9. What suggestions do you have for improving the overall process?

APPENDIX K

Alignment Chart

Purpose statement	Central research question	Research subquestions	Interview questions
The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore and describe the transition experiences of female military veterans regarding their graduate-level education program after leaving service, using *the Schlossberg transition factors of* *1. situation,* *2. self,* *3. support,* *4. and strategy.*	What are the transition experiences of female combat veterans using the Schlossberg transition model factors of situation, self, support, and strategies?	Warm Up Question for which no data are collected All other research questions have data that leads to themes to support the RQ.	**Warm-up question** What motivated you to pursue graduate-level education after leaving military service? Define and discuss the elements of the 4-S model as defined by Schlossberg **Closing question** Are there are final insights you feel are relevant to this study that you would like to share?
		1. What were the situational transition experience (situation encompasses the extent, nature, and assumed significance and readiness for change and transition) factors that female military veterans described experiencing while planning for their graduate-level	Interview Question 1: As you considered your graduate degree, what were the factors that you considered as you determined your chosen degree program? Probe 1a: [Significance] Share with me your thoughts about goals for obtaining this degree? Changed a few words- your choice about how to state. Did not want it to sound like an interrogation. Why, can do that? Probe 1b: [Nature - planned and unplanned] Share with me

		education after leaving military service?	the circumstances you considered when applying for this degree program. Word choice Probe 1c: [Extent] What were your time or duration considerations for this graduate degree? Probe 1d: Were there other situational factors that you considered? Interview Question 2: What were the circumstances that played the most significant role in your decision to separate from military service? Probe 2a: What were the most challenging transition changes for you?
		2. What self-characteristics (one's self, such as one's health, socioeconomic status, psychosocial competence, past experience with similar transitions, and value orientation) do female veterans describe that affected their ability to complete graduate education after leaving military service?	Interview Question 3: As part of this transition to a graduate-level degree program, what were your considerations and experiences with personal factors such as: • your physical health • mental well-being, • financial health and status, • and past experiences with similar transitions Probe 3a: What kind of financial support aided in your socioeconomic status while completing graduate school?

			Probe 3b: Were there any other personal factors?
		3. What support (interpersonal support, institutional support, and physical settings) do female military veterans describe that helped them to complete their graduate-level education after leaving military service?	Interview Question 4: What role did your support systems have in your pursuit of completing graduate-level education? Probe 4a: Were there any social or institutional support systems that were made available to you that you did not use? Please explain. Interview Question 5: Describe the environment or settings which helped or served as an obstacle to your completion of graduate school. Probe 5a: What steps did you take to establish an effective learning environment for yourself? Interview Question 6: What type of support system did you find to be the most impactful and why? Probe 6a: Can you share some examples of how you utilized these support systems to accomplish graduate school? Interview Question 7: Describe any assistance you received from a mentor, agency, or specialist that contributed to your completion of graduate school?
		4. What were the strategies (intentional and thoughtful action, execution, task completion, and course amendment) that female veterans describe as using as they completed a	Interview Question 8: What were the strategies you used to overcome obstacles to your completion of graduate school? Probe 8a: Were some strategies or coping mechanisms more difficult to implement or adhere to than others? If so, please explain.

		graduate-level education after leaving military service?	Interview Question 9: What did you do to manage stress throughout your journey to ensure you completed graduate school? Probe 9a: What do you think was the most helpful and why? Interview Question 10: What milestones did you establish and strive for during the time between leaving military service and completing your graduate-level education to ensure your success? Probe 10a: Why were those particular milestones essential to your success? Interview Question 11: Were there any changes you made regarding your degree path, concentration, or school of attendance? If so, please explain. Probe 11a: Why did you elect to make these changes and how did it impact your progress?

APPENDIX L

Protecting Human Research Participants Certificate

CERTIFICATE

OF COMPLETION

PHRP Online Training, Inc. certifies that

Arthur Littler

has successfully completed the web-based course
"Protecting Human Research Participants Online Training."

Date Completed: **01/25/2020**
Certification Number: **2827304**

PHRP
Protecting Human Research Participants
Online Training