1-1-2021

Retired Military Officers' Length of Service and Loss of Social Identity in Second Careers

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Walden University
2021

Abstract

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by

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MS, Walden University, 2015

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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February 2022

Abstract

Many past researchers have reported problematic issues and challenges with military personnel transitioning to civilian life and to the civilian workplace. The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of 20 retired military officers who had between 24 and 42 years of military service regarding how they may have experienced the losses of social identity and organizational socialization and how those losses may have impacted their second careers in civilian organizations. Data for this study were collected via semistructured interviews and the use of interview protocols. The conceptual framework consisted of a combination of social identity theory and the theory of organizational socialization; those were the lenses through which the entire study was framed and the collected data were analyzed. The findings of this study indicated that shades of social identity and organizational socialization losses occur, and the losses do have a temporary impact on the participants' second careers in civilian organizations. However, the social identities that made the participants successful in the military made them successful civilians as well. The current military Transition Assistance Program could be revised to include the missing psychological portion of the veteran and retiree transition. The implications for positive social change include addressing the psychological portion of the transition, which includes the potential losses of social identity and organizational socialization, leading to more psychologically successful and aware veterans and retirees.

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Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation to my husband, LtCol Robert B. Thomas, USMC (Ret). While the work presented itself to me naturally, you have always been my inspiration for this journey and research. Without your insistence on beginning college so long ago and your support throughout the years, I would not be here now. I just made it through the most extensive “obstacle course”, just like you said I could! Thank you.

I also dedicate my dissertation to my Mom and Grandma, who taught me how to work hard and for their support throughout my entire educational journey. Thank you.

I would also like to dedicate my dissertation to my partner in this journey, Bethanie Hiramoto. Without your support and commiserating with me on this monster of an expedition, I would not be here. Thank you.

I also dedicate this dissertation to the men and women of the United States military past, present, and future. Thank you for your honor, courage, and commitment to our country, with special recognition of my best friend, MSgt Stevie Massey, USMC.

A special dedication to the Marine Corps for teaching me discipline, to adapt and overcome, and to never quit. Without these instilled characteristics, I would not be who I am or where I am now. Thank you.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost, I would like to extend a huge, eternal thank you to my dissertation Chair, Dr. James Herndon. Thank you for adopting me part of the way into my dissertation journey and getting me over the goal line. You are the best tug boat captain a PhD student could ever ask for! Thank you for answering all of my questions, emails, and last-minute panic attacks, and thank you for your "Herndonisms." I cannot thank you enough, Sir. Thank you also for your service to our country.

Thank you to Dr. Bob Haines for being my extremely detail-oriented Second Committee Member. Your expertise and fine-tuning of my dissertation made it the best it possibly could be, and I will always be grateful to you. Thank you, Sir, and thank you for your service to our country.

Thank you to Dr. Amy Hakim for serving as my URR and being a positive and encouraging voice throughout this process.

I want to thank all of the retired officers that took the time to participate in my study. Without your willingness to answer my many questions, this document would not exist. Thank you for serving me in this journey, as you have served this country for decades. A special thank you to one Marine Corps officer participant for referring most of the other participants! You know who you are, Sir. Thank you.

Finally, thank you to God for allowing me the opportunity and discipline to complete this doctorate journey.

Table of Contents

List of Tables iv

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study 1

Background 3

Problem Statement 4

Purpose of the Study 10

Research Questions 11

Conceptual Framework 11

Nature of the Study 14

Definitions 15

Assumptions 16

Scope and Delimitations 17

Limitations 18

Significance 18

Summary 19

Chapter 2: Literature Review 21

Literature Search Strategy 23

Conceptual Framework 24

Literature Review 25

Social Identity 25

Organizational Socialization 30

Retirement 32

Military Culture 34
Military Transition to Civilian Life 43
Military Retirement 49
Military Personnel in Civilian Careers 56
Summary and Conclusions 59
Chapter 3: Research Method 61
Research Design and Rationale 61
Role of the Researcher 62
Methodology 62
Participant Selection 62
Instrumentation 63
Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection 64
Data Analysis Plan 65
Issues of Trustworthiness 65
Ethical Procedures 67
Summary 68
Chapter 4: Results 70
Setting. 70
Demographics 72
Data Collection 74
Data Analysis 74
Evidence of Trustworthiness 75

Results....76
Summary....178
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations....179
Interpretation of the Findings....181
Implications....198
Limitations of the Study....200
Recommendations for Future Research....202
Conclusion....205
References....207
Appendix A: Sociodemographic Data Collection Form....214
Appendix B: Interview Questions....215

List of Tables

Table 1. Demographics of Research Participants 73

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Retirement is an experience that many people will navigate through during their lifespan. The process of retirement from any organization comes with its own set of unique challenges that retirees must face in the transition from their careers to their next phase of life (Penn & Lent, 2020). Military retirement is the culmination of no less than 20 years of service within any of the U.S. military branches (Age and Service Requirement, 2019). Different than retirees from civilian professions, where civilians transition from a civilian career to a civilian life, the military culture has a distinctive effect on the transition from the comprehensive military culture to civilian life (Atuel & Castro, 2018; Coll et al., 2011; Johnston et al., 2010; Van Maaned & Schein, 1979). The military culture is not merely a workplace culture but a complete way of life for those who serve (Coll et al., 2011; Iraci, 2017; McCormick et al., 2019). Therefore, when military retirees leave military service, they are not just leaving their job but their way of life.

The socialization process for those who join the military begins in what the military branches refer to as *boot camp* (Redmond et al., 2015). Boot camp is only reached by those people or *recruits* who successfully complete a detailed background check and a mental and physical battery of tests (Redmond et al., 2015). During boot camp, civilians are transformed into military personnel. For officers, the process is similar, but unlike enlisted boot camp officer recruits are called *officer candidates*, and they attend Officer Candidate School (OCS; Department of Defense, 2021). Just like enlisted boot camp, a rigorous and thorough socialization operation ensues; however,

unlike enlisted boot camp, officer candidates learn how to lead troops, think strategically, make strategic and executive-level decisions, and take personal responsibility for the people in their charge (Department of Defense, 2021). With few exceptions (such as certain commissioning programs), officer candidates must also have a college degree prior to being commissioned as military officers (Department of Defense, 2018). The basics of either socialization process are the same but diverge where levels of responsibility come into action (Military One Source, 2020). However, all military personnel leave their civilian identities behind to adopt their military identities in order to carry out their missions (Coll et al., 2011). In theoretical terms, these members are creating new social identities and enduring an intense organizational socialization process that creates a new identity within their new organization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Griepentrog et al., 2012; Hogg & Terry, 2000; Kowtha, 2018; Van Dick et al., 2005; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

Based on the theories of social identity and organizational socialization, it could be argued that once military personnel gain their military identities, they exist within those identities for the extent of their length of military service (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Griepentrog et al., 2012; Hogg & Terry, 2000; Kowtha, 2018; Van Dick et al., 2005; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). It could also be argued, based on these theories, that the cultures of the military branches support and maintain the military members' identities, sustaining them on a daily basis, even if these cultures may have changed over the past several decades. For those who make a career in the military, which within the military culture means staying in until or past the 20 years of service necessary to be eligible for

retirement, military members' identities remain monopolized by the culture with each passing year via organizational socialization (Kowtha, 2018; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Therefore, military members' identities remain intact until they choose to leave or retire from military service (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Coll et al., 2011; Griepentrog et al., 2012; Van Dick et al., 2005; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

After military members either make the decision to leave or retire from military service, they must attend what the military branches commonly refer to as the Transition Assistance Program (TAP; U.S. Department of Labor, 2021). The TAP is designed to aid military members in finding a job in civilian life and make them aware of the resources that exist for veterans (U.S. Department of Labor, 2021). The TAP includes various courses and speakers, such as reviewing résumé writing, starting a small business, and applying for Veterans Affairs disability compensation; however, the past and current TAPs have not and do not address anything related to the psychological transition the new veterans and retirees will face (U.S. Department of Labor, 2021). Based on previous research, the length of service may have an influence on how the military-to-civilian transition and the subsequent effects of that transition are characterized (Romaniuk & Kidd, 2018). I conducted the current study to develop a better understanding of this influence and its effects.

Background

Within the U.S. military branches of service, the workplace culture is powerful. Those who join the military and stay for any length of time experience the military culture not as just a workplace culture but as a way of life (Coll et al., 2011; Iraci, 2017;

McCormick et al., 2019). Military boot camp is a psychologically complex and lengthy socialization process that completely immerses former civilians into the military culture, and it is extremely effective at doing so (Coll et al., 2011; Iraci, 2017). Those who stay in the military for any length of time are entirely immersed within the culture during their service (Coll et al., 2011; Iraci, 2017). For those who make a career out of serving in the military, retirement is a known reality they will eventually face when they stay to the 20-year mark; however, some military members decide to serve up to 40 years on active-duty service (Redmond et al., 2015). Regardless of their length of service, all military members know when they enter the military that someday they will leave the military culture and military service, planning their exit via discharge or retirement. Most military members are not prepared for the psychological adjustment that takes place when leaving military service and, more importantly, when leaving the military culture (De Medeiros & Rubinstein, 2016; Griepentrog et al., 2012; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). They are also not prepared for the loss of social identity that occurs (Romaniuk & Kidd, 2018). In the past few decades, the issues with the military-to-civilian adjustment have been recognized and studied in different forms (Johnston et al., 2010; Romaniuk & Kidd, 2018; Taylor et al., 2007).

Problem Statement

Military members have been the focus of numerous past research studies (e.g., Redmond et al., 2015). Within the overall population of military members and veterans is a smaller population of those who serve over 20 years and then retire from military service (Romaniuk & Kidd, 2018). Inside the military retiree group is a unique group of

officers who complete between 24 and 42 years of service. This group of retired military officers had not been addressed by current research; therefore, little was/is understood about this specific population (Romaniuk & Kidd, 2018). Military retirees have been studied, but not those who stay in past the obligatory 20-year retirement mark. One aspect of this population that had lacked research attention was when officers retire and transition to civilian life and work, they lose the social identity they have spent over 2 decades creating and solidifying within the military culture (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Griepentrog et al., 2012; Kowtha, 2018; Michinov et al., 2008; Redmond et al., 2015; Romaniuk & Kidd, 2018; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Another aspect of this population that had yet to be assessed was the impact that losing their social identity had on the officers' civilian secondary careers (Adams et al., 2002; Romaniuk & Kidd, 2018; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

After military officers retire, many of them transition to a civilian career (Johnson et al., 2010). Upon leaving military service and its culture, retirees find themselves entering a completely new and vastly different workplace culture (Johnston et al., 2010; Romaniuk & Kidd, 2018; Stern, 2017; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). In doing so, a conflict occurs in that their former social identity does not automatically fit into their new civilian environment (Romaniuk & Kidd, 2018; Winkler, 2018). A new process of organizational socialization occurs that causes anxiety and psychological discord (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Retirees may attempt to force their previous social identity into their new civilian culture, creating negative consequences. As a result, retirees may struggle psychologically (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Coll et al., 2011; Romaniuk & Kidd,

2018; Taylor et al., 2007; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979; Winkler, 2018). They may experience feelings of insecurity, anxiety, depression, shock, uncertainty, social isolation, loneliness, and vulnerability, among other negative emotions (De Medeiros & Rubinstein, 2016; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979; Winkler, 2018).

In addition to the abovementioned negative emotions experienced by some retirees, various researchers found several different facets of the psychological adjustment that take place after military retirement (Romaniuk & Kidd, 2018; Taylor et al., 2007; Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2010). Some of the predominant facets of negative adjustment include feeling out of place; excluded; and misunderstood or underappreciated for knowledge, skills, and abilities that may or may not fit in the civilian workplaces, among other psychological processes (Romaniuk & Kidd, 2018; Taylor et al., 2007; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979; Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2010). The psychological adjustment stems from multiple areas, but one main reason, in particular, is that the retirees are members of the military and, therefore, the military culture, which is where their social identities were formed and crystallized through intense organizational and collective socialization processes (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Kowtha, 2018; McCormick et al., 2019; Michinov et al. 2008; Redmond et al., 2015; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979)

The military culture has central and necessary tenets of inclusion, teamwork, and being valued at a depth more significant than most civilian workplace cultures (Coll et al., 2011; McCormick et al., 2019; Redmond et al., 2015). Among other cultural differences between military and civilian cultures, the culture in the military extends

beyond the workplace and encompasses military members' entire lives (Redmond et al., 2015; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). The military culture is built upon a multifaceted and intense ideology that is typically not reached by civilian workplace cultures (Coll et al., 2011; Iraci, 2017; Redmond et al., 2015). Due to the strength and breadth of the culture within the military, the degree to which members' social identities are formed and reinforced is also greater (Redmond et al., 2015). The concept of military social identity is exacerbated for military officers (Redmond et al., 2015). A difference exists between military officers and enlisted personnel with regard to their responsibilities, training, and, to some extent, the culture experienced (Iraci, 2017; Redmond et al., 2015). Therefore, the depth at which officers form and then lose their social identities causes a different psychological adjustment, which could be compounded by the length of service they complete (Redmond et al., 2015; Romaniuk & Kidd, 2018).

Within the existing literature, many researchers have studied the psychological adjustment that takes place when military veterans, military retirees, and, in a few studies, military officers transition out of military service (Romaniuk & Kidd, 2018; Taylor et al., 2007). Researchers have found that retirees and officers experience a loss and, therefore, trauma occurs when veterans leave the military culture (Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2010). Many factors combine to determine the extent to which the loss and trauma are felt, potentially including the length of service, which could impact the extent or depth to which the military culture was ingrained psychologically (Romaniuk & Kidd, 2018; Taylor et al., 2007). Therefore, potentially, the longer the service for the officers, the more deeply rooted the social identity may become because it is reinforced on a

continuous basis for that length of time via constant organizational socialization reinforcement (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Consequently, the trauma is complicated by a combination of the loss of social identity, potentially the length of service, and being an officer (Department of Defense, 2018; Military One Source, 2020; Romaniuk & Kidd, 2018; Taylor et al., 2007).

The culture that exists within the U.S. branches of military service is not just a workplace culture but a way of life (Iraci, 2017; McCormick et al., 2019; Redmond et al., 2015; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). The trauma and the array of negative emotions associated with the loss of leaving the military culture, compounded with losing their social identity, is a social problem for military veterans (Romaniuk & Kidd, 2018; Taylor et al., 2007). The retired officers must not only find a new way of life but also a new social identity in the civilian workplace. This is in addition to attempting to deal with and manage the negative emotions that come with the overall transition to civilian life, in general (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Griepentrog et al., 2012; Romaniuk & Kidd, 2018). The loss of identity that may occur in the specific population of officers who retire between 24 and 42 years of service has yet to be addressed by research. Specifically, research on the length of service is needed, and I conducted the current study to address that gap (see Romaniuk & Kidd, 2018; Taylor et al., 2007).

Overall, the research studies reviewed pointed to an issue with veterans leaving the military, which could be intensified when veterans retire from the military (Romaniuk & Kidd, 2018). Based on the theoretical framework for this study, significant losses of culture and social identity take place when people transition out of the military (see

Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Griepentrog et al., 2012; Hogg & Terry, 2000; Kowtha, 2018; Van Dick et al., 2005; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Many retired officers must move to or choose to continue to secondary civilian careers while attempting to maintain their previous social identity or form a new one while simultaneously experiencing the negative emotions associated with the losses (Schnurr et al., 2005; Stern, 2017; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). However, the length of service has not been evaluated in any reviewed studies or has the specific concept of social identity been addressed despite calls from current researchers for the study of these issues (Romaniuk & Kidd, 2018; Stern, 2017). Therefore, the amount of time or length of service needs to be understood as it pertains to the loss of social identity and how it has an impact on the psychological struggles and feelings of loss in military officers when retiring from the military (Redmond et al., 2015; Romaniuk & Kidd, 2018).

The research study in which I initially found this gap in knowledge was a systematic review of the current literature surrounding this topic by Romaniuk and Kidd (2018). The researchers pointed out the need to address the gap by understanding the impact of the length of service has on psychological adjustment. Within their systematic review, Romaniuk and Kidd found that the current literature either did not report length of service at all, or the researchers reported between 1 and 38 years of service; however, the impact that the length of service has on the psychological adjustment and loss of social identity for veterans and retirees, both enlisted and officers, was not addressed by the studies reviewed. Including length of service is important to research to understand the depth of acculturation in the military culture and the depth of social identity loss that

takes place; consequently, in the current study I sought to understand the loss of social identity that takes place and how that impacts the second career of retired officers.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand the experienced loss of social identity among U.S. military retiree officers with a specific range of service and what that meant in their secondary civilian careers. The goal of this study was to understand the loss of social identity and organizational socialization that takes place for retired military officers who had between 24 and 42 years of military service. I chose this service date span based on retirement data provided by the Department of Defense (2020). The data showed that military officers retired at an average of 23.3 years of service, which provided the starting delimitation. Rounding up for clarity to 24 years, these officers had dedicated 4 years past the eligibility requirement to retire. The data also showed 42 years is the last service year at which any officer retired, providing the ending delimitation. Another goal of this study was to understand how those retirees experience that loss of social identity and organizational socialization in their second career in a civilian workplace. The last goal was to understand how those retirees experience the struggle that ensues between their former military social identities and organizational socialization and their new civilian social identities and organizational socialization.

I conducted a qualitative, interpretative phenomenological analysis, as outlined by Smith and Osborn (2015), to develop an understanding of how military officers psychologically struggle when they retire and the ways the psychological struggle could

be mitigated. The results contribute to closing the gap in the literature previously described in the problem statement. In addition to adding to the current body of literature, the opportunity for policy changes also existed. The results of this study have the potential to impact current policy in regards to military officer retirees' transition. Transition programs exist but do not address the psychological aspect of the transition; therefore, the programs may use the findings of this study to revise their offerings to include the psychological aspect or develop a postretirement program for those who desire such psychological aid outside of the official military programs.

Research Questions

RQ1: How are retired military officers with 24–42 years of service affected by the loss of social identity and loss of organizational socialization after military retirement?

RQ2: How are retired military officers with 24–42 years of service affected in their second career civilian workplaces due to the loss of social identity and organizational socialization?

Conceptual Framework

I derived the conceptual framework for this study from a combination of social identity theory (SIT) and the theory of organizational socialization (see Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Griepentrog et al., 2012; Kowtha, 2018; Michinov et al., 2008; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). SIT was developed by Tajfel in 1978 who sought to explain the identity with regard to social aspects within groups. According to SIT, a group of people is characterized by the people that consider themselves members of a group and that the

other members consider each other person a member of that group (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Michinov et al., 2008). Each member sees the other members of the group as members rather than a collection of persons when they accept membership into a group; therefore, when members of a group consider themselves a part of a group, that group is embedded in each member's identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Griepentrog et al., 2012; Kowtha, 2018; Michinov et al., 2008).

The theory of organizational socialization was developed by Van Mannen and Schein (1979), with the authors seeking to create a theory that explains how organizational culture can become ingrained in people's identities and dictate their behaviors, decisions, relationships, language, social identity, and customs, among other concepts. The authors stated that their research suggested that no matter which organization people work for, they will be changed by that organization in a number of ways. Membership is granted via organizational and collective socialization after a rite of passage is traversed. Members then adopt the ideology (with natural outliers) and act in accordance with the expectations of the organization and the rest of the group. The learned elements that are ingrained in members of the organization are done so as they have stood the test of time within the organization in order for them to be passed to new members. The authors posited in the theory that the entire length of the career for each member is characterized by a continuous socialization process through constant stimuli within the organization (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

Based on these two theories, the socialization process of military boot camp, OCS, and the constant stimulation of the military culture through that socialization and

daily activities cause the culture to be deeply rooted within most (as there are always outliers) military members' identities (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Griepentrog et al., 2012; Kowtha, 2018; Michinov et al., 2008; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Once socialization takes hold in people's identities, it increases their self-concept, self-esteem, and sense of self and makes them a member of the group with shared behaviors and characteristics (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Griepentrog et al., 2012; Kowtha, 2018; Michinov et al., 2008; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). The military culture is reinforced continuously through the military socialization throughout the length of military service until retirement occurs (Kowtha, 2018; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

As it applies directly to military service, SIT has three major components of the overall concept of social identity: cognitive, evaluative, and emotional pieces (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Griepentrog et al., 2012; Michinov et al., 2008). The cognitive portion has to do with how people classify themselves as part of the group or have cognitive awareness of being members of the group. The evaluative portion has to do with the self-esteem felt by the group, either positive or negative, that comes with being a member of the group. Finally, the emotional portion has to do with loyalty or commitment to the group and how members emotionally invest in the group. Each of these three elements combine to create a SIT that attempts to explain pieces of the identity as a whole (Griepentrog et al., 2012; Michinov et al., 2008). These three elements align with the theory of organizational socialization in that for the length of the retirees' careers, they are subject to the reinforcement of the military culture and socialization. Each year in

service potentially bolsters the effect of the socialization (Kowtha, 2018; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

Therefore, when military officers retire from military service and, in particular, those having served between 24 and 42 years, a struggle of social identity is most likely to occur (Ainspan et al., 2018; Griepentrog et al., 2012; Romaniuk & Kidd, 2018; Winkler, 2018). Due to the type of social identity and organizational socialization that the military propagates, retired officers may also find it difficult to integrate with civilian teammates, compounding the issues with losing their social identity and gaining a new social identity, which leaves the retirees adrift (Ainspan et al., 2018; Griepentrog et al., 2012; Romaniuk & Kidd, 2018; Winkler, 2018). The retirees find themselves having to engage in a completely new socialization process after over 2 decades of a solid foundation in one organizational and collective socialization; which can potentially cause anxiety, an array of negative emotions, and suffering (Kowtha, 2018; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). The combination of the two theories described provided the conceptual framework through which all other aspects of this study were viewed.

Nature of the Study

I explored the lived experiences of the targeted population in this study through a qualitative, interpretative phenomenological analysis study and with the use of semistructured interviews. The qualitative method of collecting data was aligned with and well suited for this study because the military officer retirees' lived experiences of the loss of social identity and organizational socialization and how that impacted their second careers was the focus of interest and study. The deeper meaning that participants attached

to their lived experiences was what I sought through the study, and the qualitative method allowed for such depths to be reached to fully grasp their experiences. Once I understood the participants' experiences and uncovered their inner worlds, social change may potentially take place through mitigating the negative aspects of the psychological process before, during, and after military retirement (see Romaniuk & Kidd, 2018). Positive social change was the underlying purpose and goal of this study: social change for one person or for the entire population under study.

The participants for this study were 20 retired military officers with 24 to 42 years of active-duty service who had transitioned out of the military to a second career in a civilian workplace. I chose this number of participants based on the desire to thoroughly answer the proposed research questions (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Data saturation was attained prior to reaching the target number of participants however, data collection continued to attain academic rigor for the results. Because the target number was reached, the patterns and themes that emerged from the data are considered to be robust.

Definitions

Collective socialization: Group entrance into an organization through a rite of passage via shared group experiences (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

Military officer: A commissioned federal officer in a branch of the U.S. Armed Forces who holds a position of authority with greater duties and responsibilities than noncommissioned officers (Spiegel & Shultz, 2003).

Military retirement: The end of military service after serving no less than 20 years in any branch of the military within the U.S. Armed Forces (excluding those that retire prior to 20 years due to medical reasons; Spiegel & Shultz, 2003).

Military transition: The process of leaving military service, culture, and socialization and reentering civilian life and, for many, the civilian workplace (Romaniuk & Kidd, 2018).

Organizational socialization: The learned set of characteristics, behaviors, and knowledge stemming from the organization, affecting current members, and taught to new members of the organization for proper assimilation by all (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

Social identity: Members of a group who see themselves as members, with each member seeing them self as a member, so they are members, and each member acting accordingly, with the social identity being formed and ingrained psychologically (Ashforth & Mael, 1989).

Assumptions

Assumptions are vital to a research study because they provide insight into elements of the study that the researcher cannot control (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). One assumption for this study was that participants answered all interview questions honestly, transparently, and to the best of their abilities. Trustworthiness of qualitative data is gained through honest and open interview responses. Another assumption was that all participants would agree to conduct their interviews either in-person, through video chat, or via the telephone and have those interviews recorded. Recorded interviews contributed

to the trustworthiness of the data as well because the recordings were available for reference during analysis. Without the recordings, only field notes would have been available for reference, weakening the analysis. I also assumed that the participants wanted to speak about their issues with regard to their potential loss of social identity and how it had impacted their second career in a civilian workplace. This assumption was necessary to gain consensual participation in the study.

Scope and Delimitations

This research study was focused on the loss of social identity that occurs when military officers retire from military service and move on to a second career in a civilian workplace. I chose the population of retired military personnel because little research had been conducted concerning it. This population of officers was specifically chosen due to the scope of responsibility and training that officers receive over enlisted military personnel and the fact that there is a lack of research information regarding officers. These elements, in combination with the potential loss of social identity within in this population having not been studied previously, were the reasons I chose to the apply the SIT over other theories. The specific span of service years was chosen based on retirement data provided by the Department of Defense (2020). At 24 years, the officers have dedicated 4 years past the eligibility requirement to retire, and 42 years is the last service year at which any officer retired, based on the data. I recruited participants for this study through social media, and active-duty personnel were not included in the study.

Limitations

The challenges associated with this study included the potential for bias and the potential for a lack/reduction of transparency in the participants answering the interview questions. As the researcher, I was cautious and took every necessary measure to ensure bias was removed from the study as much as possible through using available qualitative research strategies, such as member checks. Additionally, the participants' answers to the interview questions rely on self-reported data, which could have led to issues in several ways. One way was telescoping because the participants had to recall events that took place at the time of their military retirement, which could have been many years prior to the interview (see Price & Murnan, 2004). Another way is attribution because the participants could have attributed any negative issues they experienced to an outside force or outside negative event (see Price & Murnan, 2004). This was a strong possibility for the study because the retirees may not have known or understood their loss of social identity or how that impacted them. The participants may also have attributed any negative emotions they did experience to an outside force or event apart from their retirements.

Significance

The current study is important to the field of industrial and organizational psychology because it provides insight into retired officers' transitions from long-term military service to the civilian workforce and how long-term service influences the loss of social identity. The loss of social identity could be why long-term military officer retirees struggle in their second careers and experience depression, low self-esteem, a

lack of self-identity, and anxiety during and after the transition to the civilian workforce. Once the loss of social identity of long-term military retired officers is understood from the retirees' perspectives, the potential for social change may be stimulated by inspiring new areas of research where the loss of social identity may be psychologically prepared for or mitigated prior to or just after retirement.

For social change to occur, identification of the phenomenon of a loss of social identity and a pattern in the retired officers' experiences must have occurred first. Therefore, the results may create an awareness that there is an issue. Additionally, from the results of this study, a psychological adjustment program may be developed for this specific population of retired officers for both before and after retirement to aid them in the transition to their second careers in the civilian workforce. All military personnel, including officers, must go through transition classes prior to retirement, and using the findings of the current study, revisions may be made to these transitions programs to include a focus on the psychological adjustment. The overall goal of the study was to first understand the problem and then, second, potentially create social change by addressing the problem in some manner.

Summary

Retirement from any career provides challenges as an individual transitions from their career to retired life. However, when military officers retire after being in the military culture for over 24 years, the transition provides unique and, most often, painful challenges. Because military officers are provided with greater responsibility and levels of training, their position, in combination with their length of service, can often cause

negative consequences when they finally do retire. Their transition to civilian life comes with the loss of organizational socialization and a potential loss of social identity, potentially equaling pain and psychological trauma. These losses result in a social problem for this population, and I conducted the current study to address this problem.

Chapter 1 included a discussion of the problem under study, the purpose of the study, research questions, conceptual framework, assumptions, limitations, and significance. In Chapter 2, I will provide a broad review of the current literature concerning the topics discussed in Chapter 1.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

According to SIT, when people believe someone is a part of a group and that person also believes they are a member of the group, they are a part of the group (Ashforth & Mael, 1979). That idea, along with other elements and tenets of the theory, become ingrained and form people's social identity. The term social identity is not to be confused with the concepts of personality or holistic identity because social identity is a separate concept from these terms. Social identity, as detailed above, is, therefore, a part of the military culture through continuous organizational and collective socialization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Griepentrog et al., 2012; Kowtha, 2018; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Therefore, when military personnel leave military service (in the case of this study, military officers retiring from between 24 and 42 years of active military service), they potentially lose their social identity and organizational socialization (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Griepentrog et al., 2012; Kowtha, 2018; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). This loss of social identity stems from no longer being a part of the group and military culture.

Using SIT and the theory of organizational socialization as the theoretical basis for this study, I assumed that regardless of how prepared for retirement officers are, or regardless of the mindset that military officer retirees have upon retirement, all retirees lose their military-gained social identity and culture through organizational socialization because they are no longer a part of the military group and culture (see Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Griepentrog et al., 2012; Kowtha, 2018; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). All reviewed literature reflected retirement, military retirement, the transition to civilian life, and the loss of social identity being painful experiences (Ashforth & Mael, 1989;

Griepentrog et al., 2012; Kowtha, 2018; Romaniuk & Kidd, 2018; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Therefore, in this study I sought to understand the experiences of military retired officers and the potential losses of social identity and organizational socialization that takes place upon military retirement, whether they were painful or otherwise. I also sought to understand how the loss of social identity has impacted military officer retirees' second career in their civilian workplaces.

If military officer retirees have a discernable pattern of negative or painful experiences associated with the loss of social identity and organizational socialization that also impacts their civilian careers, this is a social problem for this population. Previous researchers have reported retirees having a negative response to the loss, which also contributes to the idea of a social problem (Romaniuk & Kidd, 2018). Within the current military-to-civilian transition programs provided to military officer retirees, awareness of the loss of social identity and organizational socialization and the psychological issues that stem from it are not broached or addressed; therefore, the officer retirees struggle (Romaniuk & Kidd, 2018). They not only have psychological struggles, but they struggle within their second career in civilian workplaces as well (Johnston et al., 2010; Kowtha, 2018; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Without awareness and mitigation, retirees either attempt to hold onto their previous social identities and organizational socialization or attempt to create new ones, all of which has the potential to add to the struggle of simply being a civilian rather than serving in the military (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Griepentrog et al., 2012; Kowtha, 2018; Romaniuk & Kidd, 2018; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). In the current study, I addressed the need for the

inclusion of education on the loss of social identity and organizational socialization in retiree transition programs or the development of a separate program designed to aid retirees in successfully transitioning out of the military (see Romaniuk & Kidd, 2018).

In this chapter, I review current and seminal literature and research that pertains to the current and surrounding topics in this study, including social identity and loss of social identity, organizational socialization, military retirement, and military retirees' second civilian careers.

Literature Search Strategy

I conducted a thorough search for pertinent literature pertaining to this study using the Walden University Library and Google Scholar. The databases queried included: Academic Search Complete, APA PsycArticles, APA PsycBooks, Business Source Complete, Health and Psychosocial Instruments, Military and Government Collection, and SocINDEX with Full Text. The searches included the limiters of peer-reviewed articles and a publication date range from 2015 to 2020. Search keywords included: *military retirement, retirement, military transition, military culture, military organizational culture, military officers, social identity,* and *organizational socialization.* I searched these terms in each of the databases listed above in order to gather the full breadth of available research. The literature search resulted in a great number of research articles and dissertations, both current and seminal, from which I chose the most relevant to review and include in this study.

Conceptual Framework

I used a combination of the following two theories to form the conceptual framework for this study: SIT and the theory of organizational socialization (see Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Griepentrog et al., 2012; Kowtha, 2018; Michinov et al., 2008; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). These two theories were chosen for their applicability to military culture and how the culture influences military members' lives holistically. All aspects of this study, including the development of the research questions and interview questions as well as and my interpretation of the results, were viewed through this combined lens.

SIT was created by Tajfel in 1978 (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Griepentrog et al., 2012). SIT consists of several components that apply to military culture. The main component is that group members believe other members are members, so they are; each member also believing themselves are members, so they are, and, therefore, those elements are ingrained in the members' social identities (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Griepentrog et al., 2012). The military culture involves being a member of a group. Being a part of the military group sets people apart from those who are not a member of the group, with the members of the military group believing it to be so. SIT also includes cognitive, evaluative, and emotional components that also contribute to forming and maintaining a social identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Griepentrog et al., 2012).

The theory of organizational socialization was developed by VanMaanen and Schein (1979). Organizational socialization is the process of beginning and continuing the culture that exists in the workplace. The authors specifically discussed the culture that

exists in the military, which, in turn, creates a holistic way of life for military members (Kowtha, 2018; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). With each interaction, event, and day that passes, organizational socialization is bolstered for most military members (Kowtha, 2018; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). The continuous reinforcement of socialization includes but is not limited to customs and courtesies; behaviors, decisions, and social interactions; relationships with other people; and language used (Kowtha, 2018; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979).

The combination of these two theories provided a base from which I viewed the social dilemma and research study elements. Military members' social identities and the continuous reinforcement of the military culture's organizational socialization take a deep psychological hold for most military members (Kowtha, 2018). I developed the research questions to directly relate to the two theories chosen and be based on their basic tenets. While these two theories have not specifically been used in previous research in the manner in which I used them in the current study, they have been used in relation to the military population in general. Therefore, the results of this study will build off of and contribute to the existing research regarding social identity, organizational socialization, and the military retiree population.

Literature Review

Social Identity

Ashforth and Mael (1989) supplied the basis for SIT, describing the basics of the theory, tenets, and subsequent consequences from being inside and outside a social identity structure. They found that social identity was central to how people feel in the

workplace and the attachment they assigned to that workplace and their roles. When people felt as though they were a part of a group and the other members accepted the other people as members, they were members. Membership in a group allows for the group's culture to be ingrained in each person's social identity.

Some previous studies have included the concept of social identity in concert with the workplace. Michinov et al. (2008) provided data on how retirees' social identities played a role in their retirement satisfaction in general. The main focus of their study was to understand three components of social identity and how they had a negative or positive impact on retirement. The researchers began their study with a discussion on retirement and how, typically and in the past, it has been associated with elderly people. However, that societal mindset is now shifting to people retiring at younger ages all over the world. To make their point, the researchers mentioned that a single operational definition of what retirement means had not been recorded at the time of their study. Therefore, they stated that retirement is complicated and difficult, with many different facets of psychological transitions and issues. Social identity was intimately tied to people's work lives, and people's work became ingrained in their identities (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Michinov et al., 2008).

When people retire and go through one of the biggest changes in their lives, they lose that work identity, no matter how ingrained, which is, at any level, a loss (Griepentrog et al., 2012). However, it is important to mention that while gathering past research for their study, Michinov et al. (2008) noted that other studies had proven that it is not a painful loss but a relief of stress and that retirement has a positive impact on

peoples' holistic lives. Their discussion on this subject included factors that may have an effect on whether retirement turns out to be a positive or negative experience. Of the various complex factors, they chose to focus on the factor of social identity, using SIT to frame their study and succinctly describing social identity as being defined by a group's reality or social reality (Michinov et al., 2008). Other researchers concurred that the group's reality or social reality became people's identities (Griepentrog et al., 2012; Hogg & Terry, 2000; Van Dick et al., 2005).

Michinov et al. (2008) questioned whether losing that social identity would have a negative impact on retirement satisfaction. Their study consisted of just over 150 participants, all of which who were retired at the time the survey was taken. The questions concerned retirement satisfaction and focused on the three different components of social identity (i.e., evaluative, cognitive, and affective). The results of the study showed that the three different components of social identity were identified and distinct within the retirees. The cognitive and evaluative components of social identity showed that retirement was painful through the loss of group membership and the level at which the retirees were emotionally invested in their previous jobs. The affective component of social identity did not negatively impact retirement because those people cognitively and emotionally joined the group that is retirees (Griepentrog et al., 2012; Hogg & Terry, 2000; Michinov et al., 2008; Van Dick et al., 2005). Therefore, the participants considered themselves in a transitional state from one group to the next and did not suffer the same losses within that affective component of SIT.

As far as the results concerning whether social identity impacted retirement satisfaction, the findings showed that the role of the affective portion of social identity did have an impact on retirement satisfaction. The more that the retirees associated themselves with the retiree group, the higher level of retirement satisfaction they had. The researchers summed up their study by stating that while SIT clearly had an impact on retirement and retirement satisfaction, the theory is multifaceted and the ideas within it were shown to be independent of one another (Michinov et al., 2008). The researchers suggested that repeated variations of their study be carried out, including more female retirees, a larger sample, and a separation of the individual components of SIT with the aim of identifying what it means for work identity. The researchers recommended future research take place to develop an understanding of social identity along with what retirement means in life stages and transitions (Michinov et al., 2008).

The identity is a complex and multifaceted concept that drives behavior in all people. Social identity is a more specific area of identity but still highly complex. One of the facets of social identity and identity in general is the idea of emotions being a part of it (Griepentrog et al., 2012; Hogg & Terry, 2000; Van Dick et al., 2005). The combination of emotions and identity being generally overlooked, Winkler (2018) suggested that emotions should be included when doing identity work because emotions are intimately tied to the identity. The author described how people's identities and their emotions were one and the same because both helped define who people were and how they interacted with the world around them, including other people. When people struggled with their identities, they felt emotions, and the struggle is characteristic of

negative emotions, such as confusion, depression, fear, and anger (Winkler, 2018). This was also true when people felt as though their identities were threatened because they again felt negative emotions and struggle. In addition to those elements, people attached emotions to their actual identities. When people are proud of or enjoy their identities, they assigned or associated positive emotions to them, which highlighted the fact that when an identity is threatened or lost, negative emotions occurred (Van Dick et al., 2005).

The author surveyed the most current research at the time, and 16 years back from that point of literature concerning social identity, identity, and emotions. Several themes emerged from the review of the literature, including when people endure an emotional experience, identity work should be included as identity is impacted. One of the emotional experiences that the author described that falls into this category is a major career change. The author found a theme that when people go through a major career change, their identities are threatened, and they experienced a slew of negative emotions (Winkler, 2018). The negative emotions included but are not limited to doubt, uncertainty, helplessness, insecurity, and vulnerability. Also, the author found a pattern within the literature that when people go through a career change and experience the negative emotions just described, they also employed defense mechanisms to deal with the negative emotions. Most people did not understand how to deal with these negative emotions in a healthy manner but instead, turned to defense mechanisms and self-medication. The author described the conclusion to the literature review as identity, social identity, and emotions are intimately connected to one another. Future research was

suggested in the area of identifying if different emotional issues or experiences are tied to a specific kind of identity issue or experience, such as the length of the threat or issue concerning identity producing a certain type of emotional response. However, emotions should be included in any discussion of social identity (Winkler, 2018).

Organizational Socialization

Organizational socialization is an extremely important concept for the military and military culture. Organizational socialization can be described as the process by which new members of an organization are taught the culture, expectations, behaviors, values, beliefs, attitudes, boundaries, knowledge, and skills, among other aspects of what it means to live and exist within that culture (Kowtha, 2018; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). The way this takes place for new military members is through basic training or boot camp. For military members, in particular, this is a vital process as it could someday mean the difference between life and death. To illuminate the topic of organizational socialization for the military, Macovei (2016) discussed the different components of organizational socialization and how it was imperative for the military culture. The main purpose of this study was to understand within thirteen dimensions which organizational socialization values became internalized by the participants of the study. The researcher described the three different components of the theory of organizational socialization, which include anticipatory, assimilation, and organizational detachment (Macovei, 2016). The element of anticipatory socialization came prior to people joining the organization or, in this case, the military. In this stage, people conceptualized whether or not they believed they will fit into the organization, and if they believed so, they began to

anticipate what it will be like to be a part of their desired organization. The next phase of assimilation occurs when people actually entered the organization and, from beginning to end of the entry process, learned about the culture, job roles and responsibilities, social rules, and norms, rules, and regulations, etc. (Kowtha, 2018). People either assimilated into the culture, or they did not. Those that assimilated went through the process called metamorphosis. Metamorphosis is the process by which new people to the organization became members and is heavily psychological, and a transformation takes place in the mind. Positive emotions came from a successful transformation, with confidence and contentment being the benefits. The level at which each member was successful within the organization is dependent on how internalized the culture became. The internalization includes understanding the culture, respecting it, valuing it, and living it. The more the culture becomes internalized, the greater the success people will have within the culture and organization. The quantitative study consisted of over 250 participants who completed surveys that contained questions concerning 13 different areas of organizational socialization and how they are internalized (Macovei, 2016). The results of the study showed that four out of the 13 factors were associated with strong internalization of the military culture. Some of the factor elements include personal values aligning with military values, growing up with military interest/knowledge, moral or religious beliefs aligning with the military culture, and appreciation of honor, duty, and sacrifice, which are inherent in the military culture. The much lesser degrees, the remaining factors played a small role in internalization. Future research was suggested in the area of religious beliefs not aligning with the military culture and understanding

whether or not that causes less internalization and, therefore, less success within the military organization (Macovei, 2016).

Retirement

The concept of retirement is something that most adults will go through during their lifespan (Adams et al., 2002). Typically, adults spend most of their time at work; therefore, it makes sense that work would become ingrained in people's identities in some way and for them to become attached to their work roles. However, when it comes to retirement, several researchers studied whether or not attachment impacts how people retire. For instance, Adams et al. (2002) applied work-role attachment theory to how people make retirement decisions, in general. The main purpose of their study was to understand people's attachment to their previous jobs and how it impacted retirement. The researchers noted several key points with regard to work-role attachment and utilized work-role attachment theory to frame their study. Work-role attachment theory includes organizational commitment, job involvement theory, and career connection. How people make the decision to retire was one focus of the study, as most studies prior focused on how people made the decision in a logistical sense with physical health and financial health as the key factors. However, the researchers wanted to know how work-role attachment played a role. Due to work-role attachment theory considers that people want to be a part of something greater than themselves and stay working, it is important to consider how that impacted the decision for retirement. The researchers stated that they looked into this area as people could feel less valued after they retire due to people feeling as though they are valued in their role at their workplaces through the

organizational commitment, job involvement, and organizational identification (Adams et al., 2002).

All of the aforementioned ideas also contribute to people's identities (Adams et al., 2002). Participants for the study included over 230 people over 45 years of age, who were not yet retired. All participants were given a survey concerning work-role attachment theory elements along with their intentions with regard to retirement. The results of the study showed that the higher levels of work-role attachment within the three areas of the theory had a negative impact on the views and intentions with retirement. The more people identified with their jobs, in that they adopted their jobs into their identities, the more difficult it was to consider or think about retirement. There were outliers in the study that positively associated with retirement; however, the researchers mentioned that the possibility of burnout with those that have a high level of work-role attachment is also high. Overall, the researchers showed through their study that the more that people are attached to their jobs, and the more their jobs are ingrained in their self-identities, the harder it is to retire. Future research was suggested for the study to be reproduced in a longitudinal format so that actual retirement decisions and their consequences may also be assessed (Adams et al., 2002).

The process of retirement is difficult for most people as people spend most of their lives active in the workforce. However, when military members retire from service, they experience a depth of loss that is immeasurable in civilian terms (Brunger et al., 2013). The military culture and work environment are all-encompassing. Military members are provided food, shelter, medical care, housing, amenities, social

engagements, and education, among other elements. All of the aforementioned services are contained within a single base or station where military members work and live. This is different from civilian culture where if those elements are desired they must be sought out by varying entities and companies. Essentially, military members would never have to leave their base or station to sustain their lives. Therefore, when they retire, they lose not only the military culture but all of the amenities and life sustainment services that come with it (Atuel & Castro, 2018). The study conducted by Brunger et al. (2013) assessed how military members view this difficult transition of retirement and how they experienced the loss of the services that the military culture provided and how the transition to civilian life went. The study by Brunger et al. found that retirees financially and emotionally struggled in that retirees ranged from financial strain to homelessness. When people are not prepared for retirement in a multitude of ways, strain on finances and mental health ensued (Brunger et al., 2013).

Military Culture

The basis for functioning within the military service is the military culture. Each branch of the military has a shared sense of culture, but there also exists a unique type of military culture within each branch. The military culture is not simply a workplace culture for a job, but a way of life for those that serve (Atuel & Castro, 2018; McCormick et al., 2019). The military culture is powerful, permeating, and dominant. Those within the culture sink or swim based on their assimilation into the culture in a holistic manner. The military culture has clear hierarchal levels of status and clearly defined jobs/roles in which people understand how to function. The military culture and workplace are unlike

any civilian workplace culture, as the culture and the members operate within a different set of rules and standards (Atuel & Castro, 2018; McCormick et al., 2019). It is vital to understand the culture to understand what it would be like to lose it. To that end, Redmond et al. (2015) has provided detailed information on the basics of the military culture as a workplace culture. The main purpose of the article was to provide civilians with a glimpse of what functioning within the military workplace culture was like in order to better prepare employers for hiring and properly utilizing veteran employees. The article covered a wide range of topics within the military workplace culture, which included but was not limited to how the military branches are a part of the government, and how the structure of the military falls within the government, the different branches or departments of the U.S. military, and the Veterans Affairs role (Redmond et al., 2015). Topics also included each military branch's founding dates, what their members are referred to, their mission statements, and their core values. The military occupational specialty concept was also explained, along with the differences between serving active duty and serving in the reserve forces. A breakdown and table of each branch's rank structure were provided for each rank contained from the lowest to the highest-ranking military member's title. The difference between the officer ranks and the enlisted ranks were explained as there is a difference in them with regard to training, responsibility, and decision-making capabilities. The military also operates under a completely different set of laws punishable under the Uniformed Code of Military Justice. The military workplace is a vastly diverse one when it comes to the demographics and backgrounds of the people that serve, perhaps being the most diverse workplace culture in the United States

(Redmond et al., 2015). Organizational socialization takes place in basic training or "boot camp" where military members learned their rules and about their new culture. The article goes on to more specific topics as well as how military spouses operate, how combat is handled, along with the concept of deployments. A short discussion of how difficult it was for veterans to transition back from combat and back to civilian life also occurred, and it was mentioned that many veterans struggle psychologically. The authors implore civilian employers to better understand the military culture as it will allow them to properly utilize veterans for the knowledge, skills, and abilities they obtained during their military service (Redmond et al., 2015).

Due to the nature of the military culture, military members tend to become insulated from the civilian world and certainly the civilian workplace culture (McCormick et al., 2019). A portion of the struggle of the transition from military to civilian life is due to the culture in which the members exist for an extended period of time. Knowing the military culture is a unique one, Coll et al. (2011) provided a view of military culture so that mental health professionals could better understand the loss of culture and where adjustment issues stem when veterans transitioned back to civilian life/work. The main purpose of the article was to provide a clear picture of military culture in a general sense with a focus on the culture shock that occurs when veterans leave military service. The authors expounded on the military culture and the core values that governed the people that served in the branches of the U.S. military. Some of the highlights from their explanation included loyalty, courage, integrity, honor, commitment, and a unique method of communication that is common within branches

and then throughout all branches (Coll et al., 2011). Military members were taught to wage war and also maintain peace at different times in their careers, all while serving a common and united goal with the other members. Military members must be ready at all times and engage in constant training to be ready at any time (McCormick et al., 2019). All of these concepts and more pervaded military members' lives not just while actively working in their work sections, but while they were off-duty as well. It is a holistic environment with containment in an almost bubble-like state that encompassed military members' lives. The researchers went on to discuss that when military members transitioned to civilian life and perhaps the civilian workforce, they transitioned and experienced culture shock (Coll et al., 2011). The culture shock may be worsened by a number of factors. Some of the factors included mental health disorders, such as PTSD and anxiety disorders, among others, along with negative stigmas surrounding asking for mental health assistance, and due to a lack of getting help, self-medication. The authors also provided mental health professionals with some questions to begin their work with military veterans but urged the professionals to first understand the environment from which the veterans are coming. Once the military culture is understood, they will be better equipped to aid military veterans with their mental health (Coll et al., 2011).

Because the military culture is a powerful culture, losing such power results in a struggle. Recognizing that struggle, Canfield and Weiss (2015) offered a perspective that curriculum should be included in social work educational programs specifically related to aiding veterans that are transitioning back to civilian life. The basis for their article was due to the loss of military culture being a traumatic one. The authors of the article discuss

that it was important when helping veterans to transition back to civilian life that an understanding of the military culture was crucial (Canfield & Weiss, 2015). The military culture is unlike any civilian culture in the way that it operates, encompasses military member's lives, and dictates members' patterns (McCormick et al., 2019). The authors made an argument for the inclusion of curriculum in the social work education programs specifically that related to topics of how to speak to, assess, understand, and effectively treat military members. Specifics of the curriculum suggested are specifics of interviewing skills that speak the same language as the veterans and utilizing solution-focused therapy modalities. Considering there is a negative stigma that exists within the military culture in that members cannot focus on or discuss problems without appearing weak or incapable, they are taught by the culture to figure out the solutions instead. Solution-focused therapy appeared to align with the military culture in thought processes and is well suited to aid military members in treatment. Another barrier to treatment brought on by the military culture is the idea of self-growth or self-care. Everything about the military mindset was about the common goal, common well-being, and thinking of others before the self. When military members transitioned out of the military culture, it was difficult for them to ask for help and, when they did, adjust to thinking about only themselves (Canfield & Weiss, 2015). The authors also suggest that most educational settings teach about veterans and PTSD. However, veterans that transition to civilian life experienced difficulties and challenges even if they have not been diagnosed or have PTSD. Therefore, it is important for the curricula to include military cultural information and background to better serve transitioning veterans. A greater understanding of the

military culture may lead to better transitions for military veterans, and for the authors, that begins in including cultural information within social work educational programs (Canfield & Weiss, 2015).

Although there are struggles and difficulties that may come from the transition of military veterans to civilian life, there are also positive benefits that could transfer from military to civilian workplaces. Two of the overarching positive benefits of leadership skills and motivational levels were discussed by Vițalariu and Moșoiu (2016) in their article, highlighting positive areas of the transition of military veterans to civilian workplaces. The authors described organizational culture as the rules, behaviors, patterns, morals, virtues, skills, and perspectives that members of the organization typically follow. The authors stated that the level at which these elements are adhered to by members was determined by the level at which the organizational socialization had taken hold within each individual. Due to the intense organizational socialization process of basic training, the level at which military members engage in socialization is typically high. There will, of course, always be outliers, but most military members engage in the organizational socialization and organizational culture that the military propagates. The organization as a whole that is the U.S. military, counts on people internalizing the culture as that is the only way the proper performance of duties is obtained. With those ideas established, the authors went on to discuss how there were positive benefits to being a part of the military culture that may be carried over to the civilian workplace after military members transition (Vițalariu & Moșoiu, 2016). Of the many positive elements or qualities that may be carried over, the authors chose to focus on motivation and

leadership. The authors define motivation as the essence of what drives performance from an internal level. Military members work towards a common goal with the rest of the group, and internal motivation is bolstered and increased (Griepentrog et al., 2012). Leadership was described as taking responsibility for other people, duties, and quality of work, among other factors-leaders also bear qualities of selflessness, self-sacrifice, and high standards of morality. Motivation and leadership qualities, in particular, are those that served military veterans well in a civilian workforce. While there were always difficulties during the transition, the utilization of motivation and leadership allowed military veterans to excel in the civilian workplace. Again, these factors and others stem directly from the organizational culture. The authors showed a lighter side of veterans' transition from military to civilian workplaces when veterans use the strengths that were taught to them by the military culture (Vițalariu & Moșoiu, 2016).

As culture has been shown to be extremely important in the work setting, it is appropriate to understand and conceptualize the military culture in order to understand military veterans better. One author, Lane (2019), wrote an article about the military culture and how that culture created cultural identities for military members and veterans. The main purpose of the article was to highlight the differences between the civilian culture and the military culture in order to better understand the military culture, thereby increasing cultural competence. The author utilized the cultural humility framework to better understand military culture. Organizational culture, but specifically, the military's organizational culture, not only dictated behavior in the performance of their duties but also dictated how military members live their lives holistically. Military members follow

the rules, regulations, and behavioral expectations, in both formally written down areas along with unwritten areas (McCormick et al., 2019). The author described the military culture as the following: shared values, beliefs, attitudes, ideas, such as anonymity, self-sacrifice, trust, teamwork, and uniformity, and the constant idea that the common goal is always greater than the individual's goals. A significant gap existed between the military culture and the civilian culture, both inside and outside the workplace. The misunderstandings or lack of information with regard to the military culture led to issues within civilian workplaces along with civilian healthcare workers. One of the main differences between military and civilian cultures is that the military members do not see military service as a job that simply provided money; they saw it as a part of their beings and their identities (Lane, 2019). Civilian cultures and, therefore, civilians, on the other hand, typically see jobs as a means to an end, and their jobs do not become a part of their identities. Another main difference is that much of what the military does is train for combat and combat situations, which come with the weight of life and death situations. In contrast, the civilian culture does not have that in common, leading to a very different mindset and end goal of the organization, which is typically making money. The author urged civilian employers, healthcare workers, and civilians to understand the military culture so veterans may be better understood and utilized for their fullest capabilities. Social change and cultural competency may be the outcome if military veterans are better understood (Lane, 2019).

Well-established now is that the military culture is divergent from civilian culture. A study was performed by Suzuki and Kawakami (2016) on the differences between

civilian and military cultures and how that caused military veterans to struggle when they reenter civilian life after service. The main purpose of the study was to identify the patterns and themes of military culture and if cognitive dissonance plays a role upon reintegrating into civilian life. The researchers described the differences between military and civilian cultures, with the main identified difference being that military service comes with the idea of others over self, and the civilian culture comes with the idea of self before others. The researchers conducted their study due to there being a lack of research regarding the military culture in general. One highlight they noted from their study was that culture shock occurs two times during military members' service, once when they enter the military and once when they end their military service. Typically, people enter the military at a young age when the brain is still developing personality, and they typically leave after around four to twenty years of service. There are outliers on both ends of those service marks as well (Suzuki & Kawakami, 2016). After engaging in the holistic military service and then having to transition after any length of time, veterans struggled. Due to the strength and breadth of the military culture, when veterans reentered civilian life and the civilian workplace, they were severely misunderstood as the civilian culture in no way is reflective of military culture (Atuel & Castro, 2018). The researchers mentioned that while there are transition programs that military members must attend before they end their service, they were ineffective at psychologically preparing veterans for what they will face. The researchers also covered the topics of socialization, the core values that dictated military culture, and social roles/identities. The study performed was qualitative, with 11 participants that consisted of both males and

females that had gotten out of or retired from the military (Suzuki & Kawakami, 2016). The results of the study produced five major themes, which included freedom in civilian life, constantly having to be at the ready for combat, self-control, comradery, and service to others over self. Each theme was well-described by the researchers in detail with the results of what the participants had provided. Overall, the culture was what taught the military members these elements, good and bad, and it was the loss of culture that caused the results, both good and bad. The study also produced a discussion of cognitive dissonance and veterans having to find their values again. The military culture ingrained in members' identities the values of the service, all noble in nature, and when veterans transition, the civilian culture does not value the same elements, as it is more individualistic in nature. Struggles and difficulties ensued for veterans as they try to reintegrate and find it challenging to do so. Understanding the culture and the loss of culture from military service, along with the differences between military and civilian cultures, could aid future researchers in understanding how to cause social change in this area. Future research was suggested in the area of veterans reentering civilian life and taking note of the differences in mental states in the participants to see if there are differences in the results (Suzuki & Kawakami, 2016).

Military Transition to Civilian Life

Research surrounding the transition from military service to civilian life has been studied from multiple angles by many researchers in the field of psychology. Considering all those who join the military must, in turn, someday leave the military, the transition from military life to civilian life is a significant psychological topic. Ainspan et al. (2018)

studied strategies that could aid military members in making the transition to civilian life, but in particular, those that were transitioning with PTSD and other conditions that resulted from military service. The main focus of the study was the psychological processes that may aid veterans in transitioning to civilian life successfully. The study included concepts such as community involvement, the transition assistance program, and treatment of the psychological component at the veteran's local Veteran's Affairs (VA) facilities. The study reported statistics of the number of those that transition back to civilian life each year, which included over 200,000 veterans. The volume of veterans that transition each year makes the transition a major issue. The study also reported statistics for those veterans that transition out of the military and with some type of debilitating disorder such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Ainspan et al. (2018) underlined the point that the transition from military to civilian life is a difficult process on its own, and adding other psychological issues such as PTSD, compounded the difficulty in which veterans' transition. At the time the article was written, the authors reported that almost 20 million Americans were veterans. Considering most veterans went on to have another civilian career, the successful transition and therefore functioning of veterans in the civilian workplace proves to be a social issue. The authors reported statistics with regard to those veterans that cannot obtain civilian employment or become unemployed after a time in the civilian workplace, with the rates being higher than civilian employees. A note of interest is that the youngest veterans and the oldest veterans show an even high unemployment rate than the median-aged veterans. The transition assistance program that all veterans must attend prior to leaving military

service does not seem to prepare veterans for the transition in the psychological realm, as it focuses on entrepreneurism, résumé writing, and job applications (Ainspan et al., 2018). Peer support from family and community members, along with psychological treatment at the VA facilities, appeared to aid veterans in their transition to civilian life but is also reactionary rather than preventative. Veterans must also seek those elements out in order to benefit from their presence and use. While the authors reported awareness of the psychological issues and some movement by the Department of Defense (DoD) and the VA, future research must still be focused on the area of the transition from military to civilian life, but in particular, those that must transition with PTSD (Ainspan et al., 2018).

As there are many areas of focus as it pertains to the military to civilian transition, Stern (2017) conducted a literature review on military veterans and their transition to the civilian workforce but specifically those with military service-connected disabilities. The researchers stated the reason their review was needed is due to the large volume of transitioning veterans there is each year within the United States. The main focus of the study was to collect recent and relevant research articles pertaining to the transition from military to civilian life and if the veterans with disabilities could maintain civilian employment. The articles collected pertained to the transition; however, they included those veterans that were transitioning with service-connected disabilities. Service-connected disabilities could include physical and mental issues, as disabilities include anything that the veteran obtained through their military service. The researchers queried the current available peer-reviewed research articles and, through their

inclusion/exclusion criteria, obtained 56 peer-reviewed articles. The researchers also collected some additional non-peer-reviewed articles that were properly vetted for validity to bringing the total number of articles to 63 for the review. All of the articles included some from each type of methodology and included discussions of military veterans transitioning to civilian life and careers with disabilities. The collection of articles reviewed by the researchers produced several major themes within the literature, which included mental health service-connected disabilities provided the veterans with significant challenges regarding obtaining and maintaining a civilian job, a conflict regarding veterans' work identity as there is a conflict between the military and civilian cultures pertaining to identity, the veterans were stereotyped for being military veterans who came with negative stigmas in their civilian workplaces, and the last theme that emerged was most veterans getting out of the military in recent times leave the service with some type of disability be it physical or mental (Stern, 2017). The disability rating comes with a stipend from the VA, which put extra complications regarding civilian employment, as some veterans fear getting a civilian job and losing their disability benefits, in turn taking a toll on their mental health. The higher the disability rating, the higher compensation the veterans received. The researchers reported staggering numbers of those that were rated with a disability rating of over 50%, as they were more likely to not have current civilian employment. The conclusion and discussion of this systematic review were that it is difficult for veterans to transition from military life to civilian life, and for those that leave military service with some type of service-connected disability, the transition is even more difficult. While the researchers stated that one of the major

positive benefits for those transitioning to civilian life is to obtain civilian employment, doing so comes with its own set of issues that were described above. The transition combined with disabilities, combined with barriers to gaining employment, military to civilian transition comes with many challenges and complications. The researchers suggested future research be conducted in the area of those veterans that have made a successful transition to civilian life and which strategies worked best for them in gaining that success (Stern, 2017).

A recent focus of the topic of the transition from military to civilian life but, in particular, the psychological adjustment that took place during the transition was a systematic review conducted by Romaniuk and Kidd (2018). The systematic review included the current literature regarding the psychological adjustment of military veterans and retirees encounter as they transition to civilian life. Retirees have been studied less frequently as they make up less of the transitioning veteran population. Therefore, the inclusion of retirees in any research study is of note of interest. The main focus of the study was to collect all recent and pertinent resources regarding the transition from military to civilian life and the negative psychological processes that take place during that transition. The researchers collected 18 studies, which consisted of a combination of mixed-method studies and qualitative studies, with eliminating criteria for those that were selected (Romaniuk & Kidd, 2018). The systematic review of the current literature was conducted as the most recent systematic reviews that were available at the time only addressed concerns related to military members returning from combat deployments. Also, the researchers stated that previous systematic reviews only included transitioning

veterans that already had preexisting psychological disorders or issues and did not specifically focus on those that transitioned without PTSD or traumatic brain injury. Closing the gap of surveying current literature for those that transitioned without those disorders was vital to a current understanding of the struggle of the military to civilian transition. One of the criteria that were utilized by the researchers was that the research studies collected had to be peer-reviewed, along with the studies had to include a discussion of what the transition was like for military veterans after discharged out of military service. The research study consisted of a qualitative coding process from the collected current literature into themes (Romaniuk & Kidd, 2018). The themes that emerged from the coding and review included but are not limited to a loss of the military culture and therefore the community that military members were accustomed to, a loss of life's purpose, and a loss of one's identity. Within each of those major themes that emerged from the coding were several more subthemes with regard to where the themes stemmed. A comparison of the military culture to the civilian culture played a major role in the adjustment in the transition. Within the 18 studies chosen for this systematic review, the participants ranged in age, gender, deployments, backgrounds, and lengths of service. The results of this study included the idea that the military to civilian transition for veterans is psychologically difficult. Veterans experienced a wide range of negative emotions due to the losses experienced and mentioned above. The negative emotions cause issues with family life and work-life for the new veterans or retirees. While the negativity surrounding the transition was clear through the systematic review, the researchers pointed out a glaring flaw in most of the studies previously completed, and

that is that they did not record or report the length of service of the veterans. Therefore, the researchers suggested that future research in the area of the military to civilian transition be focused on the area of the length of service and how that affects the transition one way or another (Romaniuk & Kidd, 2018). It was from this stated gap by these researchers that the current study was formed in order to address the gap with regard to the length of service.

Military Retirement

There are several ways in which military members leave military service. One of those ways is through retirement. After serving at least 20 years within one of the branches of the military, members are eligible for military retirement. Many military members choose to stay in the past the 20-year mark, retiring at various years of service ranging from 21 to 40 or more. Military retirement has been studied infrequently, as the number of military members that retire is significantly less than those that are discharged each year. However, to gain one perspective on military retirement, De Medeiros and Rubinstein (2016) provided data on how men in the military community experienced depression after military retirement, but especially due to their feelings of masculinity. The researchers stated that not much attention had been paid to depression in men due to the societally implied stigma that only women can be depressed. The focus of the study was to assess depression in men and men that have retired from military service. Feelings of denial about aging and retirement tied into the feelings of the loss of masculinity for these retired military personnel and caused depression symptoms. The researchers stated that people's identities were tied to their place, meaning that while in the military, they

had a military identity, and in a retirement community, the masculinity and culture of the military were lost, again, causing depression. The place at which the retirees reside could have been playing a major role in how the retirees viewed and thought about themselves. The researchers reported a number of almost 1.5 million military retirees living in the United States in the year 2013 and was a social issue for this group. A qualitative study was conducted by the researchers to examine depression in military retirees due to the loss of masculinity, military culture, and identity (De Medeiros & Rubinstein, 2016). The study included eight men, military retirees, from one military retirement community home and engaged in semistructured interviews. The retirement community consisted of all military veterans. All participants in the study were diagnosed with depression and from a clinical setting and came from different backgrounds and ethnicities. Thematic assessment of the data collected was conducted, producing several key themes throughout all of the interviews. One of the themes related to the military retirement community/facility specifically, as it was for veterans only, part of the veterans' identities was continued or remained intact. All members of the community, being veterans, all had that in common. It also included the recognizing of any military paraphernalia or decorations that the veterans displayed, which may not have been recognized the same in a civilian retirement home. Another theme that emerged was depression after being discharged or after returning from combat (De Medeiros & Rubinstein, 2016). The symptoms of having PTSD and leaving military service caused a great deal of subsequent symptoms for the veterans that affected their lives and caused or contributed to their depression. The researchers noted that the veterans' depression also stemmed from social

issues and feelings of isolation in social settings, further stemming from the loss of military culture. The last finding of the study interestingly had to do with how the veterans displayed or rather covered up the feelings of depression with anger. Anger is a powerful emotion that is used to cover up emotions that make people feel vulnerable. The veterans reported that feeling depressed made them feel less masculine and, therefore, would not talk about or display such emotions. Overall, the researchers uncovered important ideas with regard to retirement, leaving the military culture, depression, PTSD, and the symptoms that cause issues in retired veterans' lives (De Medeiros & Rubinstein, 2016).

A great deal of research has been conducted on the transition from military to civilian life, and there is a general consensus that it is difficult for most veterans (Romaniuk & Kidd, 2018). To discover more about military retirement and the transition to civilian life, Johnston et al. (2010) conducted a study on Marine Corps non-commissioned officers and how they transitioned to the civilian workforce after military retirement. The main purpose of the study was to assess military retirement and the experiences that veterans had when they retired from military service. The literature review that the researchers conducted showed again, a general consensus that leaving military service and transitioning to civilian life is typically difficult and riddled with challenges. The researchers used role-theory to frame their study, which has to do with the concept of social roles within the workplace, along with Schlossberg's Transition Theory, which has to do with transitioning with a focus on relationships and social connections. A few other concepts included the idea of veterans being able to use the

skills they gained in the military in the civilian workforce, finding a job in the civilian workforce, and the elements that appeared to aid veterans in their transition to the civilian workforce. At the time the study was conducted, the researchers noted the lack of research surrounding military veterans, specifically becoming a part of the civilian workforce, which was their focus. The researchers conducted a qualitative study with a dozen participants, of which all of the participants were retiring from the Marine Corps and all of which were currently enrolled in the required retirement transition program. The questions asked of the retirees surrounded how the transition was experienced with a specific focus on job skills and any elements that aided in making the transition a smooth one. The results of the study produced several themes in the answers given by the retired Marines, which included financial worry, additional military benefits worry, a lack of value given to the skills the Marines possessed in the civilian workforce, issues with leaving the military culture and entering the civilian culture, loss of military relationships and support, lack of feeling of purpose, lack of importance, and meaninglessness of civilian work. The elements that aided the transition for the retirees included a plan for after retirement, social support or retention of relationships, and the specific situation that each individual finds oneself, and all played a role. The researchers suggested future research pay more heed to the psychological concerns of the transition of military retirement (Johnston et al., 2010).

To continue the discussion of military retirement, Schnurr et al. (2005) conducted a longitudinal study concerning older male retired military veterans. The main focus of the study was to understand the physical symptoms, along with the psychological

symptoms that older male veterans experienced during a longitudinal study of military retirement. The researchers focused upon three different life periods as it pertained to military retirement, which includes prior to retirement, during retirement, and after retirement. The researchers also compared several different groups of veterans as it pertains to PTSD, such as those that had a full diagnosis, partial symptoms, and no symptoms of PTSD. The quantitative study included over 400 participants that served in combat, had varying degrees of PTSD symptoms and were retired military. Participants were given questionnaires either conducted in-person or through the mail. Some of the topics included in the questionnaire included issues with retirement during the three-time periods mentioned above, PTSD symptoms, and exposure to traumatic events or environments (Schnurr et al., 2005). The data collected were analyzed using quantitative data analysis software, SPSS. The reported results of the study included a discussion on how retired veterans that had some or full symptoms of PTSD had a more difficult time during and after retirement with both physical and psychological symptoms reported. It was also reported that the retirement transition made the symptoms of PTSD worse, as military retirement comes with trauma in itself. However, the researchers offered another explanation for retirement, causing worsened symptoms, as the veterans may have retired due to struggling with psychological and physical symptoms along with PTSD. Future research is suggested in discovering if retirement itself undesirably impacts physical and psychological symptoms or if the diagnosis of PTSD caused the retirement and thus the retirement challenges (Schurr et al., 2005).

Researchers Spiegel and Shultz (2003) provided data on how planning before retirement affected Naval officers' psychological adjustment and job satisfaction during and in retirement. The main purpose of the study was to understand how military retirees experience job satisfaction in their civilian careers after retiring from military service. The researchers accomplished looking at job satisfaction through also examining how having a plan for after retirement and the skills of the retirees played a role in civilian job satisfaction. One of the factors for the basis of the study was that civilian retirement vastly differs from military retirement, as when military members retire, they are still at an age where a job is desired or necessary, as military retirement comes after at least 20 years of service. The researchers also reported that a difference in civilian and military cultures exist in that the military culture pervaded military members' lives to the point where they were essentially separated from most aspects of civilian life. There were important factors that the researchers assessed pertaining to job satisfaction, including retirement planning, how retirees' civilian jobs matched up with their skills and expertise, and if the veterans retired on their own or were forced to retire. The participants consisted of over 650 retired officers from the U.S. Navy. The participants were from all different jobs in the Navy and from varying backgrounds and demographics. The retired officers were given a quantitative questionnaire that consisted of questions regarding retirement, career transition, and how retiring from the Navy was experienced, along with all pertinent background and demographic information to assess whether or not those elements played a role in the characteristics of the transition. The results of the study showed that those that had a post-retirement plan for their retirement did have a greater

level of job satisfaction as they felt ready for the transition. However, the researchers suggested that future research studies should focus their efforts on how efficient preretirement programs are within the military. While knowledge, skills, and abilities, along with planning, appear important to a successful transition, it does not account for all aspects of a successful or unsuccessful transition (Spiegel & Schultz, 2003).

To understand a portion of the psychological transition that takes place during military retirement, Taylor et al. (2007) conducted a research study on the impact of job attachment on the psychological adjustment of Naval officers during retirement. The main focus of the study was to understand military retirement and how the adjustment to retirement is impacted by met/unmet expectations of retirement along with the occupational attachment. The researchers suggested that because people spend a great deal of time at work, self-worth is tied to the role in which people carry out work. The attachment to the role that people have at work could have an effect on how people adjust to retirement, how people enjoy their retirement, and how worrisome people are to retire prior to retirement occurring. Role theory was utilized to frame the research study and its elements. Role theory states that people play different roles within a work context, and people have relational characteristics and behaviors within those contexts. The role in which people attach to, in part, determines their identities along with social identities. A transition not only took place with work roles during retirement but the identity of being retirees instead of workers. Applying all of the concepts just described to the military population was conducted by the researchers as they argued that military members are more likely to have a strong work-role attachment, consequently making retirement more

difficult. For the quantitative study, over 650 participants that were all retired Navy officers from varying backgrounds and demographics took part in two questionnaires. One questionnaire pertained to Navy active duty, and one pertained to military retirement. The results of the study showed that attachment to careers appeared less important to how military retirees adjusted to retirement than the researchers previously thought, as there may have been other elements that played a greater role in adjustment. However, attachment did play a role in retirement satisfaction but based on if the retired Naval officers had moved away from their last stations or not. The officers that had not moved after retirement had high retirement satisfaction. Future research is suggested to be conducted in the area of whether or not the past work of retirees becomes less important or the attachment fades over time, meaning the longer ago military service was, the less important it becomes, and if retirement satisfaction increases (Taylor et al., 2007).

Military Personnel in Civilian Careers

A general consensus exists that the military to civilian transition is a difficult one, which comes with a large number of challenges and difficulties. Varying degrees of the challenges and difficulties have been studied in multifaceted ways and from multidimensional angles. However, studied less frequently is what happens to military personnel after they join the civilian workforce and are working in civilian workplaces. To that end, Tūtlys et al. (2018) studied how retired military officers transitioned into civilian workplaces. The main focus of the study was to understand the experiences of retired military officers and how their military skills and competencies compare with

their civilian jobs. The researchers utilized the competence model to frame the study and gain the results. Some of the topics covered included what the retirees did in the military and what that means for their civilian job competence, and how well the skills learned in the military transfer to their civilian jobs. The researchers conducted a qualitative study in which 25 participants were interviewed using semistructured interviews, which were conducted face to face. The researchers ensured a random sampling with the participants being from various backgrounds, education, and experiences. The results of the study showed the military retirees had challenges with regard to finding employment in the civilian market. Some of the challenges included competencies not matching with the civilian jobs available, the older retired officers being considered too elderly for certain positions, civilian employers not understanding the transferability of military retirees' skills based on a divergent dialect, lack of support network comparable to the military support network, negative stigma that comes with being a senior officer from the military, lack of structure compared to military service, and many other pertinent areas within the results. Future research is suggested in the area of understanding what it is like for the stakeholders in the hiring of military retirees, such as policymakers and civilian employers, which would allow for a clearer understanding of the issues from their sides.

Many retirees, even those that stay in past the obligatory 20 years, get another job after they retire from military service. The topic area of how they function in their second careers has been studied infrequently; however, Vigoda-Gadot et al. (2010) provided data on retirees' second careers and how military retirees transitioned to those careers to attempt to understand this population better. The researchers argued that most people go

through several different careers during their lifespan, as people tend to change their jobs at least once during their lives. The researchers made the point that when people switch to another career at some point during their lives, they call upon the knowledge, experiences, and skills they gained from their previous careers (Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2010). Considering military members are eligible to retire from military service at the 20-year mark, it stands likely that most military members go on to have another career, hoping to use the skills they earned in the military. The researchers utilized the theory of organizational commitment to frame their study of military retirees. People's personalities played a role in the jobs they choose and how committed they are to their chosen jobs, along with the concept that the closer that people identified with their jobs, the more committed they became. The researchers also mention how social relationships played a role in organizational commitment. The researchers chose to focus on several areas pertaining to retirement, including how prepared military members were to retire and if that had a positive impact on retirement, how people fit into the social dynamics of their previous careers, and if that has a positive impact on retirement, and how much work-family conflict existed in the retirees' relationships during and after retirement and if that had a negative impact on retirement (Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2010). The researchers conducted a quantitative study with just over 200 participants, who filled out a questionnaire pertaining to career satisfaction, overall life satisfaction, intentions to turn over to a new career, how many jobs they held organizational commitment, how they prepared for retirement, their social situations, and work-family conflict. The results of the study showed that those that prepared for retirement before they actually retired

showed a positive correlation with retirement and for those that moved onto another career in the civilian workplace. Preparing for retirement also had a positive impact on life satisfaction. The work-family conflict did not appear to have an impact on career satisfaction but did have a negative impact on overall life satisfaction. Social relationships had a positive impact on career satisfaction and life satisfaction. Areas for future research were suggested in replicating the study to be able to generalize it to more than just the specific group of retirees that participated in the study to understand retirement from a more general level (Vigoda-Gadot et al., 2010).

Summary and Conclusions

The goal of this study was to understand the loss of social identity and organizational socialization that military officers may lose when they retire from military service. The issue of loss for these retirees was a social issue that had yet to be addressed by current research. Many of the articles and studies presented in this literature review point to issues with veterans and, in a couple, retirees, making the transition from military service to civilian life or work. The research pointed to there being an issue with the transition, but not why the transition is difficult. Articles were presented concerning the military culture and organizational socialization in an attempt to offer a possible reason for the difficulties. The loss of culture and organizational socialization may create a struggle during and after the transition. Current transition assistance programs do not address this psychological piece of leaving or retiring from military service. Military personnel inside civilian organizations have been studied less frequently, but there is research to support a struggle in civilian organizations as well. Again, the struggle within

civilian companies pointed to a loss of the military culture and organizational socialization. The gap in all of the literature presented, is multifaceted. However, it included the length of service as an indicator of the level at which veterans and retirees struggle during and after the transition. The gap also included a lack of current research on retirees specifically. Also, a connection between the loss of social identity and organizational socialization, leading to the psychological struggle, is missing. It is apparent from the review of literature that the topic of veterans and, therefore, retirees, transitioning to civilian life and civilian careers continues to be a social issue for this population. The present study could be highly beneficial in understanding how losing social identities, and organizational socialization led to difficulty when retiring from military service, and to understand how long-time serving retirees played a role in that difficulty, which could lead to social change.

Chapter 2 was a review of the current literature surrounding the theories of social identity and organizational socialization, military culture, and military retirement, among other topics. This chapter serves as a basis of literature showing a social issue remains for this population and calls for future research. Addressing the gap shown in Chapter 2 was the aim of this study. In Chapter 3, the study design and methodology are discussed in detail. The theoretical framework for this study is also discussed in greater detail with regard to its use in research. The research questions, participant selection, data analysis plan, and ethical considerations are also discussed in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3: Research Method

This chapter will include a description and discussion of the qualitative, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) design that I used to conduct this study on military retirees with 24 to 42 years of service. The goal of this study was to understand the lived experiences of retired military officers related to their potential loss of social identity and loss of organizational socialization after retiring from military service. In this chapter, I will discuss the research design and rationale, my role as a researcher, the methodology, data analysis plan, issues of trustworthiness, and ethical procedures before concluding with a summary.

Research Design and Rationale

I employed the IPA qualitative method of collecting and analyzing data in this study. The qualitative method was chosen for its focus on the participants' lived experiences and the meaning that people assign to those experiences (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The IPA design was chosen for its focus on how human beings attempt to make sense of the world around them, especially because this study looked at an emotionally complex issue (i.e., how military officer retirees experience the loss of social identity and organizational socialization). The quantitative method of collecting data would not have allowed for the depth of understanding participants' lived experiences or would it have allowed for the depth of information gathered in qualitative interviews. A survey would have only allowed for short responses and would have limited the richness of the data collected. The following research questions guided this study:

RQ1: How are retired military officers with 24–42 years of service affected by the loss of social identity and loss of organizational socialization after military retirement?

RQ2: How are retired military officers with 24–42 years of service affected in their second career civilian workplaces due to the loss of social identity and organizational socialization?

Role of the Researcher

Considering this was a qualitative study, I was the primary data collection point (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I also analyzed the data and reported my findings. Because I was the data collection point, my role was as observer/participant because I engaged the participants in semistructured interviews. I attempted to exclude participants with whom I had a prior professional or personal relationship with because that might have skewed the data; however, there was one participant with whom I had a prior relationship (more than 20 years ago). I mitigated skewing of the data by maintaining professional and ethical boundaries while conducting the study, and no active relationship with this participant existed. No other known ethical issues existed.

Methodology

Participant Selection

The population for this study was retired U.S. military officers who were presently working in a civilian workplace. The target size for the population was 20 military officer retirees because qualitative studies typically consist of small sample sizes due to the robust amount of data collected (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Data saturation

occurred prior to reaching the target size. However, data collection continued to allow increased academic rigor in the results (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The participants had to meet the following criteria to participate: be U.S. military veterans who were retired from military service and who retired as commissioned officers who served 24–42 years on active duty and were actively working in a second career in a civilian organization at the time of the study. There were no restrictions regarding the retirees' military occupational specialty or the time period in which they retired. Active-duty military members were excluded because this study was focused on retired military officers.

I recruited participants for this study through the social media platforms of Facebook and LinkedIn. A post was created outlining the participation criteria provided in the previous paragraph. I also employed purposeful, snowball sampling by inquiring about referrals for other retired officers that participants knew (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Instrumentation

The instrument for this study was the semistructured interview question list, which was comprised of open-ended questions (see Appendix B). Using open-ended interview questions resulted in the collection of rich and thorough data by allowing participants to provide as detailed a response as they liked (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The interview questions broached the topics of the participant's current life situation, their potential loss of social identity, their loss of organizational socialization, and past and current functioning in their civilian workplaces. I developed the set of questions and recorded the semistructured interviews for accurate and complete documentation.

Recording and maintaining the interviews for future reference and confirmability also provided credibility and validity and allowed for accurate data analysis. Data will be maintained for a period of 5 years, per the Walden University requirement, and so they may be utilized in future research opportunities.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

I recruited participants for this study via social media and purposeful snowball sampling. Participants included retired military officers that served between 24 and 42 years and were currently working in a civilian job at the time of the study. Active-duty military members were excluded. Recruitment of participants continued until 20 retired military officers confirmed their participation.

Once the appropriate number of participants was identified and recruited, I conducted audio-recorded, semistructured interviews on video chat or over the phone with the participants, depending on the retirees' availability. In-person interviews did not take place. A signed informed consent form or consent given via email was obtained from each participant willing to take part in this study, and all interviews were recorded for documentation and accuracy purposes. Prior to each interview, the participants were provided with information regarding available mental health and crisis hotlines should they have had the need for them. Participants also received information on the next steps in the research process, including information on member checking and my contact information should they have had any questions.

Data Analysis Plan

I collected all data from participants via audio-recorded, telephone or video interviews. Audio recordings were assigned the corresponding confidential participant number, and then the recordings were transcribed using NVivo 12 transcription and qualitative analysis software. Member checking, which is the process of research participants reviewing the data transcriptions and agreeing or disagreeing with the accuracy of the transcription, were conducted for data accuracy; however, not all participants responded. After data were checked for accuracy, I transcribed the interviews and manually coded them using thematic coding using the NVivo 12 software (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Open coding was carried out by highlighting words or phrases within each of the transcripts that ascribed to the same meaning. Once words or phrases were assigned with a code word and color, they were grouped into larger patterns of meaning or clusters. The clusters revealed patterns in the participants' responses (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I will discuss the patterns found in the study findings. All data collected will be maintained for a period of 5 years.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Issues of trustworthiness of any research study must be considered and addressed prior to the start of the study to ensure data are accurate and as unbiased as possible (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Credibility is the ability of a researcher to be able to assess their study holistically (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I established credibility in this study through member checks and data saturation. Member checking is the process of transcribing the interviews that were conducted and then sending the transcribed interviews to the

participant to review. I sent the interview, accompanied by member check questions, via email to each of the participants for their review. Many, but not all, participants provided member checks of their responses. Data saturation occurs when new participants do not provide new answers, and there is a significant pattern within the participants' responses (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I chose the number of 20 participants with data saturation in mind because qualitative studies tend to have fewer participants to reach saturation (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Data saturation was reached with the 20 participants included in the study.

Transferability is the idea that the study's results may be generalized within the population that was studied (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Transferability within the qualitative realm is not typically possible due to the type of data being sought and participants providing lived experiences. However, transferability should be obtained as much as possible, and for this study, I strove to reach it through thick description and as much variation in the participant selection as was possible. The selected population was a niche group of military retirees; therefore, as randomized a selection as possible was sought. Through the thick description and variation in participant selection, understanding the lived experiences and the meaning the participants ascribed to the experiences seemed to provide as much transferability as possible.

Dependability refers to the alignment of the study concepts, such as research questions, data collection, and how those data will stand up over time (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). The elements of this study appear to be aligned. The research and interview questions align with the theories comprising the conceptual framework. Dependability

was also increased in this study through the use of data triangulation. Data triangulation in this study was achieved through the collection of data from multiple military retirees from different backgrounds, different military occupational specialties, with different windows of service years, and different timeframes in which they retired. Collecting data from participants with varying degrees of these elements enhanced dependability through data triangulation. Data triangulation was also achieved by using member checks.

Confirmability is the qualitative researcher's admittance and acceptance that all qualitative research comes with a certain amount of researcher bias due to the researcher being the primary instrument of data collection (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Considering all qualitative research includes the assumption of a certain amount of bias, it is important that other steps are taken to ensure the least amount of bias possible. I mitigated researcher bias in this study through data triangulation, transferability, and member checks. Each of those elements seems to have allowed for as much of a reduction of researcher bias as possible.

Ethical Procedures

Researchers must acknowledge the possibility of ethical issues within any research design and that they may present themselves at any time. This research study involved retired military officers that were currently working in a civilian job at the time of the study, so it was vital to collect, record, and report data with the utmost care and confidentiality to protect the officer retirees' current jobs. During the recruitment and data collection processes, I informed the participants that they could cease their participation in the study at any time. Approval for this study was granted by the Walden

University Institutional Review Board before any data were collected. Walden University's approval number for this study is 05-06-21-0362167. The identities of all participants in the study were and will be kept confidential, and the data collected were kept confidential as well. To do so, each participant was assigned a participant number, and their real names were not used. Participants also signed a document or sent an email giving informed consent prior to their participation in the study.

Ethical and legal issues should be avoided at all costs, and potential ethical and legal issues should be identified and addressed prior to research being conducted (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To avoid ethical and legal issues as best as possible, I took the following steps: signed or emailed informed consents were obtained from every participant, every effort was made to keep all participants and their provided data confidential, received and discussed informed consent with participants prior to data being collected, ensured that all participants engaged in the study willingly, ensured that all participants were/are protected from any harm as best as possible, provided and used (if necessary) resources for participant safety, obeyed the American Psychological Association code of ethics, and adhered to all standards of conduct with regard to human subjects as it relates to research.

Summary

In Chapter 3, I detailed the methods by which this study was carried out. The chapter included a discussion of the research design, the role of the researcher, how participants were selected, questions posed during the interview process, the data analysis plan, and ethical procedures, among other details. In Chapter 4, I will provide the results

of the study. The chapter will include explanations of the setting, the demographics of the participants, how data were collected, how data were analyzed, and the results.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of retired military officers who served between 24 and 42 years and how they potentially experienced losses of social identity and organizational socialization. The study also included an attempt to understand how those losses might have impacted the officers' second careers in a civilian work environment. I was particularly interested in the length of service because past research has highlighted the military-to-civilian transition, in general, as being problematic for many veterans but has not specifically focused on long-time servers. The research questions for this study were:

RQ1: How are retired military officers with 24–42 years of service affected by the loss of social identity and loss of organizational socialization after military retirement?

RQ2: How are retired military officers with 24–42 years of service affected in their second career civilian workplaces due to the loss of social identity and organizational socialization?

Chapter 4 includes a discussion of the research setting, the demographics of the research participants, how data were collected, the analysis of the data, the results of the data analysis, and a summary.

Setting

I utilized the social media platforms of Facebook and LinkedIn to recruit participants for this study; however, only the LinkedIn platform yielded any participants. The first four participants were gained from posting the recruitment flyer to my personal

LinkedIn page because I am a member of several military groups and pages there. This LinkedIn post was shared by several people on their personal and professional LinkedIn pages. From those first few participants, significant snowball sampling took place. One retiree referred another retiree and that retiree emailed a multitude of retirees and posted the recruitment flyer to his personal LinkedIn page and his LinkedIn group. From that participant's referrals, I gained many participants; however, some participants did not share how they became aware of the study. Therefore, the exact number that was a result of snowball sampling is unknown. I did not ask who they were referred by to maintain ethical standards and procedures.

All 20 participants in the study met the inclusion criteria in that they were retired officers, had served between 24 and 42 years, served in one of the Department of Defense branches of the military, and were working in a civilian occupation at the time of the study. There were several participants that volunteered but did not meet inclusion criteria.

One condition that could have affected or influenced participants during their retirement transitions and civilian workplace experiences was the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. Several of the participants retired either just before or during the pandemic. It is unclear how it directly influenced their retirement compared to those who retired before the pandemic because pandemic-specific questions were not posed. However, one element of normal retirement that was mentioned that would have taken place for some of the retirees that did not because of retiring during the pandemic was their retirement ceremonies and/or parties. This element will be addressed in future research suggestions.

Demographics

The study participants were all retired military officers with between 24 and 42 years of military service who had transitioned into the civilian workforce. The participants served in three branches of the U.S. military: the Marine Corps, Navy, and Army. There were no Air Force volunteers for the study. The ages of the participants ranged from 43 to 64 years old. Of the 20 participants, seven were prior enlisted; 19 of them had from one to five combat tours; 19 of them reported being married, with five of them having been divorced previously; and all 20 participants reported having between one and seven children.

To maintain confidentiality, I assigned each participant a participant number. The participants' branch of service, rank at retirement, years of service, and each participant's highest level of education are presented in Table 1. To protect confidentiality, the other pieces of demographic information are not presented or discussed. The military community is relatively small, and any further included demographic information might present the opportunity for the participants to be identified. Confidentiality is an important part of any research study because it allows participants to answer the research and interview questions honestly. The confidential pieces of demographic information for the participants are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographics of Research Participants

Participant Identifier	Branch	Rank at Retirement	Years of Service	Highest Level of Education
P1	Marine Corps	Colonel	30	Masters
P2	Marine Corps	Colonel	35	Masters
P3	Marine Corps	Lt. Colonel	26.5	Masters
P4	Army	Colonel	32	Masters
P5	Marine Corps	Colonel	26.7	Masters
P6	Marine Corps	Colonel	29.3	Two Masters
P7	Navy	Captain	30.2	Masters
P8	Marine Corps	Colonel	28	Masters
P9	Marine Corps	Lt. Colonel	25	Masters
P10	Marine Corps	Major General	36.5	Three Masters
P11	Navy	Captain	29.5	Masters
P12	Army	Colonel	26.5	PhD Candidate
P13	Marine Corps	Colonel	30	Masters
P14	Marine Corps	Colonel	26	Masters
P15	Marine Corps	Colonel	27	Masters
P16	Marine Corps	Colonel	30	Bachelors
P17	Marine Corps	Major	24	Masters
P18	Marine Corps	Colonel	33	PhD Candidate
P19	Navy	Lt. Commander	27	EdD, Three Masters
P20	Marine Corps	Major General	36	Two Masters

Data Collection

I collected the data for this study through the use of semistructured interviews. The target number of participants was 20 retired officers, and 20 officers participated and were interviewed. The audio-recorded interviews lasted approximately 60 minutes. Participants gave their permission to audio record the interviews when completing their informed consent form and also their verbal consent during the interview process. Some interviews were conducted by phone, but most interviews were conducted over Zoom, a video chat platform. Due to geographical location of the participants and the COVID-19 pandemic, none of the interviews were conducted face to face. However, the Zoom platform appeared to allow for better rapport building and interaction during the interview as opposed to the phone interview option. I asked each of the participants all the interview questions, and their responses to each question were audio recorded through use of the voice memo software on my cell phone. No unusual circumstances were encountered during the data collection process.

Data Analysis

I transcribed each of the audio recordings using NVivo 12 transcription software and then checked each transcription in detail for accuracy by listening to the audio recording while reading the transcript. Mistakes in the transcription were corrected to reflect each participant's exact spoken words. After each participant's transcript was checked for accuracy, I carried out the interpretative phenomenological analysis method to analyze the data. I manually coded the transcribed interviews using thematic coding and NVivo 12 software (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Open coding was conducted by

highlighting words or phrases within each of the transcripts that ascribed to the same meaning. Once words or phrases were assigned with a code word/phrase and color, they were grouped into larger patterns of meaning or categories. The categories revealed patterns in the participants' responses (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I named the patterns and will discuss them in the Results section of this chapter. All data collected will be maintained for a period of 5 years.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

It is vital within any research study to consider the evidence of trustworthiness of the entire research process. For qualitative studies, those elements of trustworthiness include credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016). These elements were carried out in this research study just as they were discussed in the previous chapter. I achieved credibility through the use of member checks, with each participant reviewing their transcripts from their interviews for accuracy and data saturation. Data saturation was reached, as evidenced by the themes presented in this chapter. Transferability is not possible in qualitative studies; however, it should be strived for as much as possible through rich data collection. While 20 participants is a large number of participants for a qualitative study, transferability is limited in this study due to the homogenous nature of gender and military branch of the participants. Confirmability considers all qualitative research to include the assumption of a certain amount of bias. I achieved confirmability in this study through data triangulation, transferability, and member checks. Each of those elements allowed for as much of a reduction of researcher bias as possible.

Results

As a result of data collection and qualitative analysis of the data, several prominent themes emerged. However, each theme that presented itself was connected to and related to the other themes, like a domino effect. To honor the results and present them in a comprehensible narrative manner, I discuss the themes after each research question, with several other emergent themes being addressed after both research questions that did not directly pertain to answering either research question. However, a concise narrative of the flow of the results will be presented below.

The overall narrative of the lived experiences of some of these participants was that when they retired from the military, the essence of what social identity meant was lost. Some participants put this loss into words, and some could not put it into precise terms. The core of SIT is when people are members of or belong to a group, the group's beliefs, values, behaviors, language, and other aspects of the group become ingrained in their social identities via cognitive, evaluative, and emotional means (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Therefore, when they are no longer an active member of that group, elements of, a portion of, or the entire social identity is lost. Loyalty and commitment to the group are pieces of the emotional tenet of SIT (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). The loyalty and organizational commitment of this group of participants were extremely high, as may be seen in their answers, and so much so, that when the subject of not being a member of the group was broached, only some of the participants acknowledged a loss. This was, in part, due to a flaw in the interview questions. I used the word "identity" in the questions, and the term was misunderstood outside the context of SIT because most of the

participants took the word “identity” at face value. It was apparent in the participants’ responses when the word “identity” was used in the interview question that they considered this word to be who they are holistically instead of how they existed within the military social group and culture, causing a distortion of results. Despite this flaw, however, their feelings on the elements, portions, or total losses they felt were revealed through other interview questions that did not include the word “identity,” bolstering the results in a way because they still discussed losses of social identity without being directly asked about the concept.

Understanding what comprised the participants’ social identities is vital for understanding their lived experiences during and after their transitions to the civilian workforce. The participants’ social identities that were built and maintained during their decades of military service were clear through the reported characteristics within the military culture (i.e., organizational socialization) and how they continued to use those characteristics as well. Although parts of some of the participants’ military social identities were either lost or changed, the parts of their military social identities that remained intact, stemming from the military culture, aided them in their transition. The parts that remained intact not only aided them during their retirement from military service but also helped them adapt to their civilian environments and impacted the choices they made after retirement. Their length of service was the positive reinforcement of the organizational socialization characteristics that formed their social identities. Therefore, each passing year they were successful in their military service while utilizing their social identities to be successful was the continuous positive reinforcement of those

social identities within the military culture, with many of the participants' answers to the interview questions addressing this topic. Although their social identities were lost or changed, they utilized the elements learned and reinforced for decades through organizational socialization to push forward, adapt, assimilate, and maintain success in their new civilian environments. This adaption to the civilian environment, while trying or even difficult at times, appeared to have been conducted for a specific purpose: to belong. The loss of belonging and the search for belonging again is this study's overarching theme. I will explain this concept in greater detail through discussing the emergent themes.

The concise narrative above will be discussed in detail via each theme that created it, along with the other emergent themes that presented themselves outside this main narrative. There were no glaringly discrepant cases as each theme presented has a strong backing. While each participant contributed to the themes slightly differently, the common ground was found through interpretative phenomenological qualitative analysis and will be discussed and supported below.

RQ1: How Are Retired Military Officers with 24-42 Years of Service Affected by the Loss of Social Identity and Loss of Organizational Socialization After Military Retirement?

Several themes emerged from the data pertaining to the losses of social identity and organizational socialization. The most prominent themes concerning answering RQ1 included (a) loss of belonging, (b) loss of security or stability, (c) cultural elements that made up social identity, (d) shades of social identity loss, and (e) the elements that aided

mitigation of the losses of social identity and organizational socialization. The following is a discussion of each of these major themes that emerged from the data with quotes from the participants to answer the first research question.

Loss of Belonging

During the interviews with the participants and in discussing the interview questions that addressed the losses of social identity and organizational socialization (military culture), several patterns emerged from the data, with the patterns converging on one central overarching theme: the loss of belonging. The loss of social identity (see theoretical framework) was felt most through the loss of belonging. While the participants called this phenomenon different things, the overall theme presented itself in a clear manner. The military culture teaches military members to be emotionally unaffected, to stay focused on the mission and the future, and that failure is not an option, as many of the participants discussed in their responses. Therefore, participants eluded to the overall theme of the loss of belonging via the loss of social identity through various, seemingly innocuous, ways.

The analysis for this study was difficult as participants, who are distinguished, long-time serving, accomplished, retired officers and military men were asked to discuss their emotions and feelings. It is a personal perspective that this could be the first time that many of these participants have considered these ideas, losses, and emotions since retiring. Also, for these participants, being retired military members, many felt as though they still “belong” because they still hold a military ID card and have access to most military installations, among other tangible military resources. However, the theme of

"loss of belonging" was not related to those surface-level, physical elements. The loss of belonging refers instead to the intangible elements of knowing they belong to the active team, the emotions tied to being an active member of the team, and how it feels to have been a member of the active team for multiple decades and then not being one. The loss of belonging refers to the participants mattering, in other words, that they matter, and what they did on a daily basis mattered, and now in the civilian world, the feeling is different. When some of the participants lost their sense of belonging to the active team, they lost the feeling that they mattered, how they mattered to the team, and how they mattered to a greater purpose.

It is vital for the reader of any of these results to look past the surface level meaning to anything that was said and perceive the deeper and underlying meaning of what the participants actually said. The deeper meaning of what the participants said has been allowed to emerge through the qualitative research analysis process. This study was built upon the theories of social identity theory and organizational socialization, and the answers were viewed through these lenses. Again, the participants' answers were seemingly innocuous until the lenses of the conceptual framework were applied. For example, for 16 of 20 participants, the loss of belonging may be seen in the pattern code of "not being an active member of the team anymore." Navy participant, P11, stated:

> You know, I was joking the other day, I was flying and I couldn't get on the plane first because I'm not active duty and, I didn't get a free bag because I wasn't… those are silly little things, but a lot of those things are different.

Marine Corps participant, P13, noted several elements:

> But the one title I can't ever take away is Marine. And so, I didn't lose my identity because I'm always going to be a Marine. You're always going to be a Marine. But any identity I lost would have been directly associated with the people I was with and how I identify with them and how we looked up to each other, and held each other accountable.
>
> And I felt like I was failing here [civilian job]. And for the first time in my life, I can identify that failure, but I couldn't fix it. And I didn't have Marines around me to help me fix it, so it was a pretty lonely place.

Marine Corps participant, P14, mentioned:

> So definitely there is some awareness that I miss that culture. I miss wearing the uniform a little bit just because, it states who I am. It stated who I am in a way, whether it was the rank or the medals or just the fact that I was on active duty. I'd say I would have a low awareness of how it really affected me.
>
> I said, let's go on base. You know, there's nothing else to do, let's go to the base. My ID card had expired. Not one time in my entire life had I ever let my ID card expire, but it was [expired]. And the gate guard looked at me and is like, well, I can't let you in, you don't have a current ID. And I'm like, I can't come into the base? He's like, sorry, I can't let you in. And so, it was like this very dramatic, like God was telling me, [Name], you got to move on, you've got to let it go. And so, we just made a U-turn and left the base. I was like, all right, so it's a new world now.

Marine Corps participant, P15, stated:

> So, I think there is a loss of... Again, it's probably a good word, you know, that group, culture, identity, part of it, I think, individuals will make up for that by wearing insignia. You know, some will still wear their jackets or they'll have a ball cap on and it says veteran or something. I think that's a little tug at this, hey I'm still one of these. So other people would have material recognition that individual is a veteran. So, yeah, it's probably true that you lose a little bit of yourself and particularly if you do that for 20 years or 27, that's a lot.

Marine Corps participant, P16, said:

> Well it definitely is part of it [identity loss], right, because, especially, that rank, when you go on base, you instantly have, if you have a uniform on, you instantly have that, right. So, to say that you don't lose it [identity] partially, that would be untrue.

Marine Corps participant, P17, offered:

> Not wearing a uniform every day or not having a rank associated, I think it's difficult. And I think for people who are in for a long time… it's challenging when there are so many unknowns for them to admit, I would almost say, accept that they don't know they're struggling, which I think I can relate to now.

Marine Corps participant, P20, mentioned:

> I go to the Pentagon now in a coat and tie, and there's pictures of me in the Pentagon when I used to command installations, command position of the commanders, but I'm not that anymore. And so, it's hard not to be part of a team. I go to changes of command here, I go to ceremonies here, and they acknowledge

> you sometimes, sometimes they don't. And it's not the acknowledgement. It's just the fact that I'm not part of that uniform team anymore. Like I told you before, you're out. The way I reconcile this in my mind is that it's somebody else's time. I had my turn. I had my turn doing all the things in uniform, being part of that team, having that camaraderie and being around the troops. I had all that, all that time, and it's somebody else's turn. But it's hard to accept that. It is psychologically, it's hard. Some people can't, I've seen people who just can't let it go. I learned to let it go. I don't like it, but it's reality.
>
> It was [a loss]. It was the loss of who I was and what I lived for and my passion in my work for the last almost four decades. And so, you're not a human being, I don't think, if you dedicate your life so hard to that and you're so passionate and you love an organization so much and then boom, you're gone. And so, it was a loss. It's a loss. I remember that it hit me, I remember I had my change of command and that was it…And I had my change of command. And I still remember taking my blouse off and then starting to undo my boots, and I knew it was for the last time and I couldn't stop crying because it was the last time, and that I'd done this for so many years. And then at my retirement…we had a retirement and I retired in [place], so my family could be there. And I remember the [person who] retired me and I remember I mean, I lost it, and it's because you lose that identity, because it is a sense of loss.

Marine Corps participant, P3, offered, “Just over the part of the uniform [loss], you know, that you're going to kind of be on the sidelines. So, but you get through it.”

Marine Corps participant, P9, mentioned:

> Oh, that's true [that it is a loss]. It was a loss getting out of the military because of that identity piece. You have to lose. So, I was identified as a Marine or still am, but in the sense of being active duty and having all the jobs that you're given, and the expectations of you. When you get out, you no longer have those expectations of either being a mentor to the Marines or being a leader of those Marines or even taking care of the daily tasks, you know, 30, 60, 90-day actions for a boss. So, with the loss of that identity comes the loss of all those things that you are supposed to be doing as a Marine.

Also, 10 of the 20 participants contributed to this theme of loss of belonging as "being forgotten," "being replaceable," or "the service moves on without you." Marine Corps participant, P13, stated:

> Yeah, it's hard sometimes, you know, maybe more so because I am here [at a military base], so everything I told you earlier, that knife cuts both ways. The older I get, and over the next few years, I will know less people. And I'll just be that old retired guy. Nobody will be interested in my stories. We don't get invited to our old housing area anymore for firepits. So, it's been a slow movement away from being personally plugged in. I'm still professionally plugged in, but personally, every day, it gets a little weaker.

Marine Corps participant, P2, mentioned:

> It's just being forgotten I think is the hard part…The further you get away from that retirement date, fewer and fewer people know who you are, fewer and fewer

> people could care less…and you just recognize that, hey, the wheel keeps turning and, you're not an active member of the team.
>
> I think it goes back to this story from [person]. Where over time you are forgotten and people can't deal with that. I think that's why maybe a lot of these retirees on the golf course always try to namedrop people like, oh, I know so-and-so and I served with... oh you know him? So, they think it gives them relevance.

Marine Corps participant, P12, noted:

> The reality is, that's about all I miss, is missing sharing the successes of those folks I've worked with or that have worked for me, not being part of those successes moving forward, because that's always, as a leader, that's how you define your successes. How do the folks that you worked with and that you helped coach, teach, and mentor, how are they progressing? And it turns out like the only time you ever get calls is when somebody gets in trouble and they need a letter of recommendation or something. That typically is what you get.

The overall theme of the loss of belonging (loss of social identity) may also be seen through the pattern of "loss of support network from military and military members." One of the strongest aspects of organizational socialization or military culture is that of being closely tied and bonded to the other members of the military. This is the essence of social identity theory (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Some of the organizational socialization and, therefore, social identity patterns that emerged were "close-knit," "deep mutual understanding," and "teamwork and collaboration." Most of the participants mentioned this aspect of the military culture, and many mentioned they felt the loss of the

support network their fellow military members provided. Once participants lose the support of the members of the active team on a daily basis, they appeared to have lost that sense of belonging and inclusion to the active team. For instance, Marine Corps Participant, P13, reported:

> As I moved into this job, I had very few people for a while, no one that I really felt I could connect with like I did when I was in the Marine Corps. And when I was in the Marine Corps, a lot of that [workload] would have been shared more. So that's the loss for me, is the loss of rolling your sleeves up and being part of a team that doesn't always do it exactly right, but, you know everybody's rowing in the same direction. And when you see somebody that's struggling, like I was struggling just to maintain my sanity, somebody steps in and says, hey, what can I take from you? What do you need me to do? And that was missing. And so, I missed that part of the culture where everybody looks out for each other.

Marine Corps participant, P15, said, “I have missed the camaraderie and the individuals that I worked with and those kinds of professional qualities that people have in the service.”

Marine Corps participant, P17, reported:

> Basically, everything from the time I stepped on the yellow footprints in [Marine Corps Recruit Depot] San Diego [boot camp] to however you’re commissioned or however you entered any service, everything is based on a team, fireteam, squad, and a platoon. You're never in it alone. It is always team driven. And there's a leader. And for everything from the time you join until when you decide to get out

> or are told to get out [you're on a team], then [when you get out] you're on your own. They're kind of like, OK, you go to these classes and here's the checklist and all these things. You have to decide what you want to do. And you're on your own and it's very different when you've spent decades not thinking or going through those types of things. And so, I think that was the most challenging part of the transition.

Marine Corps participant, P2, stated:

> It's just the psychological part, you don't have that support network behind you. You're walking out there by themselves and standing outside in the field, naked. And it's hard, no one's mentally prepared for that, and I think that's exactly what you and your [dissertation] need to explain. You had the team walls, then you're no longer part of the team. You are as you… each day goes by, you get further and further away from that team and that sort of support network. And I don't think people are mentally prepared for that, the loneliness that's coming.

Marine Corps participant, P3, reported, "there's a loss of camaraderie that is audible when you move on."

Army Participant, P4, said:

> And then it surprises me, now 2 years removed, that you do miss many aspects of the culture of the military. Things like... I don't know. I'm just thinking like my work here is all great, and I work for an organization with a phenomenal culture. But…It's not like, the sense of team.

Marine Corps participant, P1, mentioned:

> I mean, even in the military, people commit suicide to say, I don't want to… even while they're in the military, but it's even more so [after they leave the service] because you don't have that support structure around you or all the friends and people who have your same shared experiences.

The loss of belonging theme also made itself known through the pattern of "negative separation emotions." While the military culture insists upon a constant drive to move forward, to not allow failure, and to be disciplined in all things, as the participants discussed in their responses, 17 of the 20 participants expressed the negative emotions they felt through various aspects of their transition from military service to their civilian lives. The negative emotions felt leaving the military culture and having different shades of social identity loss led to the feelings of not belonging as they experienced those losses. If they were still included or they still belonged to the active team, they would not have suffered the losses or experienced the negative emotions they reported. To illustrate, Marine Corps participant, P10, stated:

> People do go into a funk. I think it's natural. You have to protect against that. You have to recognize that this is why you put this kind of stuff [military mementos] up on the wall. And it is mostly pictures… I've got pictures of people I served with. So, yes, people do go into a funk. I don't think I went into a big funk because I kind of mentally prepared for what am I going to do next?

Navy participant, P11, contributed:

> It was a shock [leaving the military]. We take all the classes to prepare for it…So I chose to leave on my terms, but it was still hard to leave. I mean, I didn't stay up

> crying all night about it, but it was still hard to leave… I think on the whole, I was sad to leave. And I miss the camaraderie with a lot of the people I was working with.

Marine Corps participant, P14, noted:

> So, you bring up a good point, though. There is something that hits me occasionally every other month, it might be after watching a good war movie, it might be after reading a military book, or even if there is some kind of a military action going on in the Middle East and hearing about it. There is some part of me that I can't really put my finger on, that is sad about being out of the military. Not having that excitement or the adventure or the mission that I can go in and do something about it, and so I say that I haven't been sad about losing my identity [previously in the interview], but I am sad about something. And maybe it has to do with my identity, but maybe if the identity is wrapped up in that idea of being able to go do something about something, then yes, I think that's what I get sad about occasionally.

Marine Corps participant, P18, stated:

> The day I left, I was the commanding officer, so I had a thousand people in formation standing at attention in the sun, saying goodbye to me, and trumpets and bugles and all that stuff, and I'm like, Caesar is leaving or something, you know, and I just get in a car and I'm normal Joe the next day. So that was a little difficult.

Marine Corps participant, P2, said:

> So, my feelings were kind of rough at first, as I got to terminal [terminal leave]. And I was just sitting around the house and looking out the window and watching people go to work. And everyone was going, "man it must be nice just to sit around," and I'm like, I'm freaking bored… And I don't think people are mentally prepared for that, the loneliness that's coming.

Marine Corps participant, P20, noted:

> And that's because I wanted to stay. And I think that's the difference, and if you want to stay, it's because you want to be part of that culture. You want to be part of that team. You want to be part of that piece of society… I just thought that was a piece, that was a culture that I wanted to stay in. It's like being a priest or being in some profession that is very unique…those core values that are ingrained in us, a lot of us just want to maintain them throughout our life. And it's hard to go away. I mean, it's just hard to leave them. But I wanted to be part of that team. I want to be part of that culture. I wanted to be part of who we are. And it was to me, it was a transition that was sad. And I had to adjust, because I left the team and an organization that I love so much.

Marine Corps participant, P3, mentioned, "just you know the uniform, you're never going to wear it again and that kind of stuff, and you just deal with it every couple of days and then move on."

Army participant, P4, stated:

> And it surprised me how much I did [feel negative emotions], leading up to the retirement ceremony, and actually physically leaving the military, saying

> goodbye, and leaving the organization and the people was a little tough, or it was tougher than I thought.

Navy participant, P7, noted:

> I think it's a huge part of my identity and when I retired, I realized that when you're in, and you're on active duty, you just kind of take it for granted. And then when you don't have it anymore, you realize that was that was a huge part of my life. And for me, I was in the military over half my life. So, it definitely had an impact. And I think once you leave it, you can't just get rid of that that part of your life. So, I don't want to say it defines you, but it definitely influences the way you the way you think and the way you operate.

Loss of Stability or Security From Military Culture

In speaking with the participants with regard to how the loss of organizational socialization (military culture) and social identity might have impacted them, a loss was felt as it pertained to the security and stability that the military culture provides. The military culture is all-compassing for most facets of life (Atuel & Castro, 2018). Military members are set up in such a way that they could have all of their life needs provided to them without ever having to leave a military base (Atuel & Castro, 2018). The benefits of serving in the military come with commissaries (grocery stores), a post exchange (department store), uniform stores, medical facilities for any need, exercise facilities, fast food chains, swimming pools, recreational areas and equipment, movie theaters, banks, and much more (Atuel & Castro, 2018). Aside from the tangible elements just mentioned, military members receive (with very few exceptions) a paycheck twice a month without

fail, which provides security and stability (Atuel & Castro, 2018). Another aspect of the military culture that provides security and stability is the concept of military orders. Military members do not interview for their next job or position; they receive orders or an assignment to a job and place they will work next. This means that the participants knew (again with few exceptions) they had a position somewhere in the world for as long as they served on active duty. The participants understood that as long as they continued to perform, be successful, and stay out of trouble, they would be taken care of for anything that they needed. The participants reported that this provided them with a strong sense of security and stability for the length of their careers.

All of the above-mentioned aspects of the military culture that the participants experienced during their service created a loss for many of the participants when they left that stable and secure culture. One of the patterns that was revealed out of the loss of stability and security that caused some stress to the participants was “figuring out basic life needs” due to the pattern of “all-encompassing and consuming culture.” All 20 participants mentioned, in their own way, how fully immersive and all-encompassing the military culture was, and 13 of the 20 participants alluded to the loss of that security and stability. For instance, Navy participant, P11 stated:

> But all the things that you get when you move to a base, they didn't exist. There was no fleet and family center, there was no dislocation allowance. There was no sponsor from the incoming command. And that's not entirely true because my boss and the guy I was taking over the job from did a pretty good job of keeping me informed, but it just wasn't quite the same. And then when you get here [new

> home], there's no commissary, there's no exchange, there's no all those kind of support things, it was different. And there was no, I was coming to a much smaller organization, so, there was wasn't, “hey, you're here, Welcome.” I mean, I don't want to say that the place wasn't welcoming, it just wasn't quite the same.
>
> The first year of transition when you don't know where your paycheck is coming from and you don't know how you're going to handle medical and all those changes. I mean, I'm in a new medical system. I'm in a new dental system. I'm in a new pay system. I mean, we have to go grocery shopping in different places and those sorts of things. Those were more stressful than normal.

Marine Corps participant, P16, said:

> You know, it's tough [transitioning]. Like when you're getting out, it's the stress of not having a monitor [military member that issues orders], [not having] that twice a month paycheck that keeps coming, no matter what. And I think when people start thinking about it, it's daunting.

Marine Corps participant, P18, noted:

> And so, when I got offered something similar, I said cool because I was stressed. Can you imagine in thirty-three years, I had never negotiated my salary? When I was a kid, I made a dollar twenty-five an hour as a lifeguard or cut grass or something. So, I mean, you didn't negotiate a minimum wage salary, you just got what you got, and in the military, you get paid what you get paid…You never have to worry about it. So, that was that was a huge shock when I transitioned…But I think that's a transition thing that blows a lot of people away.

Marine Corps participant, P2, stated:

> And here's all the forms, pick out what insurance plan you need to get on, and you got to look at these things for your family. That's all on you. Those are huge life impacting decisions that I don't think anyone's really prepared for mentally…No, now you have to figure out the plan you want. You've got to figure out all these things and how do they impact you. It's no longer a walk down to the BAS [medical facility]. It's a totally different world for them. And I don't think most of them are really mentally prepared for it.

Marine Corps participant, P5, mentioned:

> I had some apprehension about leaving the military just because it was just a lot of work, like I mentioned earlier. I was doing another full-time job [military billet] and I knew I had to get another full-time job [civilian job]. And there was a lot just a lot of balls in the air, a lot of uncertainty about where I'd be working, what I'd be doing. I looked at many different career options and opportunities. So that was the only negative thing. It was honestly, it was just the logistics of everything involved.

Marine Corps participant, P6, stated:

> It's a very stressful time, because you're trying to provide for your family. You want to have that continuity. So, it is a stressful time. You're trying to find a job. Because you've got to admit, it's pretty nice knowing you got a paycheck coming in twice a month for twenty-nine years straight, so that's a big change. So, I didn't have to worry about that. I was more just worried about finding something stable,

> some sort of stable income to provide for my family and try to align with the goals we set for our timeline to retire.

Army participant, P4, noted:

> We really never talk about that feeling of what that is, that you're going to feel a sense of loss, you're going to feel a sense of change, you're going to feel a sense of different because again, you're not just leaving a job, you're leaving an environment and a culture and it's all encompassing. It encompasses everything in the military. Your military life encompasses your entire being, your family, every time you get up in the morning. Everything about you is enveloped in the military.

Another element of the theme of loss of stability and security that emerged from the data was the pattern of "anxiety of what will I do after retirement." All of the participants appeared to use the characteristics taught to them by the military culture and, therefore, were ingrained in their social identities to stay focused on the future, continue to move forward without dwelling on the past, and refuse failure. However, 10 of the 20 participants mentioned different hues of negative emotions when having to consider what they will do after their military retirement. For example, Marine Corps participant, P17, noted:

> It was the unknown of…in the military you're typically given assignments, and you get those orders and you follow those orders. But then it's the, what do you want to do next? And it's like, I don't know, I would like to do this. Are you qualified to do it? Are you willing to…what level do you want to start at? What are you interested in? Those are all very tough decisions to make. And depending

> on where you land or in your experience, your opportunities might be limited. I think that in some ways, just even building a résumé, trying to go back and look at the [transition class] I think we can probably do a better job of preparing people for that. And another thing is I think I realize going through the transition process that when you don't have two to three-year orders for the rest of your life and kind of your career, that you're almost going to be in a constant state of transition where you either have to stay ahead of it and figure out what path you want to take. But, you could still get furloughed, or laid off because those things are out of your control. So, this is going to be the way things are from now on, kind of thing, even if you worked for the federal government or somewhere else, that doesn't mean things are guaranteed or they'll always be good. So, it's something that I wish I would have realized sooner, but in some ways because it seemed so far away and so it wasn't the world I was operating in for two decades. Plus, that's a tough transition.

Marine Corps participant, P20, said:

> I was a little lost when I got out. There was a lot of anxiety when I got out, there was a lot of uncertainty. I knew that that I wanted to keep working, but I didn't know what I wanted to do. And I think a lot of us that have been in for long periods of time, and I saw your paper there, up to 42 years, and that's a long time, thirty-six years or two years, that's a long time too. But what do you do after that? I think it's akin to somebody getting out of prison after 50 years. What do you do? What am I? What are my talents? What of what I've done in the military? How

> can I translate that into a civilian job? And what kind of job is it? And so, there was a lot of anxiety for me.

Marine Corps participant, P3, stated:

> So, it was complicated trying to figure out what next. I mean, I needed to move into a new career afterwards, like I couldn't take a year off and kind of contemplate life's mysteries. That transition once you get the Appendix J [retirement approval], once it's approved, and you're retiring, now, it is sort of a big war. Clock's ticking. That's when there's a little bit of the stress factor that kicks in. But you've seen in your life [change], but beyond that, then it becomes the new mission. The job is to transition and not wake up on [retirement date] and have an "oh crap" moment, now what am I going to do? I've got to build some semblance of a plan and enter that last year or two with my eyes open to the transition.

Navy participant, P7, noted:

> That's when you realize you can't have that way of life anymore. It's a different way of life. And it's not something that's the end of the world, by any means. But you realize, OK, that's not what my life's going to be like anymore. It's going to be different.

Cultural Elements That Made up Social Identity

One of the ways social identities are formed is within organizational cultures (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Within the cultures are the values, beliefs, characteristics, behaviors, language, etc., and those elements become

ingrained in people's social identities; in other words, they become a part of people (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). The participants spent decades with their social identities firmly embedded within the military culture, and when they left that culture, they did not leave the values, characteristics, or ideals of the military culture behind. Instead, those values and characteristics that made them successful while serving in the military also aided them in being successful during their transition to civilian life. The characteristics gained from the military culture that allowed them to be successful inside the military culture were adjusted and used in order for them to continue to be successful in their civilian lives as well. This appeared to have been done consciously by some of the participants and subconsciously by others as may be inferred from some of their answers. The extent to which their previous social identities aided them in their civilian careers will be discussed under the second research question. However, it is important to understand what made up the participants' social identities while serving in the military as it impacted their answers to the social identity interview questions and the second research question.

Failure is Not an Option. Although the participants utilized parts of their military social identities to continue to be successful, many of the characteristics of the military culture served as a double-edged sword. The characteristics that both aided the participants' success in the military and during their transition to their civilian careers may have also prevented them from recognizing, having an awareness of, and dealing with the potential losses of social identity and organizational socialization. For instance, one value persistent in the military culture, which 11 of the 20 participants mentioned,

was that “failure is not an option.” With failure not being an option for two to three decades and reinforced on a near-daily basis, that cultural value did not allow some of the participants, regardless of what they felt when they transitioned, to recognize or admit any negative emotions they experienced, as negative emotions could be translated into failure: failure to adapt and overcome, failure to assimilate, or failure to be a successful civilian. Because the military culture demands success, resiliency, focus on the mission, adaptability, and discipline, as many of the participants discussed, for the participants to admit to having struggles would be extremely difficult for them. This is a personal observation stemming from the conflicting language of some of the participants during the interviews, combined with the losses mentioned in the data. However, some of the participants did, in fact, not only recognize the losses but were able to express the negative emotions that accompanied those losses as well. For instance, Marine Corps participant, P13, was able to put this idea into words:

> So, I guess I did not have... I don’t want to say I wasn't resilient, but at a certain point I wasn't, because I lacked the tools to overcome failure, because I had never really experienced it. And so, I didn't have the ability to bounce back. Some of that's my own personality. Again, it's tied to my reputation. And so, I guess I wasn't equipped with coping skills to deal with that kind of adversity that I couldn't fix or I couldn't just work harder to overcome.
>
> And I felt the same way coming in here [civilian job] that was the analogy in my mind, so when the organization is failing, not every day, but failing at a rate that I'm not used to, because of my identity, who I am, who was bred into me,

> what was expected of me for 30 plus years, my dad raised me like a Marine, so I already knew when I came in, but that was really, really hard to take. Really hard to take.

Marine Corps participant, P1, stated:

> The other thing is your resourcefulness, being able to look at all options and not be stymied just because one roadblock is thrown in front of you. You don't give up and say, oh, I can't do this, this is impossible. Right? The military teaches you, find another way. You know what the mission is, find a way to get it done.

Marine Corps participant, P10, mentioned, "We were taught in the military. If you've got a problem, you've got at least one acceptable course of action."

Marine Corps participant, P5, said:

> I've told people this in the past, that the Marine Corps makes you afraid to fail. I was never motivated to do well, I was motivated not to fail, not only myself, but those that I was responsible for. I didn't want to let them down. So that's kind of a negative reinforcement, but it's also effective.

Marine Corps participant, P6, noted, "[There is] a zero-failure mentality. Whatever the job is, we will get it done one way or another." "Especially the Marine Corps, we're well-undermanned and over overburdened for what we do, but we still plant the flag at the top of Mt. Suribachi, Right? We don't fail."

Leadership. Leadership is another military cultural value that 18 of the 20 participants mentioned they not only gained from the military but that translated into the civilian environment as well. In the military, leaders apparently do not take time to assess

their emotions, as some of the participants eluded to in their responses. Military leaders must focus on the mission and the people they are responsible for, regardless of how they feel about those elements and other elements, as the participants discussed. These distinguished, successful participants did as they had always done during their military careers and moved forward without taking time to assess their emotions with regard to their military retirement and the losses they may have suffered. Again, for these leader participants to discuss the issues they had with leaving the military was difficult. I observed this concept also, again stemming from the conflicting language of some of the participants during the interviews, the data, and the observation that this may be the first time these participants were reflecting on their experiences. Regardless, the participants gained invaluable leadership skills from their military careers. Leadership appears to be ingrained in everything that military members do. Leadership was reported to be expected, even demanded, at the two-person team level, to the thousands of people level; leadership in the military was reported to be essential to success. To illustrate, Marine Corps participant, P1, noted:

> And in order for you to achieve whatever you're trying to get done, your leadership is another big, big thing that the military helps tremendously…So that's the skill set that the military sets you up to provide, is to handle and deal with people issues.

Marine Corps participant, P10, mentioned:

> The leadership piece is probably the biggest one. And the fact that that we are taught institutionally that if there's a problem, you come in with the solution as

> well. And I think the other thing is we're maybe you're more comfortable, it probably falls under the leadership piece, but being able to talk to people, read people and say, what's going on? You haven't been your normal self lately.

Army participant, P12, said, “I defined myself being a leader. I defined myself as being someone that was good at developing, coaching, teaching, mentoring.”

Marine Corps participant, P13, stated:

> As a Marine, you could always get it done. There were twenty-eight hours in a day and you knew what you had to do. And the problems I'm dealing with now, they're unsolvable, yet I'm still trying to solve them. And I'm carrying the burden myself, almost like I'm the commander of a unit or it's just me and 250 lance corporals [low rank]. So, I'm not going to have them carry my worries around. And that's been the biggest thing in the transition is trying to, trying to not be so hard on myself and demanding of myself while not lowering my standards, but realizing that this is what it is, no one's dying.
>
> Well, I guess the analogy here would be when you're a CO [commanding officer], you own everything. You know, the Marines get the credit, you get all the blame. And no matter what it is, no matter what your knowledge level was, no matter what happened, you accept that you're the leader.

Marine Corps participant, P14, noted:

> And I think most military leaders from corporal on up have enough experience to some degree that if there's something that has to get done and you've got a group of people, you can say, OK, this is how we're going to do it. And it might not be

> the most efficient way, but you'll break people up into different teams you'll assign them different objectives. You'll try to integrate them, so no one's just standing around wasting time…But you've just done it enough or seen it enough where you can you can kind of match the resources to the task and start getting people going. And maybe a side note to that is for the military leaders, you've done it. You stood up in front of people. You're not as worried about, like them looking at you. You don't feel like you're on the spot. You get a hard question, you're used to kind of thinking about it for a second and giving some kind of good answer.

Marine Corps participant, P15, stated, "And I think that's one of the trademarks of what the military teaches you [leadership]. And whatever level you are, there's always somebody looking up to you, to follow you, and to accept guidance from you."

Marine Corps participant, P17, mentioned:

> So, I think we are taught also, especially in the Marine Corps, to be leaders. So, you're developed into being a leader, but in order to lead, you also have to be, and learn how to be, a good follower.

Marine Corps participant, P18, noted:

> You're trained in the military to take over, and I don't mean in a bad way. I mean, like the next guy over is dead so you've got to take over all of these decisions. Like what now Lieutenant? Like what are you going to do?... I mean, you're taught to lead.

Marine Corps participant, P20, stated:

> And I think some organized civilian organizations that are smart, recognize and leverage that talent of leadership, that and the ability to get things done in the organizational piece that we are very good at. I mean, for us, we can walk into a room and you can say, OK, this is all hosed up, I can fix this. You know, this is what we need to do.

Army participant, P4, illustrated: "[in the military] I identified myself entirely as a leader."

Marine Corps participant, P6, said, "You're a Marine. You need to be holding the line to the end. You're an officer. You need to be doing it even better to set the example."

Mission Focus. Mission focus was another military value that potentially aided and hindered the retired officers during their careers and then in their transitions, and 16 of the 20 participants mentioned the pattern of mission focus. The military culture demands that military members stay focused on their mission and the people under their charge, as many of the participants discussed. While this made the participants successful during their military careers, they also utilized this characteristic during their transition. The participants stayed focused on their next mission, which was transitioning into civilian life and work. Because staying focused on the mission means not dwelling on emotions, the past, or problems, their training of staying focused on the mission may not have allowed some of the participants to recognize, be aware of, or deal with any negative emotions or losses they may have experienced. This observation stems from the conflicting language of some participants and the overall themes from the data. However, it is crucial to understand their military-culture ingrained sense of mission focus to

understand potential losses and how that focus impacted their civilian careers as well. Depending on the perspective, the concept of mission focus allowed for military and transition success. For instance, Navy participant, P11, noted, “I would say [the military culture] is mission focused and provides fairly rigid direction on how things will be done and how things will be structured.”

Marine Corps participant, P17, mentioned:

> I think I would describe the military culture as being cohesive, but also being mission driven, and also in order to achieve or accomplish that mission, that the foundation has to be good order and discipline, and you have to have some sort of leadership.
>
> I said I didn't want to do anything for my retirement at all. Partly I was just ready to move on and focus on the future. Also, I didn't want to make it about me. And then given the circumstances of COVID, unusual times, my wife kind of encouraged me to do something which I was thankful for in retrospect. But at the time, that wasn't the focus for me. The focus was looking forward what was in the future, trying to get the right position and trying to make sure I can take care of my family and stay engaged, those types of things. So, for me, the military culture was ingrained in me to want to continue to plan and focus on the mission and what's ahead.

Navy participant, P19, stated, “So where I was used to, give me a task, tell me something to do, you give me a mission, give me some parameters, and then I'm going to go do it.”

> So, for me, that was another challenge. It was like, I'm going to a new [civilian] country. I'm learning a new [civilian] culture. I'm learning a new [civilian] language. But not only am I going to do good, I'm going to do better than everyone else at it and that's that military culture can-do, stick-to-it-iveness.

Army participant, P4, stated:

> I think we're very good at taking care of our teams, being team-oriented, focused on the mission, being adaptable and resilient. And I think we all have a very aggressive or, forward leaning approach to things. Let's get it done.

Marine Corps participant, P5, stated, “The broad military culture is mission oriented.”

Marine Corps participant, P6, noted:

> All good things come to an end. So, I realize some people have problems or don't grasp that concept, but I just do. So, it's like, it was great while it lasted, but here's what you have to focus on. Now I'm in this phase of life. I'm in this particular job. Here's what I'm doing. So that's where my focus is.

Marine Corps participant, P9, said:

> The culture is mission oriented. Mission usually comes first. We try to make people first, as they're the ones executing the mission. But in the end, the mission usually is the priority. And I say that because the mission involves people's lives, but if you can't get the mission done, you might be losing some people. So, the people that can't get the mission done, we have to replace them or find somebody that can do the mission. So, in that sense, I would say military culture is focus and mission prioritized.

Adaptability. Another vital military organizational cultural element is that of adaptability. There were different ways how adaptability was learned or used, and 14 of 20 participants mentioned this cultural element. Adaptability is another example of an element of the culture that aided participants in their military careers and during their retirement transition. Due to adaptability or the widely recognizable phrase of "adapt and overcome," the participants successfully utilized this element during their careers, and it aided them in being successful as they transitioned and worked in their civilian environments as well. Failure is not an option because military members should always find a way to adapt to their problems, environments, groups of people, and other issues, as the participants discussed, which therefore included adapting to their new civilian workplace environments as well. Adaptability, as it pertains to the civilian transition, will be discussed under RQ2. However, adaptability, as it pertains to the participants' social identities, is discussed here. For example, Marine Corps participant, P6, stated:

> [The culture is] flexible, and adaptable. Again, mission focused. We're going to get this done. You're constantly put into situations that you are hopefully trained for, but still, from your time in the service, training is one thing when you get doing it [the mission] is another.

Marine Corps participant, P1, mentioned:

> The military teaches you, hey, find another way. You know what the mission is, so find a way to get it done. So, resourcefulness, I think it is helpful too in terms of that transition and working in that new environment.

Marine Corps participant, P10, noted, “Here's where we are going [mission]. Here's where we're going to go, as a group. And, so when you go into a new situation, you have to adapt quickly.”

Navy participant, P11, said:

> I mentioned in the military, we change jobs a lot. And so, when you get there [new unit or job], there's a steep learning curve. You’ve got to kind of go OK, I'm here today, the person whose job I'm taking, leaves in a week. So, I’ve got to figure it out in a week, and at the end of that week, either I sink or swim.

Army participant, P12, noted, “But like anything else, you adapt, you adjust and you overcome.”

Marine Corps participant, P13, stated, “We always do what we have to do…as a Marine, you could always get it done. There were twenty-eight hours in a day and you knew what you had to do.”

Marine Corps participant, P17, mentioned, “So I think being flexible, and being adaptable are probably two of the biggest skills.”

Marine Corps participant, P3, noted:

> First and foremost, what I tell people is, adaptability. I have had enough different jobs and trips to Iraq, Afghanistan, and Cuba as a young [officer], and Korea many times, enough to get the ribbon. I became a frequent flyer to Cuba and to Korea. So, adaptability.

Army participant, P4, stated:

> I think we're incredibly flexible. I think military folks are, for example, my manager [asked] Hey, can anybody do this? [He said] Yes. [Manager asked] Can you do that? [He said] Yes. And I'm not trying to be a brownnoser doing that, it's just a simple fact, right? If it needs to be done, give me a holler, we'll get it done. So, we're incredibly flexible. We're incredibly adaptable.

Greater Purpose. The military organizational culture is all-encompassing for a specific purpose. Life needs are taken care of as much as possible so the members of the military can focus on their mission without worrying about or focusing on their life needs, as was apparent through the participants' responses. The overarching mission of the military is to protect and defend the citizens of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic (Atuel & Castro, 2018). The participants talked about this mission by discussing the concept of fulfilling a greater purpose. There were 14 of the 20 participants who addressed the idea of a greater purpose. The realization of the greater purpose came when the participants transitioned to the civilian workforce. The loss of a greater purpose for some of the participants will be discussed with the second research question. However, it is important to note this vital cultural and social identity element here, as it was ingrained in the participants through the military's organizational culture, and therefore it was ingrained in their social identities, as was apparent in their responses. This element was extremely important to this group of participants and remains extremely important even after retirement, as they reported. For example, Marine Corps participant, P1, mentioned, "And it's so different from the Marine Corps where money is

not such a…making money is not such of an issue, as committing yourself to the greater purpose."

Navy participant, P7 noted:

> I think it makes it worse now that I feel like I'm not helping anyone. Because in the military, every day you're doing something, you're doing something. And for the most part, you're doing something towards a goal, towards some kind of mission accomplishment.

Marine Corps participant, P10, stated:

> I'm too young to not do something, and people are like what's wrong with you? Well, I like working, a reason to get up in the morning, that sense of purpose and all… So, the level of commitment is very different, much higher in the military, and I think some of that is a higher calling.

Army participant, P12, said:

> For me, [military] services are a calling and why I'm doing what I'm doing now. So as long as I believe that, I was contributing and I was serving something bigger than myself, that was more important than how I was doing it…And so whether I was in the army or something else, I would have been doing something else in the service of others and the army was a means to that.

Marine Corps participant, P13, noted:

> It [military service] fulfilled everything that I wanted it to, all the things I said earlier about the culture, the sense of pride and belonging. And I would have probably stayed longer if I could have just to not leave that environment where I

> felt needed and a part of something that was important, and serving with people that I just loved.

Marine Corps participant, P14, mentioned:

> The military culture is driven by purpose, and a clarity of purpose. It has clear lines of identity, not only like your rank, but your MOS [military job] gives you an identity also, you understand how you fit into a larger picture. You gain a sense of identity by understanding your job in that MOS…I felt it was a calling. I also felt that I was contributing to something very positive. And so, I think that's why I stayed in… I think what appealed to me is there is a nobility to it. You're protecting people.

Marine Corps participant, P18, said:

> I would have stayed as long as they would have let me and died on active duty. I loved it that much. I found it very noble and good…But it was bigger and better than me. It was service over self and it was the country.

Marine Corps participant, P2, noted:

> I was trying to stay away from the jobs that were, that I didn't find very satisfying. I didn't want to retire and just get any old job or be a greeter at Wal-Mart or just take anything. I wanted to still work at a higher level.

Marine Corps participant, P20, stated, “We're [Marines] something beyond, something greater than ourselves.”

Marine Corps participant, P3, stated:

> At end of the day, what we're trying to accomplish, what we're trying to preserve, we're trying to take care of folks who may or may not be able to take care of themselves. And there's a sense of purpose and a value there that I think characterizes most of our days, and in my opinion, more than not.

Teamwork and Collaboration. One of the reasons the military is so successful in its mission is because of the organizational cultural element of teamwork and collaboration, which was discussed and reported by many of the participants of this study. The concepts of teamwork and collaboration were mentioned by 19 of the 20 participants and were central to the military's organizational culture and, therefore, many of the participants' social identities. Again, the impact the loss of this cultural element had on their civilian careers will be discussed under RQ2. However, it is important to discuss here as part of the participants' social identities. For over two to three decades, the participants relied on and were relied upon as members of teams at multiple levels throughout their military careers. Teams within the military can range from a two-person team to thousands of people to considering the entire U.S. military force as one team, as many of the participants discussed. This cultural element was deeply ingrained in the participants' social identities for success while in the military, and its absence was noticeable for many of the participants after leaving the military. To illustrate, Marine Corps participant, P13, noted:

> [The military] really is a place that's made up of a lot of different people, a lot of different skill sets. But what draws them together and what drew me to the culture was the sense of team, which, is cliché, I think overused in a lot of cases, but it

> applies here to that sense of team and commitment and knowing that you can rely on people.
>
> I missed that part of the culture where everybody looks out for each other. And they are great people here [civilian job]. But they're not Marines. And I don't treat them like Marines. I know they're not Marines. So that part was hard going away from, people that have that same sense of purpose and it didn't matter what the task was or what your rank was, you jump in and do what you got to do.

Army participant, P12, stated:

> [Civilians] assume the military is one person says something to everybody else, and they just act, that they don't fully understand the collaborative nature of the organization where, yes, there is one person in charge and ultimately is going to make a decision. But the feedback from subordinate commanders or from subordinate staff or from the staff that works in the air, or from outside agencies is always considered when making a decision. So, in my mind, it's collaborative.

Marine Corps participant, P17, said:

> Everything from the time I stepped on the yellow footprints in [Marine Corps Recruit Depot] San Diego [boot camp] to however you're commissioned or however you entered any service, everything is based on a team fireteam squad and a platoon. You're never in it alone. It is always team driven.

Marine Corps participant, P18, mentioned, “It's a comprehensive, collaborative sense of purpose and duty that I had in the military, that I don't have here.”

Navy participant, P19, noted, “From my experience, how would you say, to use the Spartan analogy, you take care of your left and right, you're either on someone's right or left. So, it's very protective of its members.

Marine Corps participant, P2, stated, “The Marine Corps is a very close brotherhood… a very strong brotherhood. We carry ourselves differently. And it’s all a question about how to help each other out.”

Marine Corps participant, P20, mentioned:

> You're part of a team and there's nothing like the camaraderie. And if you go to Iraq or Afghanistan with some of these teams and I still have my guys, it's incredible the bond that you make and you don't make those bonds out here [in the civilian world], the only ones close…are firemen and policemen. That's close, but it's still not the Marine Corps. I mean, honestly, the Marine Corps, because nobody's like the Marine Corps.

Army participant, P4, said, “I mean, there’s this incredible sense of team that we had in the military…We're incredibly team oriented.”

Navy participant, P7, noted:

> There’s a lot camaraderie and there's a lot of it's a team. And I think that's still survived over the decades of cultural changes and political changes and all the other stuff. I think it's still very much a team sport, and everyone supports each other. I think that's the overarching culture of the military.

Marine Corps participant, P8, stated:

> And that's a big part of why younger guys maybe have separation anxiety more because the piece that they're leaving is the true hands on war fighting type camaraderie, closeness that's bred through combat operations and operations in general, where you're in the field and you're living through challenging conditions and all of that stuff. And so, therefore that's your perspective when you when you leave and [it's so different].

List of All Organizational Socialization (Cultural) Elements. While all of the organizational culture and, therefore, social identity themes cannot be discussed individually due to the amount of them, the following is a list of all organizational cultural themes/characteristics that were mentioned by at least five of the 20 participants: accountability; adaptability; close-knit; constant drive to improve, excel, or move forward; culturally diverse workforce; deep mutual understanding with other military members; different from the rest of society; directness; discipline; failure is not an option; formalized; greater purpose; inner circle after a certain rank; job commitment is extremely high; leadership; massive amounts of responsibility; mission and people focus; performance-based; religion or cult (Marine Corps only); responsible for people's lives; service before self; socialized (indoctrinated); structure; teamwork and collaboration; the military makes you a better person; unforgiving; values-based; strong work ethic.

Shades of Loss of Social Identity

When discussing the losses of social identity with the participants, there were several patterns that emerged from the data. It is important to note again, prior to addressing the patterns, that the term "identity" was misunderstood by most of the

participants within the context of social identity theory. This was a study design flaw, as the term "identity" was used in the interview protocols instead of the term "social identity." Most of the participants understood the term identity to mean who they were in a holistic manner, which provided varied answers to the questions directly pertaining to identity. Some of the participants answered that the military was a part of their identity, but the military never fully defined them as people. Within the context of social identity theory, people are not fully defined by being members of a group (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). A social identity is who people are within that group (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). Therefore, the participants were unintentionally misled with the incorrect use of terms in the interview questions. However, it is important to note that when the participants were asked other questions that did not specifically include the term identity, they discussed the losses of identity in different ways, revealing more patterns in the data than when asked about identity directly.

Therefore, the patterns of what the participants revealed throughout their interviews concerning their social identities will be discussed in the three different patterns into which the participants fell: (a) I lost a part of my identity, (b) I didn't lose my identity it's just different now, and (c) I didn't lose my identity because it's still my identity.

I Lost a Part of My Identity. When discussing identity loss, some of the participants were able to put into words that they lost a part of their identities when they retired from the military. It was a partial loss of identity because, as described above, the participants preserved portions of their social identities built over multiple decades, and

those elements aided them in their transition to civilian life. However, it is important to note that several of the participants engaged in conflicting ideas throughout their interviews. That means that when asked directly if they lost their social identities, some of the participants responded with the idea they did not lose anything. However, as the interviews progressed, they either alluded to or outright mentioned a portion of identity loss. Therefore, the quotes presented might contain information from the same participant under two or more of the different themes. Not all participants fell into that category, however, as some were able to consistently put their loss into words throughout their entire interviews. For example, Marine Corps participant, P17, stated:

> And fortunately, it did all work out, but it was a little bit of an emotional rollercoaster for sure, because it is just something so different about trying to redefine and recreate yourself in a new identity after decades of being somebody else and doing something else.

Marine Corps participant, P20, mentioned:

> There's nothing that they can do in the military to prepare you for that. I mean, it's like someone telling you, this is what combat is going to be like. You don't know until the rockets are coming in and that’s just something that you have to prepare for. And psychologically, that's hard to do. You can't really prepare for when you step out of uniform, because your identity is completely changed. Even though you might still have a haircut, be wearing Corfam shoes and stuff. That's okay, but you're still not in the military.

> That's it, the loss of identity, because of the physical things and the organizational piece and where you're at. That plays into it. I mean, that that is a hard thing to accept. And because you're dealing with human beings, you're going to have different reactions from different folks. Some people do really well and some people don't. Some people never will never leave the service, in their mind, they never leave the service.
>
> I lost part of it [identity]. I mean, it's normal to do that. You lose it because of the physical identity, you get out and no matter what you do, you're older. Marines, the average age, I think is twenty-four or twenty-five, so it's a young service. You lose that identity, you're not in uniform anymore. That was a huge part of the identity. And your language completely changes. You're not talking battalions, regiments, groups anymore. You're not doing any of that. So, your identity, you lose part of it, but there's pieces of it that you never lose. And those are very personal pieces that you never lose. You never lose, I don't think, the work ethic. It's really important you don't lose the core values piece of it, you don't lose a lot of the reliability and leadership that you have learned.

Navy participant, P7, stated:

> I definitely think I lost a lot of identity because, I mean, I achieved the rank of captain [O-6]. I had a lot of people that looked up to me and hopefully they did. And you have a lot of responsibility. You're given a lot of responsibility, the higher the rank you go, and now I don't have that responsibility.

> In my first job I had I took care of myself, and that was it. And that was kind of actually a relief because there's a lot less stress on you [in the military]. But now I realize that stress, I think, is a healthy stress, because you're responsible for the well-being of a lot of different people. You're responsible for the accomplishment of all these different missions as a leader. And I don't have that now, and I kind of miss that. That is one thing that I did lose when I got out is, I don't have nearly the responsibility I had before.

Marine Corps participant, P13, noted:

> So, I guess my loss of identity, my attachment to the Marine Corps and what made me successful as a Marine in an ironic way, it worked against me in this position [civilian job] because I found it difficult and still do some days to transition. Not to being a civilian, but to managing and leading and looking at life differently.

Marine Corps participant, P1, stated:

> You really can't be yourself or say what you want to say [in the civilian workplace] …Because the civilian culture has different values and in the Marine culture you could say what you want to say and not offend anybody because they know you're joking, and that's just part of the culture. So, versus in the civilian sector, you basically you got to think before you speak because something that you would say that you wouldn't think twice about that people from your previous culture, the military would know how to interpret it. The people in the civilian side, they don't know how to interpret it.

Marine Corps participant, P10, mentioned, “I do think that's a really good question, because I do think people do go into a funk, the loss of identity.” “I do, yeah, I'm sure I lost some of it [identity].”

> And I think the biggest challenge kind of goes back to, most often, not always, but a lot of times you're not going to have that level of authority that you had before, usually when I used to talk, people would listen. And it doesn’t necessarily happen that way.

Navy participant, P11, noted, “I think I wanted to walk in and have everyone still recognize that I've been a Navy captain and thirty years in the military.”

Marine Corps participant, P14, said:

> There was a, it was a loss, and I feel it more now than I did right when I left. So there maybe there was a honeymoon period with being retired where everything was great and I wasn't missing anything.

Marine Corps participant, P15, mentioned:

> I think that's true [loss of identity]. When we drive through a military gate or you go to a commissary or something, you're used to being treated one way. Right? Particularly as an officer, I can imagine because of the protocol on the salute at the gate and things like that. And then when you're out at Wal-Mart or you go to a Little League Baseball game or something, you're just another part of the crowd that's a little different. So, I think there is a loss of... Again, it's probably a good word, that group, culture, identity, part of it.

Marine Corps participant, P16, stated:

> Partially [identity loss] just because it has to be. How could it not? You do it for 30 years and you get a uniform you put it on and you walk in the building, you have your assigned parking spot. You have a nice office. People come in and tell you, good morning, sir.

Marine Corps participant, P18, said, “I was concerned about it [losing identity] because it was hard to separate myself from it because I had done it so long.”

Marine Corps participant, P2, stated:

> I'm walking away from this [the military] and I kind of used it as my transition period [terminal leave], in a sense mentally as well, because it was hard, to where if I didn't have my uniform on, you'd see there's a lack of respect, no one knew who you were.

Marine Corps participant, P9, mentioned:

> Oh, that's true [that it’s a loss]. It was a loss getting out of the military because of that identity piece. You have to lose. So, I was identified as a Marine or still am, but in the sense of being active duty and having all the jobs that you're given, and the expectations of you. When you get out, you no longer have those expectations of either being a mentor to the Marines or being a leader of those Marines or even taking care of the daily tasks, you know, 30, 60, 90-day actions for a boss. So, with the loss of that identity comes the loss of all those things that you are supposed to be doing as a Marine.

I Did Not Lose My Identity It Is Just Different Now. For some of the participants, the idea of losing a part of their identities did not resonate with them.

Instead, the participants saw their identities as being “different” now. Most of the participants served in the Marine Corps, and with serving in the Marine Corps comes the cultural element that once the title “Marine” is earned, it can never be taken away from the earner, as many of the participants mentioned. This led to the concept that even though Marines get out or retire from the military, they will always be Marines, and therefore they will always belong. However, as described above, not being a member of the active team may be felt as a loss of belonging. This led to the notion that the participants’ identities are not lost but changed, as in they are just different, but in a way that cannot be described in words. The participants will never be civilians, as they are retirees and veterans. However, they are also not active members of the team. Being a member of this midpoint group affords them a social identity in which they do and always will belong, but it is simply unlike what it was before. For this concept, 16 of the 20 participants explained this feeling as best as possible. For instance, Navy participant, P11, mentioned: I would also say that a lot of the things are still the same. I mean, my retired status still gets me, that kind of recognition. And I can still go to the bases and the commissary.

Marine Corps participant, P13, stated:

> The one title I can't ever take away is Marine. And so, I didn't lose my identity because I'm always going to be a Marine. You're always going to be a Marine. But any identity I lost would have been directly associated with the people I was with and how I identify with them and how we looked up to each other, held each

> other accountable. But my identity was never as a colonel or a CO [commanding officer] or anything else. It was always as a Marine, and that I still have.

Marine Corps participant, P14, said:

> I feel that I still have membership. I can still get on base and go to the commissary, get a haircut. I can wear clothing that displays that I was in the Marine Corps. I could have stickers on the back of my car. I carry a military ID in my wallet still. So, while I don't have the responsibility per say, as being in the military culture, I do reap the benefits. Maybe another good example might just be a Marine one. If someone asks, what did you do before this? I just tell them I was a Marine, so I still claim that that moniker, even though I don't have any responsibility towards it right now.

Marine Corps participant, P15, stated:

> We get vanity plates, too, we put things on our vehicles, to identify ourselves, and then in our Wal-Mart has it I'm not sure everybody does, but it's like reserved for a veteran. So, people pull in there because that's how they identify themselves…But it is an identity feature.

Marine Corps participant, P16, noted:

> I left the unit and the uniform, but I never really left the relationships afterwards, you know? So, I think those are those are the tangible things that people forget about, like just because you leave uniform doesn't mean you shouldn’t pick up the phone [and talk to military friends].

Marine Corps participant, P3, mentioned:

> It's my overall membership in the club, I think it's still there. And the title is different now as opposed to, on the field. I have purposely chosen to view it that way. I don't think I lost my identity when I retired. I just became one of those guys with RET after his rank as opposed to being active duty, but knowing that it's still there, it's just different.

Army participant, P4, stated:

> You're always associated, right? I mean, I still have a lot of friends that are in and then the guys and gals that are in my former unit, there's a lot of civilian government, civilian folks that I know. So, you're always part of it, you feel like you're still part of the team, now, it's different, too, because [unit name] was a very tight knit special organization. So, there was an incredible sense of team there, but you realize that you're not [the same].

Marine Corps participant, P5, said, “I don't feel like I don't have membership. Like I said, I still identify as a Marine. I don't have an active voice, but the things I picked up in the Marine Corps, I use in other ways.”

Marine Corps participant, P6, said:

> I'm no longer active duty, but I still consider myself part of the military group because, once a Marine, always a Marine. No, I don't think I did [lose any identity]. People that I don't know will come out and say, I can tell you were in the military or something like that or whatever, so no, I don't think I lost it. Again, being a Marine is a big part of part of who I was, but it's not all who I was.

Marine Corps participant, P8, noted, “No loss [of identity], just change. And I don't think change and loss are the same thing.”

I Did Not Lose My Identity Because It Is Still My Identity. The final theme of the matter of social identity loss was a group of those participants who did not feel they lost their social identities because their military social identities were still their identities. Part of the reason that some of these participants did not feel as though they had lost any portion of their identities was that they made very strategic and conscious civilian job and workplace choices. Others did not make the conscious choice but still ended up in a civilian workplace that ended up benefiting their social identity needs. In either case, some did not lose their social identity because the civilian workplace they joined was similar as it pertained to who they are in their civilian workplaces. In other words, they did not have to adapt much, if at all, nor form completely new social identities. How this theme impacted the civilian workplace and their social identities will be discussed in detail under RQ2. Also, there were other participants who were so mentally prepared and ready to leave military service that they did not consider leaving a loss, nor did they lose any portion of their social identity, from their perspectives; however, continuing to pay attention to conflicting ideas from the same participants, this may not have been the case for some of the participants. However, all of these aspects of what 12 of the 20 participants said will be reviewed. To the point: Navy participant, P19, stated:

> No, because I carry that with me. I don't think I lost any identity whatsoever and I'm not one that pushes it, it's just part of me. I've seen some people that [appear

> to lose their identity] But they feel they are losing that identity, that connection. So, no, I was okay.

Marine Corps participant, P18, noted:

> I'm a Marine and I say I'm a Marine because I'm a Marine for life. That's what we think. So, I'm not going to say I'm a former Marine. I was formerly on active duty for the largest part of my adult life, the only adult job I ever had…I thought it was noble and honorable and worthwhile and because it's the only adult job I've ever had right out of college…So, I identify myself as a Marine because it's like etched in my heart and soul. I don't even have any tattoos but if I did. I mean, I don't need one because it's who I am. And I guess there's baggage with that, too. But no, I clearly identify myself as a Marine…But the Marine part is very much who I am and my entire family and even my kids. I mean, they know the Marine Corps birthday. Being a Marine is every bit a part of me.

Marine Corps participant, P14, stated:

> I don't, generally speaking, feel like I lost my identity, kind of going back to the fact that I still claim it, and I claim it very easily without even thinking about it. So, you bring up a good point, though. There is something, though, that hits me occasionally every other month it might be after watching a good war movie, it might be after reading a military book or even if there is some kind of a military action going on in the Middle East and hearing about something. There is some part of me that I can't really put my finger on that that is sad about being out of the military, not having that, that excitement or the adventure or the mission

> where I can go in and do something about something, and so I think I say that I haven't been sad about losing my identity, but I am sad about something. And it maybe it has to do with my identity, but maybe if the identity is wrapped up in that idea of being able to go do something about something, then yes, I think that's what I get sad about occasionally.

Navy participant, P11, mentioned:

> I still have a connection, so I'm not completely detached and you might find this in a lot of people you talk to, a lot of us don't go all that far from the military, especially the senior officers. As I said, I still wear a uniform every day at work…They still call me sir and they still call me Captain [Name]. And every day when I come to work, I'm still Captain [Name]. I kind of half-stepped out of the military. So, I guess I don't know that I necessarily feel disconnected at all.

Marine Corps participant, P16, said, "Yeah, I don't know why. I mean, I just didn't [feel any loss]. I didn't feel like it was a loss.

Marine Corps participant, P3, stated:

> I loved the ride. It was a little tough not being the fellow man in uniform, that was a little tough. But beyond that, it didn't feel like I was losing my identity. I had I'd run my race. And so, it's just it's a part of it… I don't think I lost my identity when I retired. I just became one of those guys with RET after his rank as opposed to being active duty.

Marine Corps participant, P5, noted, "I still identify as a Marine. I don't have an active voice…but I don't feel like I've lost any identity.

Marine Corps participant, P6, mentioned:

> I don't feel like I lost my identity…Again, being a Marine is a big part of part of who I was, but it's not all who I was. I don't feel like I have to walk around, waving that banner.

Marine Corps participant, P8 stated:

> No, I didn't lose any identity. The day to day trappings of the rank, sure. But that's not my that's not my identity. My rank is not my identity…I'm still a Marine, former Marine, once a Marine, always a Marine, a Marine. I got nothing to prove to anybody, and I know what I did and I know my service.

Elements That Aided Mitigation of the Losses of Social Identity and Organizational Socialization

A few of the most prominent themes that emerged from the data were the elements that helped these participants transition and what aided them in various ways in understanding and mitigating the potential losses of social identities and organizational socialization. Several of the patterns were seemingly coincidental (receiving advice from a mentor) and others that may not have been known without specifically talking to long-time servers (service limitations). There were many patterns within this portion of the results. Therefore, only the most prominent themes will be discussed. The patterns that will be detailed in this section are (a) they received advice from a mentor, (b) family, friends, and buddy support system, (c) focused on the future, (d) had awareness they would have to leave the service at some point/service limitations helped them psychologically prepare to leave and (e) respect in the civilian workplace.

They Received Advice From a Mentor. An emergent pattern from the data that concerns elements that aided the participants in mitigating losses of social identity and organizational socialization is the pattern that some of the participants received advice from a mentor. The advice was given to the participants at various times in their careers, and though the advice was varied in what was said, the advice provided the participants stark perspective that military service is not forever. Therefore, a perspective change took place psychologically that the participants, no matter how they viewed their service before, needed to plan to exit military service at some point and that they needed to be psychologically prepared for that occurrence as well. Also, although receiving advice that aids in the mitigation of losses seems coincidental, 13 of the 20 participants mentioned receiving some type of advice that provided perspective on their military service eventually coming to an end. Because the participants came to this realization while still actively serving, it aided them in being, at the very least, partially psychologically prepared for losses of social identity and organizational socialization. For example: Marine Corps participant, P17, said:

> Another piece of advice that I was given on my first tour at the Pentagon by a two-star general was basically, at some point the Marine Corps is going to break your heart, whether they tell you to leave or they tell you you're not going to get promoted. So basically, you need to, one, mentally prepare for that, and two decide whether you want to leave on your own terms or leave when you are told to leave, and I did not want to be in that position. So, for me, I wanted to leave at a time where I had done everything I wanted to do as a Marine and be able to

> leave and say, I had a great ride, I enjoyed it. I will always have those memories and be able to call myself a Marine, but I didn't want to necessarily have any regrets or continue one-tour or one-assignment too far where I looked back and said maybe I should have left. That conversation had happened probably eight years before I retired.

Marine Corps participant, P15, said, "A long time ago somebody said "you'll just know when it's time to go." You know, you'll know, and I did."

Navy participant, P19, stated:

> Oh, I prepared myself for it long before, again, always looking over the horizon, the five-year plan. I had some good people in the military told me, you got to look forward. What are you going to do? And one senior chief I had said, "what are you going to do over the horizon? What do you see?" Most people don't know the validity of the statement. You know, most people get out and if you can't find a job, you're dead within five years. You're dead within ten years of retiring. That's just what military people do. Your stress levels up here, and it goes down. You just can't take it. You know, you die.

Marine Corps participant, P2, noted:

> My mentor, General [Name], an awesome guy, who said to me, go out in town and find a restaurant that's packed, busy, and you're going to have to wait. And go up and tell the hostess…and he says wherever it's really super crowded. You wait in line and you go up and go, "you don't understand, I'm Colonel [Name]." I need a table, and they'll be like, "OK, wait like the rest of them." He says, that will put

> it in perspective that you're not owed anything. You're just another person in society.

Army participant, P4, said:

> I remember when I was a captain and my commander, a lieutenant colonel, he was going to retire after his command. I remember I was just so surprised because he was a superstar. I mean, this guy was a rock star. And I said, sir, I can't believe you're retiring after command… He looked at me and goes "f*ck [name], we all got to get out sometime, you're going to get out, you can't stay in the army forever." And I was thinking, OK, yeah, I guess, but, at that point it's a whole different…then I just remembered his words, that, hey, everybody gets out. This is going to end and you've gotta be able to handle it… So, that's the first time I actually had seen somebody at that terminal point of their career and then started thinking about, wow, this as will end at some point.

Family, Friends, and Buddy Support System. One of the elements that aided the losses of social identity and organizational socialization for the participants was the support they received from their families, their friends, and their military buddies, either still active duty, veteran, or retired. Support from their family members allowed them, regardless of the negative emotions some of the participants felt, to focus on their families and the future (a cultural, social identity component). Their families also provided emotional support for some of the participants. Other participants reported the same type of support from their friends, focusing on their families and emotional support. Also, some of the participants reported reaching out to their military friends still on active

duty, to their fellow veteran friends, and to their retired friends. In doing so, they were able to talk about the military either through what was going on presently or memories they shared, which aided them in different ways. For the support network theme overall, 15 of 20 of the participants mentioned they were aided by this element. For instance: Marine Corps participant, P3, mentioned:

> I had some great mentors and friends… and that was easier because I had resources, I had colleagues and other friends who had been through it, giving me some tips and tricks to begin understanding that this is a reality.

Marine Corps participant, P5, stated:

> I didn't have any concern with that [leaving the military]. I had talked to my wife over the years and she said, you know, you're going to have trouble when you get out of the Marine Corps because you spend your whole career in a homogenous organization where you have to dress the same, you have to cut your hair the same, you have to say the same things, you have to act the same, you get promoted based on common values and you're going to get out there and you're going to realize not everyone is team oriented. They're in it for themselves. And so, I was somewhat prepared for that.

Marine Corps participant, P10, noted:

> When I think back to the cultural piece, I still rub up against my friends from time to time and we get together and tell war stories. But, there's more to life than the war story… but the culture, I think, you can still gain some of that by staying connected with your buds after you've left active duty, continue to encourage.

Navy participant, P11, said, “But I'll tell you, I had a lot of peers who went through the [retirement] process before me, which helped a lot.

Marine Corps participant, P13, stated:

> But I still have good friends too, Marine friends, that we talk regularly and joke around and text each other. And I mean, we usually end up just telling the same old stories from 20 years ago, but they're still funny.

Marine Corps participant, P14, mentioned:

> So, a lot of talking. My wife is a great listener, and even though she doesn't understand like that connection, she recognized there's a big transition. So, a lot of talking to my wife just about like why I was feeling certain things and trying to figure out put my finger on exactly what I was feeling. I could say [to her], well, I felt sad. Well, what a sad really mean? Why? How long was it? What kind of sad was it?... And so, the resiliency I think we get from our families, overshadowed any insecurity I had psychologically about going into the civilian world.

Marine Corps participant, P14, noted:

> Seeking advice from other people [helped], friends that were in the military. [A military friend] and I talked a lot. I think those things kind of help bouncing things off. That's how I kind of handled the stress. And yeah, it is very stressful.

Marine Corps participant, P2, said:

> I think also what helps is having a good support network. My wife, she was there, encouraged me to do stuff, get a hobby, go do something. You know, don't just sit around here. Find something to do and [she had] no problem you know go take a

> trip up to go see your parents or go down fishing with these guys and do that or whatever.

Focused on the Future. As discussed above, one of the strongest characteristics ingrained in the participants' social identities stemming from the military culture was the concept of staying focused on the future. Because this social identity characteristic was ingrained in the participants for over two decades, it allowed them to utilize what they had been taught in the military to stay focused on the future, even during this major, life-changing transition. It was as if the participants treated their transition like another military move, focusing on where they would live, shop for their groceries, and where they would work, and other life elements (personal observation). Although this pattern is listed under elements that aided the participants in mitigating the losses of social identity and organizational socialization, this seemingly positive element may not have allowed them to process any negative emotions that did come up during their transition to civilian life. Regardless, staying focused on the future allowed the participants to move forward, stay focused on their next mission (joining the civilian workforce), and continue to be successful in their next endeavors. For this pattern, 11 of the 20 participants contributed to its emergence. For example, Marine Corps participant, P14 said:

> There's a strong sense of, if you've got kids, you've got a responsibility. And so, yes, I think it's helpful and healthy to think through these things, but at the end of the day, you've got to get up and go to work. And so, there was only a limited amount of time where I could really kind of dwell down on the issue [transition emotions], and then it was just time to go get a paycheck because you got people

> to feed. So, I think through those things, it helped me kind of move through that transition period.

Marine Corps participant, P10, stated, “So, yes, people do go into a funk. I don't think I went into a big funk because I mentally prepared for what am I going to do next? Work on my résumé.

Army participant, P12, said:

> I was doing interviews while I was still working [on active duty] and I found a position and moved on. So, the fact that I didn't have to dwell on it, like I wasn't sweating what was going to happen [next] and you have to go through all that process, probably made it easier to just rip off the Band-Aid and move on.

Marine Corps participant, P15, mentioned, “Making the decision [to retire] it was our decision and it took some time to come to that. So, once you make that conclusion, you're just like, OK, next chapter, just closed the book on this.

Marine Corps participant, P17, noted:

> The focus was kind of looking forward to what was in the future, trying to get the right position and trying to make sure I can take care of my family and stay engaged, those types of things…And I think that was ingrained in me to want to continue to plan and focus on the mission and what's ahead.

Marine Corps participant, P2, stated, “It's never about what we've done in the past now, it’s not been one iota of that. I think that's what's helped me to make that transition.

Marine Corps participant, P3, said:

> Here are some things to think about [for retirement]. Where do you want to work? What do you want to do? How much money do you need to make? So, you start putting all that together and it's just like getting ready to go on a deployment. You don't have a whole bunch of time to wallow in self-pity, you've got to begin planning for the transition. And while there's friction, it's manageable.

Marine Corps participant, P5, noted:

> I had all positive emotions, I was so happy at my retirement date I mean, I was not sad really at all. I mean, I was really happy. I know some guys and girls get emotional at it and it's a significant change, and I mean, I get it, but no, I was really happy. I was working my butt off at my job and I was just ready for a break. I just want to take a breather. And I was ready to try something else. And I thought about what I was going to do [in the civilian world], and that was a positive experience for me.

Marine Corps participant, P8, mentioned:

> I was excited for a change, I think, again, that you reach a point where you realize there's a degree of diminishing return on your finances and on your future job prospects and your upward mobility. I had kind of reached a point where I did see I wasn't going to make general and I wasn't going to receive any kind of better assignments in my mind, more plum assignments. So, I was ready for change and ready for the opportunity to do something completely different. It was closing a chapter of my life, obviously a very long chapter of my life, and yes, no, that was sad, but, I mean, I was proud of the time that I did and the friends that I made and

the service that I performed and so I had no regrets. And I looked forward to the future.

Had Awareness They Would Have to Leave the Service at Some Point/Service Limitations Helped Them Psychologically Prepare to Leave. One of the significant patterns to come out of the theme of those elements that aided the participants in mitigating the potential losses was that the participants had some type of conscious awareness and thought processes that they would someday have to leave the service. Some of the participants spoke of it in general terms, and some of them specifically attributed this awareness to service limitations. Service limitation is a regulation for the U.S. military forces that is used as a force-shaping tool (Griffin, 2021). This means that military members must be promoted to a certain rank by a certain number of years in service in order to continue serving on active duty (Griffin, 2021). If the members do not achieve this, they are essentially forced out of military service. For officers, it means that they are afforded two opportunities to be selected to their next rank; if they are "passed over" or not selected for the next rank twice, they have a limited time after the second denial to be processed out of military service (Griffin, 2021). This single concept had huge implications for the participants as it pertained to the decisions they made with regard to their careers, retirement timeframes, and their mindsets about leaving military service. Having conscious awareness of service limitations allowed some of the participants to mentally prepare to leave the service, potentially also mitigating (at least temporarily) the losses of social identity and organizational socialization, as they knew they had to leave. Understanding the end of service and service limitations, 18 of

the 20 participants mentioned this concept. For instance, Marine Corps participant, P3, stated:

> So that helped me personally to transition because I always knew in the back of my mind, that I've got a shelf life, and I'm going to have to retire no matter what my rank, or at some point be told, thank you for your service, here's a medal, go away, if you don't promote, that time is going to come.
>
> I never shied away from accepting that [having to leave]. There were days when I didn't want to come to terms with it, like, how many more years can I milk it? But I never stuck my head in the sand to say, well, that's just not a world [civilian] I'll ever have to deal with, because that's when I think folks [get into trouble] and then it's very difficult because now instead of preparing for circumstances as they are, they prepared for a fantasy that will not come true.

Army participant, P12, mentioned:

> And these folks have all made it 20 years in a very, very tough environment. But like most, you've been doing it since you were 18, and all of a sudden, your whole life is about to change, and that can be fairly scary. I was fortunate I did the retirement on my terms and I didn't wait for the army to tell me I had to get out.

Marine Corps participant, P5, stated:

> Yeah, I've always felt that Colin Powell said it best in one of the books. He said, you've got to have something in your life more important than your job because your job at one point is going to go away. So, whether that's faith, family interests outside, you got to have something that motivates you and something that you

> enjoy doing because your job will go away. So, I've always tried to maintain other priorities in my life other than the Marine Corps.

Marine Corps participant, P1, mentioned:

> I had done everything I could do at this rank. The only thing that I could have done more, I could have hung around to see if I can make general and I'm not just going to keep hanging around just to see if I can get general, because, I had done everything I could do at the Colonel level, and that's just the way it has to be. You have to, whether you do four years or you do 30, you've got to get out sometime. So, you've got to make that transition. There's no need to fret over that. Like I said I did everything I could do and life goes on.

Navy participant, P11, said:

> I was approaching high year tenure. So, I was going to have to get out anyway. And the writing on the wall was I couldn't stay there. So, I chose to leave on my terms, but it was still hard to leave. I mean, I didn't stay up crying all night about it, but it was still hard to leave…So one of the jokes in the military is I don't know what I want to do when I grow up, especially for those people who are doing 20 or more years. I don't know that I really was prepared. I think I just kind of ripped off the Band-Aid.

Army participant, P12, noted:

> I was fortunate I did the retirement on my terms and I didn't wait for the army to tell me I had to get out. I honestly, I didn't even wait. You're most competitive in the next 2 years after brigade command. I didn't even wait for that. Like I never

got to my board, my file never got seen, post brigade command. I got out before that and I was perfectly fine with that, but it was on my terms, not someone else's.

Marine Corps participant, P13, said:

I just reached 30 and had to go. I mean, there's factors the last 2 or 3 years of my career, that [indicated] it was time to go. So, I'm not saying I wouldn't have gone to 40, had that been an option. Maybe I would have done things a little different the last two or three years and kept going to 40. But yeah, that's what I'm talking about, service limitations.

Marine Corps participant, P16, mentioned:

I think it is like year twenty-eight, I got the letter that said, hey, unless you get promoted to BG [Brigadier General], you're not going to be in after this date. So, it's very defined…I think that helped out in a way that I used those last few years just to kind of leave with a happy heart.

Yeah, it definitely, having the 30-year limit helped in that regard, because I wasn't really left with the decision [when to retire]. Most people with a fork in the road or maybe multiple options to do, but yeah, I think it definitely helped, I didn't feel a loss.

Marine Corps participant, P18, noted:

It's kind of up or out and the Marine Corps helps you at the 30-year mark or the 29-year mark, if you're not promoted they send a very nice letter saying you're going to retire in a year and you cry and you get all upset and you buy some big

boy clothes and try to get a job, but no I would have stayed longer. Definitely, definitely stayed longer…that's just not how our system works.

RQ2: How Are Retired Military Officers With 24-42 Years of Service Affected in Their Second Career Civilian Workplaces Due to the Loss of Social Identity and Organizational Socialization?

For the second research question, again, several key themes emerged from the data. In discussion with the participants on how the losses of social identity and organizational socialization impacted their second careers in a civilian workplace environment, the following themes were the most prominent: (a) Civilian incomprehension of the military and military culture caused frustrations that (initially) stunted growth of new social identity and therefore belonging, (b) cultural differences between military and civilian cultures caused frustrations that (initially) stunted growth of new social identity, but they adapted so they could belong, (c) the participants utilized portions of their long-standing military social identities to adapt and also form new social identities so they could belong, and (d) strategic civilian job choices were made for the purpose of belonging.

Civilian Incomprehension of the Military and Military Culture Caused Frustrations That (Initially) Stunted Growth of New Social Identity and Therefore Belonging

When these participants retired and transitioned out of military service, most had plans to join the civilian workforce. Based on their long-time military service, many of the participants had the assumption that their decades of hard work, experiences, knowledge, and skills would be recognized and welcomed by any civilian organization.

With being a senior officer and a senior leader in the military comes immeasurable amounts of responsibility: responsibility on an extraordinary number of levels, from being responsible for people's lives on a daily basis to being responsible for life-impacting or service-impacting decisions. However, what many of the participants experienced instead was incomprehension from multiple angles. Many of the participants experienced a great many rejections from civilian organizations, and once finally hired, many experienced a lack of understanding of what it means to serve in the military and what it means to be a senior officer and leader. The rejection and the initial culture shock of dealing with the unfamiliarity of civilians, in general, caused some frustrations for many of the participants.

The frustrations experienced caused (at least initially) some forward progress stunting, which caused stunting in some of the participants being able to form a new social identity. Also, going back to the loss of belonging from RQ1, this also caused a delay in feeling as though they belonged again. It is also important to note that for a few of the participants, the feeling of belonging did not return due to civilian lack of knowledge of what it truly means to be a member of the military, especially a retired member of the military. To summarize, the incomprehension of civilians, in general, about the military caused many of the participants to experience growth pains joining and existing within the civilian culture. However, the growth pains did not stop these distinguished officers from pushing forward until they once again attained success, as they used their military social identities to adapt and overcome. The adaption of the participants was to form a new social identity, as social identities led to the feeling of

belonging. However, their growth pains will be described using several patterns that emerged underneath this theme to illustrate their frustrations.

One of the most prominent patterns is the incomprehension of civilians about the military, in general, and 19 of the 20 participants discussed this concept. For example, Marine Corps participant, P10, stated:

> A lot of people don't understand [the military], they don't know the difference. I mean, they can probably tell the difference between a private and a colonel, but they don't necessarily know the difference between uniforms, a Marine uniform. No, I'm not a soldier, I'm a Marine. Oh, I thought…No, it's different. So, they don't fully understand. You were in the military for a long time we got it. And I think you must have been pretty senior, but beyond that, they really don't get it. . .[they say] thank you for your service, but they probably won't understand exactly what you did, they just won't get it.

Navy participant, P11, mentioned:

> Well, I think you will find there are a lot of organizations that discriminate against veterans, even if they don't say they do, because there is a stigma of what a veteran is, right? And first of all, they think we're all steely eyed baby killers. They don't sometimes people don't recognize the fact that we're also dads and soccer moms, and all the other things that humans do. There's also a group of people who don't agree with the wars or don't agree with militarism in general and that sort of stuff. Who, of course, think all the steely eyed baby killers are also waiting to snap with their PTSD.

Army participant, P12, noted:

> It's also somewhat misunderstood. What I mean by that is…they assume the military is one person says something to everybody else, and they just act, they don't fully understand the collaborative nature of the organization where, yes, there is one person in charge and ultimately is going to make a decision, but the feedback from subordinate commanders or from subordinate staff or from the staff that works in the air from outside agencies is always considered when making a decision.

Marine Corps participant, P14, said:

> There is a definite appreciation for the military, but there's not an understanding of like, what you actually do. So, they think you're the guy driving the tank or flying the helicopter or shooting a rifle. There's not like that support structure or planning structure. That kind of stuff is not intuitive.

Marine Corps participant, P15, stated:

> When you leave there and you're out in the civilian world, they're not the same people, and you can't just call somebody up and or lean over to a co-worker and say, what do you think about these experiences? I mean, they just don't know. They don't have that experience.

Marine Corps participant, P16, mentioned:

> People don't know a colonel from a corporal in the real world. They just have no idea. This last job I had, they assumed I just marched and stepped for 30 years and

> went from the barracks, to the chow hall, to my job, and did what somebody told me and then did the reverse at the end of the day. They had no idea.

Marine Corps participant, P18, noted:

> I think it's unfortunate that less and less of the civilian population knows anything about the military… People were appreciative, they just don't understand. So, all the positive stuff that transfers that I know of, some of it may not translate as well to the people that are hiring because they don't understand the initiative. There are some jobs, if you [bring up] an issue you're gonna get fired. It's not your job to come think up stuff, you just do what you're told. If you're at 7-Eleven or Wal-Mart, you're the whatever, like, hey, you know there's a better way to do that? You're fired. Shut up. Don't take my job.

Navy participant, P19, said:

> In the military, we follow orders, but we're very democratic and everyone has an input. And it's not unusual to see a commanding officer or an OIC [Officer in Charge] or a general or an admiral, turn around and look at the lowest ranking person in there and say, what do you feel? What do you think? And I try and explain that concept of inclusiveness. And I say it is real democratic process where everyone has an input, because when your life is on the line, you have a say in what you do. And some people are like no, they just give you orders and bark orders and you just do it. I said no, it's not that way. [That's] the TV military, you don't know the real military. I say there's more democracy, there's more

> collaboration, more teamwork in the military than I've ever seen in [current profession].
>
> Probably the biggest difference is the civilian culture doesn't understand the military culture, and it's very negative… but I think it's the military side can understand the civilian side because we came from being civilians. But those that have never been in the military put up barriers all the way around.

Marine Corps participant, P2, mentioned:

> People don't understand. You take somebody who's in the military and you put them outside the civilian sector or at a civilian party and they start talking the way they talk or saying jokes that would be humorous within our Corps, they would not be well received on the outside. It's kind of interesting like all the Marines when you go home, it's the perception of you're a Marine, what they think, what they envision what a Marine is, from what they gather off of history reading in textbooks or just watching some crazy DC movie or whatever movies they have, whatever Marvel movies people have, that perception of Marines being this image, but we as Marines understand what it's like.

Marine Corps participant, P20, stated:

> The civilian community sees you as a Marine, believe it or not. They know two ranks in the civilian community, Sergeant Major and General, and sometimes they ask me, is a General, higher than a sergeant? And so that's that kind of tells you, that's the way the civilian community is. But as hard as I tell people to call me [by my first name], they won't. They'll call me general, general, general, and

> sometimes some of the active duty Marines look at me, “is he still wearing his rank?” And really, I'm not. It's just that there's a certain level and that's a good question you ask about us, but the other question I think that's very relevant is them [civilians], it's the way they see us. They perceive us [a certain way] especially as former Marines.

Army participant, P4, noted:

> Civilians don't know anything about the military, and I don't say that in an ugly or demeaning way at all. I mean, it's just a simple fact. So, if you didn't join or participate or associate with anything or anyone from the military, that's the beauty of our country. I can go be a teacher, a fireman, candlestick maker, it doesn't matter, or a soldier or Marine or airman, anything I want to do. So, if you don't have any association, then that's totally fine, but there's so many folks, they just don't know anything about the military.

Another pattern is there was a lack of respect for capabilities, accomplishments, or experiences from civilians based on their incomprehension of the military. There were 13 of the 20 participants that discussed this issue. To illustrate, Marine Corps participant, P1, stated:

> It's been so frustrating. One frustrating thing, if there's an issue that comes up, I can easily make the decision and I already know the answer, but I have to go three levels up to get final concurrence on, saying, OK, yeah, we’re gonna go this direction, or we’re going to do this, and it's like, I don't need three people removed from me, that don’t even know about this issue, especially if it's a people

> issue. Because I've got more experience, a thousand times more than them on dealing with people issues. Why are you trying to tell me how to solve this problem with this individual? But that's the way it's set up.

Marine Corps participant, P16, noted:

> So, I kind of fell in on the same kind of mistrust. Why are you here? You don't have experience. You don't know the power. It's a power line industry with helicopters. You don't know the industry. You don't know these aircraft. You haven't been here thirty-nine years. So, it's very tough in that regard. So, assimilation wise, it was next to impossible, to be honest with you, with what was going on there.

Marine Corps participant, P2, stated:

> I think that's something that's the harsh reality of people leaving the military can understand. I think they need to be slapped in the face. It's not what you think it is [the civilian world]. You're not going to go out and step into a job and make this much money. And you're not going to get the respect that you think you're going get…You're not going to be wearing MasterGuns, you're not going to be wearing Colonel, you're not going to be wearing Lieutenant Colonel. You're going to walk in and you've got to prove to me, that's who you are. You've got to start at the bottom, or you gotta start at the middle and work your way in. You're not being hired to be the boss.

Marine Corps participant, P20, said:

> Another thing that effects people psychologically is that in the Marine Corps, you know you're great. You made it through boot camp or OCS, and when you come out that doesn't mean anything to folks and I tell people all the time…people out here do not care if you did combat, and they don't care if you have a Purple Heart or if you kicked doors down in Fallujah or whatever the hell you did, they don't care. That's hard to accept, because it's something that was so challenging and difficult for the military. They don't care that you graduated number one in some class or that you successfully completed boot camp. They don't care. That's hard to accept, so psychologically, that was a hard thing to do.

Army participant, P4, stated:

> To the identity part, is that the frustrating thing is that they don't recognize the fact that I have all this crazy experience. I have so much more to offer and contribute to the organization than editing a PowerPoint. And don't get me wrong, I do it. I'll do it all day long. I'll do it no problem. I have no problem doing the work. And I actually recognize the fact that you can't just join a civilian organization and expect to be elevated to a senior leader position. So, I don't have any problem because I enjoyed the work, the leader aspect of what I'm doing. But the frustrating part was nobody has taken the time to say, hey, so let's talk a little bit about what you did and where you came from. And I'm in no way bragging but my last assignment weeks before I retired, I was responsible for [Special Operations]. So, we had coordinated with the embassies in [foreign countries] and the National Security Council for our exercise, for the forces that we controlled.

> And so, I'm on a teleconference with the ambassador to these countries and the National Security Council and our deputy commanding general, he's sitting right next to me, and I'm orchestrating the call and I'm facilitating the discussion. And now I'm on a call where I'm being told by our program manager how to do the introductions a little better or a little smoother or, why don't we do an icebreaker activity before we start the zoom call? And I'm thinking, OK, yeah, that's all good, I mean, I totally get it, but just that experience piece, in terms of a loss of identity, I wish they just understood all the more that I could do. I have a lot more to offer.

Marine Corps participant, P6, mentioned:

> That's the frustrating part, that the private industry maybe doesn't have as clear, as deep an understanding of exactly what the skill sets that military members bring, which is why they supposedly have these meetings or these groups and why their liaison with these transition companies to try to help them leverage our talents.

Navy participant, P7, stated:

> I considered myself pretty high up in the military and I thought I would be a more sought-after asset, out in the civilian workforce. But what I'm finding out is you really have to market yourself, even if you were experienced, even if you were successful, even if you did achieve this rank. So, there's a lot of our skills that we acquired in the military that the civilian workforce, I don't want to say they don't value, but you still have to prove yourself, regardless of what you've done for the past 20 or 30 years. You still have to prove to them that you're a good risk,

> regardless of all the successes that you've had over the past three decades in some very adverse situations and tough situations. It's tough. I'm actually very surprised by this, and I'm realizing that you really, regardless of what you've done in the military, I don't want to say that doesn't matter, but it doesn't matter as much as I thought it would.

The last discussed pattern will be the rejection from the civilian organizations, with 11 of the 20 participants experiencing this issue. For instance, Marine Corps participant, P1, noted:

> Just having that realization and being able to make that adjustment in terms of not initially being disappointed or feel like maybe you're not as good as you thought you were. When I looked at the job descriptions and I'm like my résumé, this is everything you're looking for, and I'm better than anybody that they were going to put in there. Nobody's had the responsibility, in terms of infrastructure that I had when I was in the embassy security, overseeing the global responsibility. Who else was going to have that on their résumé?
>
> It's like, well, damn, what did I do wrong? I thought I was pretty good from what I accomplished. Why isn't anybody even interested in even interviewing me? [I thought] at least I get an interview and then they reject me. It's like, OK, at least I got the interview, but I was not even getting a callback.

Marine Corps participant, P10, said:

> I appreciated anybody who came back to me and said, thank you for taking the time to apply, and we decided to go in a different direction, we already selected a

> candidate. If they responded to me, I always went back and said, thank you so much for the feedback. I appreciate that, even the three or four months after the fact. You know, it's kind of like, am I invisible now? And if I didn't get the job, that's fine, I'm not going to take it personal. But there were a lot of things that I kept trying to tell myself, and I tell people this all the time, it's not you trust me, it's not you. But there were things that I thought would be really interesting to do. And if you give me the chance, I'll come up on stuff quickly. I mean, as a general officer, you get thrown into [different situations].

Marine Corps participant, P14, mentioned:

> Oh, it was tough, I think I had it a little harder than most… I couldn't find a job. I had kids. We moved and I couldn't get a job for like the first two months, and so, the transition was tough for me. Mainly because I had a hard time finding a job… The one contract position I applied for or the one company, I must have applied at least 20 times, and initially they were the ones that I thought would commiserate with the responsibility that I had. But at the end, I was applying for things that really were things that like an E-5, a sergeant or a staff sergeant, would do in the Marine Corps and I was happy to apply for them, I'm like, hey, this might work out great, I can do this job. But it wasn't until the Marine for Life Rep who actually in his full-time job worked for that company went and talked to the hiring manager that I got a job interview.

Marine Corps participant, P9, noted:

> It was very negative [transitioning]. Fifty to seventy-five applications on my transition out, and I probably went through 10 interviews, initial interviews and probably five secondary interviews and in eighteen to 24 months, I was never hired. So, I had to reaffirm my identity as an individual because of those losses make you feel like you are not worthy of somebody else's job. That's a lot of applications that went out. Maybe not as much as others, but before I got out, the skills that I thought would help me from the Marines was everything that had helped me become an O-5 [senior officer].
>
> If the end-state is to survive, then I did that. If the goal was to control anger then I wasn't there, so there was either anger management issues or not necessarily PTSD, but just the effect of having rejections on applications affecting my psyche and then translate that into, daily emotions, daily actions. So, I survived, so that's success, but I didn't always control it, the emotions, so that wasn't successful.

Marine Corps participant, P20, mentioned:

> People don't care if you were in the Marine Corps. Oh yeah, we love you for your service, on and on, but that's hard. The other thing that's hard is that you get a lot of doors slammed in your face. People [TAPS class] say they're going to throw money at you because you were in the Marine Corps. You have all these skills, at the TAP class, they tell you that. You have to compete, and a lot of times it's harder because they don't know what you did. They don't understand and translate to leadership. So, the rejection piece after you're a Marine, you know, you're on

> top of the world. You're a Marine and then it's rejection, that is hard, I don't care who you are.

Marine Corps participant, P6, stated:

> Again, very stressful [applying for jobs]. It's a lot of, you're throwing a lot of hooks, a lot of lines in a lot of ponds and a lot of fish aren't biting. Well, either they're spitting out the hook or they're not even biting on the hook. So it's very, very stressful, very stressful.

While not all patterns can be discussed, the following is a list of those that emerged with at least seven participants contributing to them: culture shock; difficulty translating military skills into a résumé; discriminated against in the civilian workplace for being a veteran or for being a certain rank; and it is not what you know, it is who you know.

Cultural Differences Between Military and Civilian Cultures Caused Growth Pains Into New Social Identity but They Adapted so They Could Belong

Once many of the participants were hired into their civilian workplaces, there were apparent differences between the civilian workplace culture and the military culture. Again, minor frustrations occurred, again leading to the stunting of forming a new social identity and for the overarching theme of the results, with belonging, in their new environments as well. It is important to note that even though frustrations between the two cultures occurred, it did not stop the participants from eventually adapting, as much as their previous social identities would allow, to their new environments. It is a personal observation through analysis of the data and observations during interviews that when

assimilation or adaptation occurred, it was for the purposes of belonging in the participants' new civilian workplace environments. Using the social identity characteristics learned from the military's organizational socialization, they adapted and overcame, they focused on the future, and they did not allow failure. Even though the participants adapted as best as possible to their new civilian environments, the reported differences between the military and civilian cultures will be presented. The first pattern discussed is how the military identity and culture are vastly different than their civilian environments, which includes 15 of the 20 participants. To illustrate, Marine Corps participant, P1, stated:

> How is it going to be interpreted by your new culture? Because there is a big difference in the culture, from not just the Marine Corps, but the military as a whole going in the civilian sector, but it's extreme with the Marine Corps because our values are even more ingrained than the other services when it comes to your belief system and how you view the world coming from the Marine Corps… really, the only time you miss it is when you're in your civilian job and you see that their values, the culture and values in civilian companies are a lot different than the culture and values you had in the Marine Corps and you were surrounded by.

Army participant, P12, mentioned:

> That's been probably one of the challenges that people that I deal with all the time, they have these discussions like, "oh, this person did this. I really think it's important." I'm thinking, my God, like, this is what you're concerned about? OK,

> I'll play the game, I guess, but this really isn't important. And so that's probably the hardest part where you get your perspective and maybe my perspective is warped. Because maybe the things they're talking about really are important, and it's just you have a much different appreciation for what is relevant, what is important, and what matters.

Marine Corps participant, P10, stated:

> You got to kind of got to prove yourself again, and there's nothing wrong with that. So, recognize that that's going to happen. But you also have to recognize that you are no longer in uniform. You have different roles, different responsibilities, and you're at a very different work environment, particularly if you stray away from the defense contracts.

Marine Corps participant, P15, noted:

> Coming back to the workforce was quite disappointing. The level of, I'm trying to use nice words, that lack of integrity, the lack of trust, the nonperformance, the trying to get over on one another is a lot more prevalent…But it was a culture shock for me to see how inefficient, ineffective and lack of direction a lot of these individuals have. And they've been doing this for a long time in some cases. So, I think it's probably good that I had a gap in there, because had I just come out of the out of the Marine Corps to this situation, I may not have reacted as kindly as I have currently.

Marine Corps participant, P11, mentioned:

> I think the other thing is the loyalty piece. Part of it as the military retiree, you got to get to it, at 20, but as long as you keep doing the right things, the military keeps advancing you and keeps paying you, keeps giving you jobs, et cetera. And then for that, you there's an amount of loyalty you give back to the Navy. I think that's much less the case here. A lot more people treat this as just a job.

Marine Corps participant, P14, said:

> An assumption I had was that everybody liked that level of organization and detail that we had in the military, and so even in my consulting job, I think I kind of drove my manager a little crazy the first two weeks because I kept asking, like, hey, where's that policy? So, if I get a 15-minute break, can I take it any time or just at the bottom half the hour? Phone calls, how long do they have to be if their personal in nature? I kind of wanted to know what the right answer was, and I think he finally said, you've got to stop. This is silly, just go to the bathroom, don't worry about it. I think that was the hardest thing, I kept wanting to know… And this is an emotional statement, not really a thinking one, but I didn't want to get in trouble. And so, I really wanted to learn all the rules to the new game like I had in the military, and there just aren't rules, and that was that was a big gap for me. I kept trying to find the rules.

Another pattern that emerged and contributed to the overall theme is the apparent lack of teamwork and collaboration in civilian organizations compared to the military culture. There were 12 of the 20 participants that contributed to this pattern. For instance, Marine Corps participant, P20, mentioned:

> The other thing that it surprised me, and it shouldn't have surprised me, when you're in the Marine Corps, the bottom line is the troops. The bottom line is your Marines, the mission, and your Marines. That's the bottom line. And when you talk about Marines, taking care of them, it doesn't mean coddling them, it means getting them ready for whatever's next, making sure their well-fed, disciplined, all that, and unit cohesion, all those things. But its Marines, people are our business in the Marine Corps, it's personal. It's intensely personal. It's all about people, and that's our bottom line. Out here the bottom line is money, and so that was hard for me to accept, that was hard for me. I should have expected it but I didn't expect it. At 1700 [5pm] here nobody cares where everybody goes. What did we do [in the military]? We cared. We were 24/7. And I'm not saying people are wrong and incorrect. It's just that culture, and that's what you that's what I miss. I miss taking care of folks.

Marine Corps participant, P14, stated:

> I knew it was going to be a challenge [being in a civilian environment]. I knew it wasn't going to be a direct one to one relationship. I knew there was going to be a language barrier, but I did expect that. I think I expected that people would appreciate the level of organization and detail that we kind of saw in the military, and that was not true. People did not appreciate it. They don't want to have that level of interaction between subordinate and manager. So, I think that was that was the big thing, is that this idea and this is probably specifically a Marine Corps trait, but what did we call it? Contact management. It was just where you were

> always integrated with your team. You never just pushed them off and let them do stuff. You always were working with them and at least in my limited experience in the civilian world, it seems like there's a little more separation.

Marine Corps participant, P10, stated:

> If as a Marine you see somebody struggling with whatever, you go, I can help you with that. In the private sector, they just watch you struggle, you know, oh well. OK, not all of them, there are some good ones out there.

Marine Corps participant, P13, mentioned:

> I missed that part of the culture where everybody looks out for each other and they're great people here, but they're not Marines. And I don't treat them like Marines. I know they're not Marines. So that part was hard to going away from. People that have that same sense of purpose and didn't matter what the task was or what your rank was, you jump in and do what you got to do.

Army participant, P4, contributed:

> I work for an organization with a phenomenal culture, but it's not the sense of team. I mean, this incredible sense of team that we had in the military is not this… like my teammates and co-workers find it odd when I'll reach out and ask, hey, you guys, you want me to help with this or I can jump in and assist? And they're like, no, no, you don't have to do that. Right, but we're a team, right? Well, we work together.

Marine Corps participant, P6, noted:

> I think everybody has that worry or concern that there's not the camaraderie, and you hear it from a lot of your old mentors and just friends and stuff, like the camaraderie in the civilian sector is not what it is in the Marine Corps. You know, everyone's out for themselves. It's all about the bottom line is what you hear from a lot of people. So that's obviously a concern.

Navy participant, P7, said:

> I certainly miss it because the civilian workforce, from what I saw, you don't have the camaraderie. You don't have the team, the team effort, and you also don't have that common, everybody kind of had common goals, so there's that common bond. And when you go out in the civilian workforce, you don't have that.

Another pattern that emerged contributing to the theme was that the military focused on a greater purpose and civilians did not, to which 16 of the 20 participants contributed. For example, Marine Corps participant, P1, mentioned:

> Really, the only time you miss it is when you're in your civilian job and you see that their values, the culture and values in civilian companies are a lot different than the culture and values you had in the Marine Corps and you were surrounded by them. I mean, those values are kind of not necessarily for the better in the civilian world, because people they don't do things necessarily for the common good of the group. It's based on what's in it for them. A lot of decisions in the civilian world and why people do things is because of what's in it for them. Whereas the military is like you're third, you're not the most important thing, the

> goal, the mission, that oversight, that supersedes and overrides everything, where in the civilian sector that's not the case.

Marine Corps participant, P18, stated:

> It was bigger and better than me. It was service over self and it was the country, and sure it was transactional, I got paid and I still get paid for being retired. But it was deeper. And when you take an oath, not many jobs take an oath to go when you go in the military or become a doctor or some professions. It's a comprehensive, collaborative sense of purpose and duty that I had in the military that I don't have here, you can inculcate that, you can pay for that. You can pay for loyalty, almost, with raises and incentives, performance metrics. But they don't take an oath out here.

Marine Corps participant, P3, noted, “They don't have the same level of public service. It just means nothing to them.”

Marine Corps participant, P2, said:

> You have to understand what the bottom line is [in the civilian world]. If you can't read a financial spreadsheet in the business world, you're worthless, you're worthless to them because it's all about money. If you don't make money, your company doesn't survive. In the Marine Corps, we get handed money…we had a constant flow... out there it's do or die. It's all about the bottom line. So, if they don't see value when someone sees you and does business with you, they see if you're going to make the money or not. And if you're not they're done with you, like that.

Army participant, P4, mentioned:

> I think leaving the military, you feel a little bit, and I did [special operations] again, very, very unique organization, but you feel like this stuff is so important. I mean, we were doing strikes against [enemies] in [foreign country], but we're doing some wild stuff and you feel like, wow, that's important, meaningful work.

Marine Corps participant, P9, said:

> The civilian workplace culture isn't predicated on do it right now, the civilian workplace culture is predicated or from my experience, as a contractor is get it done within the time you're given. So, the time we're given is the is what we get paid for. So, if you get it done right now, then the time that you are allotted for a project will be decreased in the next project. So, you don't want to deliver too early. And that goes against everything Marine Corps or military, but that's the way it seems the big military industry, corporations work. It really comes down to money, because that's how they survive.

There are several other patterns that emerged with regard to the cultural differences between the military culture and the civilian cultures that are beyond the scope of this current discussion but will be listed here for awareness. Those listed were mentioned by at least 5 of the 20 participants: lack of accountability, lack of directness, lack of leadership, lack of structure, military members identify with job and civilians do not, and work ethic from the military caused slight issues in the civilian workplace.

The Participants Utilized Their Long-Standing Military Social Identities to Adapt and Also Form New Social Identities so They Could Belong

It was vital to the results of this research study that the components and characteristics of the military social identity were understood. It was vital not only to understand what was potentially lost for some of the participants, but also to understand why the participants did not wallow in any negative emotions they felt while transitioning, as their military social identities were used to push forward, not fail; focus on the future; be disciplined; continue their service before self; and focus on the greater purpose. The goal for military members was to adapt and overcome, and they used these socially ingrained identity characteristics to form new social identities in their civilian workplaces and continue to be successful. If they continued to be successful just as they were in the military, they would yet again belong, but belong in their new organization. For instance, Marine Corps participant, P17, put it as:

> And fortunately, it did all work out, but it was a little bit of an emotional rollercoaster for sure, because it is just something so different about trying to redefine and recreate yourself in a new identity after decades of being somebody else and doing something else.

Navy participant, P11, said:

> I'm so used to moving every 2 or 3 years. You kind of get over that loss when you get to the next place, right? You get to know the new people and you learn the new people and all that jazz…And every move is a break, right? Every move, you leave the group of people that you spent time with and got to know really well, and sometimes you're working them 24-7, and then you go to the next place and there's a transition.

Army participant, P12, mentioned:

> Really, it was no different than any other job. What I mean by that is, it's just you get in, it's different and it's really, it's like a PCS. It's a different culture it's different processes, it's different procedures, figuring out how things work.

Marine Corps participant, P1, said, “You need to adjust to your environment, and if you don't like environment, if this it’s so bad in terms of the values, that you can't handle yourself then you need to find another occupation.”

Marine Corps participant, P3, stated:

> It's just learning a new culture, but you can still find a way to become part of a team and an entity, if we choose to… once you learn the language of the organization you joined, and begin to learn how their teams or units are set up, it's easy to make the mental transference.

Army participant, P4, contributed, “I've been able to balance that, balance the military being part of me and assimilating into the culture of the organization I'm working for.”

Marine Corps participant, P13, mentioned:

> It worked in the Marine Corps, and so how I conducted myself and all of it directly applies to here. It's just treating people the way you want to be treated, collaborating, relying on smart people, square peg square holes, being honest with people and being real yourself. Not getting too caught up in your ego when you're wrong, or you don't know something. So, all good traits, I think of a Marine leader and these folks want the same thing you want. I think that's a human desire is to be treated in all the ways I described.

Marine Corps participant, P20, stated:

> Leadership trumps everything, and you don't lose that. You don't lose that internal thing… The grid went down, they pulled me into the emergency operations center. I was home. They pulled me in, and said can you come in and help us with the organizational piece and get the military support and I did, so you don't lose these things. And I think some organized civilian organizations, that are smart, recognize that and leverage that talent of that leadership and the ability to get things done in the organizational piece that we are very good at.

Marine Corps participant, P5, offered:

> I never really thought about that until now, but now that I'm thinking back on it, I didn't have to change my behaviors when I got out and I just acted the same. I just grew my hair a little bit longer, don't exercise as much. So, again, focusing on the on the values of the company, trying to keep it as simple as possible. What do they want you to do?

Marine Corps participant, P6, noted:

> I'm a Marine. I know what it means to be a Marine. I'm going to try to take that to where I go and try to replicate that as best I can, not just because it's like the only thing out there, but because it works. It's like, hey, work hard, play hard, let's set the bar high on this team. Good goal. Let's have fun along the way. And it's just going to be good for everybody. I figured I was going to take all the good things from the Marine Corps culture, I figured I would take them with me and help establish, and use it to the benefit of whatever corporation or company I went to.

Strategic Civilian Job Choices Were Made for the Purpose of Belonging

Whether it was done consciously or subconsciously, some of the participants chose their civilian jobs purposefully. The consequence of those choices was, for some, a mitigation of the losses of social identity and organizational socialization. Making strategic choices and therefore mitigating portions of the losses, some of the participants found belonging. The sense of belonging lost from the military culture was not replaced, but what they found was adjacent to replacement. To illustrate, Marine Corps participant, P18, stated:

> I started looking to replicate that as best I could and be basically stay as a commanding officer. I was a commanding officer when I left active duty, three years as a commanding officer of a unit. And basically, the job I wanted was to continue kind of being a commanding officer. And it's sick, but I kind of like the responsibility. I like the accountability, the pressure. I like living in a glass [box], where people can look at you. I'm not perfect. Certainly not. But I try to hold the standard up and I miss that. My core fiber as a person is that I miss that. And I just identified with it. I don't think it's a negative thing. I'll just go ahead and get a job where I have that kind of responsibility, accountability and full of patriotism and working with young people. So, I purposely chose my first civilian job after I retired thirty years to stay in the same kind of culture because that and my identity, it just seemed to make sense. I didn't want to lose my identity so much, that I purposely chose a job where I retained my identity and would be in the same culture.

Army participant, P12, stated:

> I've seen everybody that's ever chased the pay leaves a job inside of a year because they think that's what they're supposed to do. You're supposed to get the big pay, they go do these things and they hate it. It's not doing what they want to do, it's not fulfilling that gap that occurs when you leave. That gap to lead and mentor and be in an organization that has character and integrity… And so, I didn't have to seek that out. I had an organization that I would not have joined had I not believed that the objectives, the goals, the character, and the mission fit what I wanted to achieve when I got out.

Navy participant, P11, mentioned:

> I'm not completely detached and you might find this in a lot of people you talk to, a lot of us don't go all that far from the military, especially the senior officers. As I said, I still wear a uniform every day at work…I wear a uniform every day. They still call me sir and they still call me Captain [name]. And every day when I come to work, I'm still Captain [name]. I kind of half-stepped out of the military. So those aspects I still have. So, I guess I don't know that I necessarily feel disconnected at all.

Marine Corps participant, P1, noted, "I hire former military because I didn't want to have to bite my tongue when I was in a meeting. I want like-minded people to deal with. So, a lot of guys I hire are former military."

Marine Corps participant, P10, mentioned:

> I think I missed it and this is one where when I talk to folks that are leaving active duty with the 20, really for the 20-plus year mark, you're going to be much more comfortable if you go after some kind of a job with a company that is tied to defense. Right, because they're going to understand you. You're going to understand them. And it's it to be a much better fit than going to work for somebody who hasn't got a clue to what's going on. And I think when you do that, it's not the same as when you're in uniform, but it's pretty close. You still got people that that understand on a Thursday afternoon at five o'clock and we're going to meet at such and such bar…They have a social aspect that's tied to the professional identity as well, where you just don't have that in a lot of these companies that don't have a lot of veterans. So, I think, if you're looking for what I would describe as an easier transition, that's where you would go.

Marine Corps participant, P13, stated:

> This position came open and he told her, there's only one guy I know and he's probably not interested that's already here locally that might be interested. And so, she reached out to me. I told her, no, I'm not interested. I don't want to be a part of that, I've got other plans. I'm going to [move away], I'm going to grow a beard and I'm making a clean break. But the more I talked to them, the more convinced I was that the purpose for this position and frankly, me in particular, although I think any Marine that cares about Marines could do what I do, I realized and I came to the conclusion that this is where God wanted me and it was to continue to serve, and that purpose is what drew me to it.

Marine Corps participant, P14, noted:

> The job that I eventually got was with a federal government contractor that supported the military, so it was almost like a halfway house for me. I went and everybody is still talking about rank and stuff like that. So now I work in a [civilian workplace], which I'm very appreciative of that one year, the halfway house, because it helped me kind of re-acclimatize to civilian world before I went into a slightly more extreme organization.

Marine Corps participant, P17, said:

> I picked an organization that has a mission and an element of service trying to help other people. So, to me, it's not that different than the military. But, if I'd gone into the corporate world or banking or some other fields, I would imagine it would be very different.

Marine Corps participant, P3, mentioned:

> One of my decision points for every interview was, how did it feel? I always felt like, with the Marine Corps, you know as well as I, there are stupid people, there are wonderful people in every industry. Every industry's got them, folks you want to avoid and folks you want to hug. But I gauged my interest in an organization on what did my intuition tell me. My [feeling] of they aren't replacing the Marine Corps, but do they have the same type of vibe that I could see myself enjoying the people I'm with, while I'm doing a job, I may or may not love doing it. So that's a way that helped me enter that sense of identity from the Marine Corps to what I did going forward.

Army participant, P4, stated:

> The culture is incredible [in the civilian workplace}], it really is, and that's what really drew me to it. So, when I started going through the interview process, I just recognized people were talking about their leadership and people were talking about the opportunities…That's one of the things that interested me was the culture. So, I had made a list of things of what I was looking for when I got out. I wanted to work for an organization that has strong organizational culture and I wanted it to be with an organization I'd be proud to associate with again.

Marine Corps participant, P5, noted:

> All the kids there wore uniforms and even though it was a high school, it was still a military environment. So that really wasn't enough of a break to really have a departure for what I was somewhat accustomed to, and then coming to the [specific civilian industry], it's a very regimented, standardized business. It's one of the reasons they like to hire military [specific MOS] because they fit well into their model. So, I haven't had to go out and do a sales job or work with people where there's absolutely zero veterans…I can see if I was in a different career field, it might have affected me differently, but it really hasn't been a huge change. We still have missions to do every day. You know, we [perform a service] and try to do it safely. So, yeah, in my case, no hard effects, but I think it's because of my chosen occupation.

Marine Corps participant, P6, stated:

> I'm surrounded by Marines that I work with, the president's a retired Marine. The VP of maintenance is a retired Colonel, V of operations [is a Marine], one of our site directors is a retired Marine major. And the kid that works for me is a former Marine corporal. The fact that there's a bunch of Marines that are in the corporate leadership here makes it, kind of similar.

Other Emergent Themes

Outside of the two research questions, two emergent themes will be discussed as they were too prominent not to discuss. One theme concerns the central concept for this study, which was specifically long-time serving retirees, and the other concerns the transition assistance program class that all transitioning military personnel, including retirees, must attend. Each will be discussed below; the length of service is positive reinforcement of social identity, and the TAP class has a critical missing element from its design–the psychological component.

The Length of Service Was a Positive Reinforcement of the Military Social Identity.

The first emergent theme was the longer that people stay in the military, and therefore the longer they are successful, the longer the military members' social identities were ingrained. Social identities were, therefore, behaviorally, positively reinforced for the length of service. This was important to understand as the commitment of staying past the obligatory 20-year mark not only reinforced the social identities for longer, but some elements of their service were different going past that obligatory mark. Some participants reported a greater level of respect, while others reported a greater sense of ownership of the organization, along with responsibility. The perspectives of the

participants on the dividing line between 20 years and beyond will be subsequently presented, as 11 of the 20 participants contributed to this concept. For example, Marine Corps participant, P1, stated:

> I think the fact that I went past 20 years, you end up having a deeper feeling of ownership of the institution or having a piece of ownership in directing or helping direct the institution down the right path. For example, if you are at the colonel level or on the enlisted side, you're the first sergeant, the decisions you make and some of the jobs you hold, have influence across the Marine Corps.

Marine Corps participant, P18, mentioned:

> The 10 years that I stayed in after 20, I was promoted at the 20-year mark, like I said, it's like light years difference of responsibility between the ranks. Sometimes it seems not so different, but the level of responsibility and accountability is tremendously different. You may go from having a thousand to six thousand Marines and sailors you're responsible for, so that was a big difference. And then just the time of it I mean, the 10 years or so. And at that point, you've already earned the retirement…So before the 20, you were trying to get the 20, but after 20, you're serving [to serve]. And after 20 years, you already knew you had the retirement. So, you're back to the core issue of why you joined, and that's just serving the country and trying to take care of everybody.

Marine Corps participant, P10, noted:

> I would say yes [identity is more ingrained after 20 years]. I just don’t think there's any way around it. Just because you go back to, I've been doing this since I

was eighteen years old. It's all I've ever known. Right? Now, at the same time, you know, it's everybody's different. Some people I think it's it definitely, yes, more so with almost 37 years as opposed to 20.

Marine Corps participant, P14, contributed:

I think after 20 years, if I would have left, I probably would have many of the same conclusions I have today. However, those extra six years allow me to see a different side of the Marine Corps, allowed me to go to one additional school, spend some time in Quantico at the headquarters and then spend some time on the staff of a three-star general, where I had fairly routine, I wouldn't say daily, but fairly routine contact with very high level issues and how the organization thought, about how the Marines thought about something, as compared to the way the Army thought about things. And so, I don't know if my conclusions would have changed at all. However, there is a deepening of the issue because I did get to see everywhere from, like what the commandant thought all the way down to what the lance corporal was thinking about certain policy implementations at the same time. And so, I think it did deepen it, although I don't know if it would have changed my conclusions.

Marine Corps participant, P15, said:

I think that's true [identity is more deeply ingrained]. The longevity of a lot of activities just kind of grows on your experience. It grows on just the things that you're committed to and so forth. During that time, the last part of an individual's career, your level of responsibility would generally get larger as well.

Navy participant, P19, mentioned:

> Yes, I agree with that statement [identity is more deeply ingrained]. We become institutionalized, to use a prison term, you know, but we do become institutionalized. It changes you regardless, even if you do not do well in the service and you get discharged, there's still something that you have, however being in there longer…I think after twenty-seven years it happens.

Marine Corps participant, P20, noted:

> Yeah, it is [more deeply ingrained], and that's the bottom line, is it is. I mean, there's a lot of folks that do their 20 and they retire, and they can't wait to get to that mark so they can retire. I think because I did past 36, I couldn't wait not to retire. I left kicking and screaming. I mean, when it's time to go, it's time to go. I knew it was time to go, but I didn't want to go. And so, I think the answer to your question, yeah, I think my identity, just because I stayed in so long, is still very Marine.

The TAP Class Is Missing a Key Element in Its Design.

As discussed in the first several chapters, military members are required to attend a transition class prior to leaving or retiring from military service (Suzuki & Kawakami, 2016). The class covers many topics that are related to the mechanical or administrative portions of transitioning (Suzuki & Kawakami, 2016). However, the class does not specifically address the psychological element of transitioning out of the military as noted by the participants. Many of the participants noted that the class served its purpose in most cases to help prepare for getting a job in the civilian workforce and how to deal with

their new medical system, along with other mechanical elements of the transition. However, the participants also noted the absence of the psychological piece of the transition. With 12 of the 20 participants discussing this concept, it will be presented below. For instance, Marine Corps participant, P18, stated:

> There was nothing in the Marine Corps one that talked about that [psychological portion]. It is like, we will teach you, you will learn. Repeat after me, "I am fine. I feel fine. I feel good." Good. Go to lunch. Don't walk on the grass. That was really stupid.

Navy participant, P11, noted:

> Not helpful. I mean, they helped with some of the details, the processes and stuff. I'm not saying that the TAP class, or whatever it's called this month wasn't helpful. I think it was, from an academic and from a systematic approach. But I don't know that it necessarily did anything to prepare me psychologically for the process, for the transition.

Marine Corps participant, P13, said:

> Admittedly that's not part of it [the psychological portion]. I'm not sure that I would have really realized that [psychological part] unless you brought in somebody like me or somebody that had done it and they said, look, this is this is the deal, you've succeeded forever. I don't care how long you were in the Marine Corps, the fact that you're sitting here and not in the brig or being escorted to the gate means that you have been successful. You are a successful person. You sought out the Marine Corps and now you're going to do something else. So, let

> me tell you about my experiences and challenges and opportunities and those kinds of things.

Marine Corps participant, P2, noted:

> Yeah, zero [help psychologically]. Yeah, it was no help at all. I think somebody came in and talked to you about suicide and the hotline and trouble numbers and stuff, if you have problems. But it didn't teach you how to deal with it. They didn't come in and say, hey, here's what you should anticipate seeing [psychologically].

Marine Corps participant, P20, contributed:

> Maybe not preparing psychologically, what they did is prepared you, first of all I went to a senior class and they really blew smoke up my rear-end saying they're going to knock your doors down and you're going to be a millionaire, blah, blah, blah. No, that's what they try to do is prepare you for a second career. They don't talk to you about, well, they touch upon it very lightly, on how hard it is to not be the general, not be the sergeant major, not be the master sergeant, master gunnery sergeant. What they're trying to teach is the mechanics of retiring and what kind of insurance you are going to have or what to expect with your payments, how to deal with the VA, your pension payments, how to deal when you're with Medical, and so they teach you the mechanics of being in the civilian world. They don't teach you the mechanics of you better be damn prepared for rejection. You better be prepared that if you do go to a job, you're going to start at the bottom. You better be prepared that if you start at the bottom and the people you work for are people that probably never thought of working hard because of their age and

> because they only know one thing, which is whatever they're doing at the time. And they don't prepare you for the people looking right past you, you're just another employee.

Army participant, P4, said:

> I don't feel like there were any super big efforts to prepare you psychologically for that. Again, because I think in my head I realized that there was going to be a change and that I was able to kind of run with it. But again, it did come back and on surprising occasions like, wow, I really miss that. I really feel like that's over, you know, that part of my life is over. So, yeah, they didn't do very well psychologically.

Marine Corps participant, P8, mentioned:

> Well, I don't think a 4- or 5-day program, does anything for your psyche. Other than maybe relieving some anxiety and giving you tools and telling you it's going to be OK. I don't know that it really focuses on any of the psychological issues and challenges that you might face. I don't remember any kind of focus on that, which is interesting, because that would be something that might be of value is like, I guess, the line of questions moving in that direction about, how did you cope and what methods did you use to relieve the stress and anxiety of making the transition and everything? I don't remember anything in the transition program that that talked about those things.

Summary

Chapter 4 included the results for both research questions were presented above. Each research question contained several themes that emerged from the collected data. The main overarching theme for RQ1 was the loss of belonging, and the main theme for RQ2 was the use of military social identity to continue to be successful in order to find belonging. Chapter 5 will include interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations, and implications.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of retired military officers with 24–42 years of service and how they experienced the potential losses of social identity and organizational socialization as well as how those losses may have impacted their second careers in a civilian work environment. Concisely, the key findings include a loss of belonging and that the military social identity was used to adapt and once again belong. In Chapter 5, I discuss my interpretation of the findings, implications, limitations of the study, and recommendations for future research.

The number of service years was important to this study because the retirees progressed past the obligatory retirement mark of 20 years and continued their military service. Military retirees have infrequently been the focus of previous research studies. In the literature review in Chapter 2, I focused on several key areas surrounding the topic for this study to highlight a potential gap in the knowledge concerning this population. Some of the topics covered in the literature review concerned the concept of social identity, the concept of organizational socialization, nonspecific population retirement, the military culture, the military transition to civilian life, military-specific retirement, and military personnel working in civilian organizations. Based on the research presented in the literature review, it could be argued that veterans experience a wide range of negative issues when transitioning to civilian life and the civilian workforce. Additionally, based on previous research presented, military personnel also experience negative issues transitioning to and existing within the civilian workplace environment.

While SIT had been used in previous research studies, it had not been applied to the military population. SIT applies well to the military population because social identities are a large part of how people operate inside the military culture, how they are successful in the military culture, and how they contribute to the nature of the military culture. The three components of SIT (i.e., cognitive, evaluative, and emotional) all contribute to the overall forming of the military social identity and may be seen in the participants' answers in the current study (see Ashforth & Mael, 1989). The members of the military believe they are members of the military group, the other members believe they are members of the military group, and the characteristics of the military culture (i.e., organizational socialization) become ingrained in their social identities via being and seeing themselves as members of the group. The theory of organizational socialization has also been utilized to conceptualize the military culture in previous research, and this theory contributed to the conceptual framework for this study by helping to conceptualize the military culture. I discussed both these concepts with the study participants in the interviews.

I conducted this research study with 20 long-time serving, retired military officers and sought to understand their lived experiences as they transitioned out of military service and into the civilian workforce. My interest in their lived experiences specifically concerned how they might have experienced the losses of social identity and organizational socialization and how those losses might have impacted their second careers in a civilian workplace. The results show that some of the participants experienced social identity losses, and others do not acknowledge a sense of loss because

their social identities are still intact. However, the data also pointed to a loss of belonging as an overarching theme. Many participants also experienced negative differences between the military and civilian workplace cultures, but they adapted and overcame, as they had their entire military careers, but they did so for the purposes of belonging once again. Aside from those themes, other themes also emerged from the data that addressed the two research questions. The themes that materialized provided a deeper understanding of retirement for long-time servers, what it means to transition out of military service after decades, and how they continue to use their military ingrained social identities to continue to be successful in their civilian lives.

Although the results cannot be generalized, understanding the lived experiences of these 20 participants has the potential to create social change in several ways. One is through each participant potentially gaining a better understanding of their retirement transition. Another is through potential adjustment and revision to the TAP program to help guide a better psychological transition for future retirees.

Interpretation of the Findings

There is a great deal of research that exists concerning the U.S. military and what it means for veterans when they transition out of military service (Romaniuk & Kidd, 2018). Many concepts have been broached and discussed surrounding the reason why so many veterans psychologically struggle when they leave or retire from military service (Romaniuk & Kidd, 2018). The results of this study affirm and extend the knowledge of the existing body of research presented in Chapter 2 that concerns the veterans' psychological struggles during their transitions. Wading past the surface-level reasons

that could contribute to the psychological struggle, the results of this study introduce the possibility that one of the potential root-level causes or main contributing reasons for veteran transition issues is the loss of belonging. The sense of belonging within the military culture cannot be aptly described in words. It is all encompassing and all consuming; for the participants, they reported knowing without a doubt that what they did on a daily basis as a member of the military mattered to a greater purpose. The feeling of belonging while serving in the military was not replaced for most of the participants within the civilian workplace. Veterans and retirees reported that they adapted and overcame, and they continued to be successful in their lives; however, the feeling of belonging on the level that was felt in the military was not replaced. This concept is not meant to be generalized to the entire population or is it even meant to be generalized to all 20 participants of this study because many veterans and retirees leave military service and are the better for it. This concept addresses those who do experience psychological struggles while transitioning because when people leave a group they have existed in for decades, different levels of loss occur.

The essences of SIT and the theory of organizational socialization were lost at varying degrees by some of the participants. With this conceptual framework in mind, the results of this study point to a loss of belonging as a potential contributing cause to the aforementioned psychological struggles on transitioning out of the military. When the results of this study are combined with the other elements that create problematic issues and emotions that have been researched prior to this study, psychological struggles are a result and are also potentially explained. This struggle did not appear to fully impede

those who experienced it, because they reported they were taught to not fail, but the loss of belonging they felt may yet remain for these participants.

In the following subsections, I summarize the emergent themes from this study and synthesize them with the existing body of literature for a concise understanding of the results. Each of the 20 participants answered the interview questions in different ways, but it is the role of the researcher to interpret and ascribe meaning to the various statements to produce themes within the data. The major themes addressing each research question follow.

RQ1

The major themes pertaining to the first research question were (a) loss of belonging, (b) loss of security or stability, (c) cultural elements that made up social identity, (d) shades of social identity loss, and (e) the elements that aided mitigation of the losses of social identity and organizational socialization. When discussing the potential losses of social identity and organizational socialization with the participants, they provided varied answers; however, the underlying meaning of what the participants said converged on a theme of the loss of belonging. All the themes that emerged from the data could be argued to, in some way, be tied back to the loss of belonging.

Belonging and group membership is the central tenet of SIT, with organizational socialization guiding and dictating what will be included in the culturally formed social identities (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). Some of the participants recognized and discussed the social identity and cultural losses, while others did not feel they lost anything because they still retained their social identities. Others

suggested that they did not lose anything at all but things were just different now. This may well be the first time these participants had reflected upon their experiences when they left the military; its culture; and, therefore, their social identities, which produced personally interesting results. Some participants recognized and admitted having negative emotions and transition issues, while others reported no issues in the slightest. However, it is still important to note that what was said by the participants during some of the interviews changed or was conflicting with their later responses as the interview progressed. This led to the idea that perhaps they do not recognize a loss if they did experience one based on the military social identity tenets of not being allowed to fail and to adapt and overcome.

The biggest takeaway from the overall collection and interpretation of data is the loss of belonging. It is also important to mention that the participants used their long-ingrained social identities to push forward during their transition. Many of the elements that were ingrained in the participants' social identities helped mitigate (in some ways) the losses of belonging and military culture.

The conceptual framework for this study appears to be a solid basis through which to view the military population. SIT helps to explain why military members have extremely high organizational commitment and how they are successful within the military culture. The theory of organizational socialization combined with SIT helped to shed light on how the elements of the military culture are ingrained in people's identities on a continuous basis. The all-encompassing and all-consuming military culture is ingrained in military members for as long as they remain in military service.

Understanding this basis of strength leads to a greater understanding of what it means when military members leave military service and their social identities and culture are lost. Without the conceptual framework utilized in this study, this potential explanation or the contributing factor of issues within the veterans' struggles may have never been known. In each of the subsequent subsections, I discuss each theme in greater detail.

Loss of Belonging

Although the participants mentioned in various, seemingly innocuous ways how they felt their losses of social identity and military culture (i.e., organizational socialization), the loss of belonging theme emerged from their responses. Those participants who were able to put their social identity and cultural losses into words discussed how they felt that loss, and the theme of loss of belonging became clear. The clarity of the theme stemmed from the lenses created by the conceptual framework, which allowed for the deeper meaning of the overarching theme of the loss of belonging to be revealed. While the negative emotions reported by past research studies could be explored and assessed and possibly link back to a loss of belonging, this particular theme did not appear in the other studies reviewed. What past research reported, however, was the negative emotions experienced by veterans when they transitioned out of military service, as noted by De Medeiros and Rubinstein (2016), Van Maanen and Schein (1979), and Winkler (2018). The loss of belonging through the loss of social identity and military culture was also reported as causing negative emotions by some of the participants in the current study; therefore, the findings of this study are in line with the negative emotions reported in past research studies.

However, the results of this study may expand the knowledge of the topic by presenting a possible reason for the negative emotions during the military-to-civilian transition by viewing the military struggle through the lens of the conceptual framework of this study. Belonging within the military culture cannot be appropriately described and it cannot be replaced. Some civilian organizations may come close, but they do not meet the same essence of belonging, as was apparent during the data analysis. If the loss of belonging was a contributing factor to the negative issues experienced by veterans, then some awareness has been achieved and an understanding of the veteran struggle could be gained. Understanding is the first step in recovery. If the loss of belonging is understood through the lens of the conceptual framework, it is possible that elements of the transition may be adjusted to make the transition experience better.

Loss of Security or Stability

The participants of this study reported a loss of stability or security as it pertained to the loss of organizational socialization (i.e., military culture). The military culture provides its members with a great deal of security and stability, as reported by the participants. The culture is set up to be all encompassing and all consuming in multiple ways, but one major way is for military members' life needs to always be met; this specific way was mentioned by the participants. Military members do not have to look outside their military base for any life need (Atuel & Castro, 2018). The participants reported the culture is set up that way to provide military members with the ability to focus on their mission and greater purpose of serving to protect the United States.

Through the conceptual framework of this study and data analysis, it appeared that sense of security was lost when the culture was lost.

Previous research studies had addressed how the military culture is all encompassing, such as Coll et al. (2011), McCormick et al. (2019), and Redmond et al. (2015) mentioned. However, while these aforementioned researchers discussed the culture, they did not specifically address the loss of that culture causing negative emotions. These researchers' findings are in line with the results of the current study because the past research shows the strength and breadth of the military culture. However, the findings of this study expand upon the current body of knowledge by providing an understanding of the experiences of the participants in losing that extremely strong military culture through the lens of the conceptual framework. Half of the conceptual framework is organizational socialization, and when that portion is lost, it caused negative issues to occur for the participants during their transition. The retirees now had to figure out logistical and mechanical elements that had not been a concern for decades. These massive logistical changes not only take place but happen all at once when the retirees leave military service. The loss of organizational socialization and stability occurred at one condensed, climactic moment and appeared overwhelming. This concept was also tied to social identity because if they had still belonged to the active group, they would not have lost their security and stability within the culture. A loss of social identity and loss of organizational culture go hand in hand for double the potential losses.

Cultural Elements That Made up Social Identity

One of the major themes to come out of the data collected was the individual characteristics that made up the participants' social identities that they gained from existing within the military culture. These characteristics were important to understand in multiple ways. One of the ways was to understand what the participants may have lost when they potentially lost their social identities, as some of them did report. Another way was that they used the social identities they built in the military culture to help them during their transition. A couple of the major social identity characteristics were to adapt and overcome, not accept failure, to be mission-focused, and to focus on the future. These elements allowed them to traverse the difficult transition successfully.

Another way was that they used their military social identities to adapt to their new civilian environments, which will be addressed under the second research question. While past research studies did address, in a general sense, what the military culture was like, such as Coll et al. (2011), McCormick et al. (2019), and Redmond et al. (2015), they did not assess the individual characteristics of the culture that became a part of people's social identities. Therefore, this study is in line with what past research has said, but it also expands on the body of knowledge of the finer details of what it means to serve within the military culture, which has been essential in understanding this population through the conceptual framework for this study. To understand the potential losses, an understanding of what the retirees had must have occurred first. A solid understanding of the characteristics that made up a military social identity was achieved through the lens of

the conceptual framework. Therefore, the reported losses of social identity were understood through this basis of knowledge.

Shades of Identity Loss

There were several subthemes that resulted from a discussion with the participants about the loss of social identity. One important item to mention is that the term "identity" was utilized in the interview protocols instead of the words "social identity." This is important to mention as the term "identity" was misunderstood by many of the participants as it was taken to mean who they are holistically as people instead of who they were in the context of social identity within the military culture. However, despite this issue with the interview protocols, as each of the interviews progressed, social identity loss was addressed and discussed.

Regardless of the interview question issue, there were three main subthemes that emerged from the data: I lost part of my identity; I did not lose my identity, it is just different now; and I did not lose my identity because it is still my identity. Social identity theory had not been used in previous research studies that included the military population. Therefore, the data on social identity loss for this population expands the current body of literature concerning the military population and specifically the long-time serving military population. Social identity and the reports of its loss are in line with SIT and what it would mean to lose it, along with the concept of organizational socialization, as the culture reinforced the decades-formed social identities.

A contributing factor of the negative issues that occurred during the retiree transition could be because of a loss or change of the conceptual framework. Loss may be

hard, and so may change. This is especially true if the lost elements cannot be recovered. The military social identity exists within the bounds of military service and while active in military situations as presented through data analysis. For instance, a sense of belonging and the previous social identity may be felt again during veteran meetings or group events but is once again lost when the events are over. While the retirees used elements of their military social identities to push forward and adapt to their civilian environments, they could not retain their military social identities. The conceptual framework and the lens of loss it provided could contribute to the understanding of why the veteran transition produced struggle for many. Existing in a social identity for decades and knowing in no uncertain terms who they are, to losing that social identity but not realizing that it has been lost could contribute to the transition struggle.

The Elements That Aided Mitigation of the Losses of Social Identity and Organizational Socialization

Several key subthemes emerged from the data concerning elements that aided the participants in mitigating the losses of social identities and organizational socialization. Some of them could only have come from exploring the specific population of long-time serving military personnel, and others seemed as though they were coincidences. For instance, one theme that came from understanding long-time servers and how they might have mitigated any potential losses was because of the awareness of service limitations. Service limitation is a regulation for the U.S. military forces that is used as a force-shaping tool (Griffin, 2021). This means that military members must be promoted to a certain rank by a certain number of years in service in order to continue serving on active

duty. If the members do not achieve this, they are essentially forced out of military service. For officers, it means that they are afforded two opportunities to be selected to their next rank; if they are "passed over" or not selected for the next rank twice, they have a limited time after the second denial to be processed out of military service (Griffin, 2021). Due to this awareness and understanding, the participants knew their service would eventually come to an end, and most likely at the rank of Colonel/Captain because of the low rate of selection to the rank of Brigadier General/Rear Admiral Lower Half. This concept aided the participants in being better psychologically prepared to leave military service.

Also, one of the other elements that seemed coincidental was that many of the participants received advice from a mentor who caused an awareness or perspective change that aided them in preparing psychologically to leave military service. The other sub-themes included their family, friends, or buddy support network; they remained focused on the future; and they had respect in their civilian workplaces. Previous research did not broach these subjects specifically, as the military retiree population has been studied infrequently. Therefore, this study has added to the body of existing literature on the military population and the retiree population with what elements contribute to the mitigation of potential losses of transitioning veterans. It has done so through the conceptual framework, as the potential losses within the framework were mitigated to a certain degree by a perspective change prior to the transition taking place. This means it is possible that steps may be taken to better psychologically prepare veterans and retirees for the transition to civilian life.

RQ2

The major themes that emerged from addressing the second research question were (a) civilian incomprehension of the military and military culture caused frustrations that (initially) stunted growth of new social identity and therefore belonging, (b) cultural differences between military and civilian cultures caused frustrations that (initially) stunted growth of new social identity, but they adapted so they could belong, (c) the participants utilized portions of their long-standing military social identities to adapt and also formed new social identities so they could belong, and (d) strategic civilian job choices were made for the purpose of belonging. When discussing how the potential losses impacted the participants in their second careers in their civilian workplaces, there were varied answers that converged on one central theme for the second research question. That central theme was that there were growing pains when transitioning into the civilian workforce, but the participants used their social identities and what they had been taught by the military culture to adapt and overcome the challenges they faced. Adapting and overcoming were done in an effort to form a new social identity and to once again belong. While the participants remained different from their civilian counterparts, they assimilated as best as possible into the civilian culture so they could belong in their new environments.

It was described above that most elements within the results of this study could be tied back to the concept of the loss of belonging, and that can be seen in the answers to the second research question, as the participants attempted and mostly succeeded in once again belonging, as best as they could. The belonging felt within the military culture was

not replaced for the participants, but they continued to be successful in their new careers as they had done for decades before. Therefore, the participants adjusted to their civilian environments, as failure was not an option for them. These themes emerged due to the conceptual framework of the study. The gains and losses were viewed through these theoretical lenses, and the themes emerged from them. The major themes will be subsequently discussed.

Civilian Incomprehension of the Military and Military Culture Caused Frustrations That (Initially) Stunted Growth of New Social Identity and Therefore Belonging

One of the major themes that resulted from discussing with the participants how they experienced assimilating into the civilian workplace was that civilians did not comprehend what it truly meant to serve in the military. That incomprehension by the participants' bosses, peers, and subordinates caused, at least initially, some growing pains into their new social identities and stemmed from shedding their previous social identities. The participants were met with a great deal of rejection from civilian organizations, and then they experienced culture shock once they did enter a civilian organization. The rejection and culture shock caused stunting of their new social identities due to the notion they were severely misunderstood. The participants described that being a senior military officer came with a great deal of responsibility and not just organizational responsibility, although they had that as well. It also came with being responsible for people's lives on a multifaceted level as many of the participants discussed. This responsibility, combined with all of the characteristics learned from the military culture, made these participants extremely capable workers and masterful

leaders. Due to civilian incomprehension, those talents were neither recognized nor utilized in many of the participants' cases, contributing to the feeling of the loss of belonging. Due to the military cultural value of failure not being an option, the participants adjusted, grew, and adapted to this unfamiliarity of civilians about the military and appeared to create an altered social identity so they could once again belong.

The past research studies indicated issues that military personnel find when they enter the civilian workforce. For instance, Tūtlys et al. (2018) reported on how military veterans' capabilities are not recognized or utilized properly, causing issues for the veterans. This study's results are in line with the previous research concerning military personnel in civilian workplaces. This study also contributed to that body of knowledge on some of the reasons why the veterans struggle when the social identity lens comes into play. The conceptual framework provided perspective on the struggle through the losses of military social identity and military culture. That which made them successful in their military careers continued to help them be successful in their civilian careers, but a struggle still occurred, causing some negative emotions. While the retirees are professionals, that does not mean they were happy, nor does it mean they understood the losses that may have occurred, and in some reported cases, did occur. This means they will succeed, but they may still experience negative emotions and not know why.

Cultural Differences Between Military and Civilian Cultures Caused Growth Pains Into New Social Identity, but They Adapted so They Could Belong

There was a solid theme that presented itself in the cultural differences between the military workplace culture and the civilian workplace culture. Again, minor issues

occurred that, again initially, caused stunting of social identity growth for the participants. However, the participants utilized their long-time formed military social identities to adapt and overcome the cultural differences. With failure not being an option, the participants adjusted their social identities to their new environment to the best of their abilities. They appeared to have done this so they could once again belong in their environment. Again, the military sense of belonging was reportedly not replaced, but it did not stop the participants from trying. Many of them found a workplace culture where they were respected in the workplace, which aided their mitigation of social identity and military culture losses. The characteristics they used, gained from the military social identity, were staying focused on the future, adapting and overcoming, failure is not an option, and staying focused on their mission.

Again, Tūtlys et al. (2018) discussed in their research of military personnel in the civilian workplace that the cultural differences had a negative impact on the veterans working in civilian careers. My research study's results are in line with and expand the body of knowledge on how military veterans experience the civilian workplace through the utilized conceptual framework. Again, through the lens of the theories, this means that the retirees were successful using elements from their previous social identities, but negative emotions still occurred without an understanding as to why it was occurring. The retirees operated professionally and successfully in their civilian environments but still may have experienced negative emotions. This means an understanding of the loss of belonging and seeking to belong again must occur in order to improve upon the transition to the civilian workforce. Awareness of these concepts is key.

The Participants Utilized Their Long-Standing Military Social Identities to Adapt and Also Form New Social Identities so They Could Belong

Another result of this study is that while some of the participants reported losses or changes in their social identities, they also used their decades-built social identities to mitigate, to a certain degree, the losses of social identity and organizational socialization. The social identity characteristics that helped the participants be successful while in the military culture also aided them in their transition to the civilian workforce using those very same characteristics. It is an overarching theme of the results of this study for the elements to be tied back to the loss of belonging and behaviors carried out for the purpose of belonging again. Therefore, because the participants were taught to carry on to their next mission, stay focused, and never fail, they used their long-standing military social identities to continue to be successful. Even though there were some negative challenges that arose in switching to the vastly different civilian workplace culture, the desire to belong in their new work environments was stronger than the challenges. After belonging to a strong team for decades, the desire to belong again was natural.

Because SIT had not been previously utilized with the military population, previous research did not directly address this area. However, the results of this research study are in line with those research articles that did discuss how social identity hurts when it is lost. Therefore, this study also expands the body of knowledge of how social identity may be applied to the military population and the retired military population as well. This means that steps may be taken to better prepare military retirees for the transition to the civilian workforce. If the conceptual framework is applied in a wider

sense, the transition may be made better through an awareness that these concepts exist and that when the transition occurs, they have the potential to be lost.

Strategic Civilian Job Choices Were Made for the Purpose of Belonging

For a few of the participants, there was a pattern that emerged where the participants acknowledged they were either consciously or subconsciously aware that there would be a loss of either social identity or organizational socialization (in other terms), and they chose their civilian job with the aim of mitigating those losses. Several of the participants looked for a civilian job or civilian workplace culture that either had the same type of culture or they were in a position similar to their military careers. The sense of belonging was not fully replaced, but they retained many of the benefits of being a senior officer in the military. This idea explains why some of the participants either did not feel any loss of identity or why some of them felt like it is just different now. Those participants are in positions and workplace cultures that are truly civilian but paramilitary at the same time. They retained much of the status they obtained as senior military officers, and some are even still addressed by their military ranks.

None of the presented past research studies addressed this subject. However, the results of this study are in line with the presented articles when it comes to the general themes. The results of this study, therefore, do expand the understanding of the current body of literature concerning military retirees. Also, through the lens of the conceptual framework, this means that some retirees were aware of the coming losses and did not want to experience them and therefore sought mitigation situations/tactics. This also means that actions may be taken to develop this awareness and process the coming losses

for all retirees. With an awareness of the potential for losses, retirees may choose to mitigate the losses or accept them, either way moving forward armed with better knowledge of what the transition will hold.

Implications

The purpose of many research studies is to try and create positive social change from the results. With the potential for the theme of loss of belonging as a core contributing issue for some of the retirees' psychological struggles, the potential for positive social change is present. At the individual level, for the participants of this study that did or are psychologically struggling, they have been acknowledged, and they may also understand their transition experiences better through the questions being asked. At the organizational and societal/policy level, the TAP class could be adjusted to include the psychological portion of the transition. Several of the participants mentioned they would have been apt to listen to a speaker during the TAP class that had already completed the transition and addressed the pitfalls of it from an experienced standpoint, as they may relate to a speaker such as that. Even though the transitioning veterans and retirees may not listen during the TAP class, the seed of awareness that the transition struggle may occur and why it may occur is powerful. Additionally, positive social change may be achieved through continued research of this population and the veteran transition in general, as there is much more to understand.

The most prominent of the implications, however, is the conceptual framework that was utilized in this study. SIT combined with the theory of organizational socialization appears to provide a strong basis for understanding how and why people are

successful in the military, how people are successful after they leave the military, and what they potentially lose when they transition out of the military as well. If this conceptual framework were to be applied from multiple angles concerning the military population, it could have the potential to open social change doors. Awareness is the key to understanding. The military members must first be aware of the potential for an issue to occur. As of now, there is a general understanding that veterans may experience negative issues in the transition to civilian life and the civilian workforce, but not why. The conceptual framework for this study could contribute to the understanding of why. It will take further research to understand if this conceptual framework leads to a root cause of veteran transition struggles; however, this study has revealed its potential. If veterans and retirees understand that they may suffer a shade of identity loss and a loss of military culture, which may lead to a sense of loss of belonging, which cannot be replaced in most cases, they have the potential to understand the transition struggle. As with anything, not everyone will struggle, and not everyone will suffer these losses, but many do. The lack of awareness of why the struggle occurs has led to confusion, a multitude of negative emotions, a body of research concerning the veteran transition, and veteran suicide.

If this study's conceptual framework was applied to the TAP class, mental health strategies, marketing or public service announcements, veteran education, veteran resources, VA tools and resources, family and friends' education, suicide prevention and hotlines, and other veteran resources, it could lead to awareness of from where the issues might stem. With awareness comes understanding; with understanding comes the ability to heal. Again, more research needs to be conducted with this conceptual framework and

this population, among other veteran populations. However, utilizing this conceptual framework to continue research on this population could provide greater insights and better understanding, which could turn into further areas of social change for the military community.

Limitations of the Study

There were several limitations with the current study. One limitation of this study was a lack of representation across all of the military branches within the Department of Defense. Due to the way that snowball sampling occurred, the study consisted mostly of participants that had served in the Marine Corps, as one Marine Corps retiree passed the study along to another Marine Corps retiree, in most cases. Perhaps the number of participants from each branch could have been limited, and recruiting could have continued until there was an equal representation of participants from each branch. It is definitely important to understand how the potential losses of culture and social identity impact military members of the different branches of the military.

Another limitation of this study was the lack of representation of female retired officers. Only male retired officers volunteered for and participated in the study. It is important to understand the differences between female and male retirees and the differences and similarities of their retirement and transition experiences. Knowing the differences between female and male experiences when losing social identity is important to understanding this population and its transitions. The study could have been designed to require a certain number of female veterans to participate. Therefore, recruitment could have continued until that quota of female retirees was reached.

A third limitation of this study was using the term "identity" in the interview protocols. The term identity is a general and loaded term that was left open for interpretation by the participants, and the concept that was supposed to have been discussed was social identity. This caused some confusion and some variation in the answers from the participants. If the term social identity had been explained and utilized in the interview protocols instead, the results might have varied from what was collected here. It is important to understand social identity as it was meant to be explored rather than with an adjacent understanding through the term identity.

One other important limitation of this study was that the results depended on the participants answering the interview protocols honestly. As described in the Results section, many characteristics of the military social identity and the military culture (organizational socialization) do not allow for the recognition, admittance, or discussion of negative emotions. Negative emotions may be translated into failure, and military members are taught not to fail. Marine Corps participant, P20, said it best when he stated, "You suck it up, and I think that's part of the military culture, is that you learn to suck it up." However, another aspect of this limitation is that this may be the first time any of these participants have been asked these types of emotionally laden questions with regard to their retirements and transitions. Therefore, it may not be that they refused to acknowledge negative emotions, but instead that they had not reflected on their experiences until now. Given reflection time after the interviews were conducted may have shown different results. Given the nature of the questions and the circumstances of the participants, there may not have been a way to mitigate this issue within this study.

The last discussion of the limitations of this study concerns the generalizability to the entire long-time serving military retiree population. Although the sample size was larger than many qualitative research studies with 20 participants, the sample size was still not enough to be able to generalize the results to the entire population. A much larger sample size, such as in a quantitative study, may allow the generalizability to the entire long-time serving military retiree population. Because qualitative studies are meant to have small sample sizes, this limitation could not have been adjusted for this study. However, future research may make up for this limitation.

Recommendations for Future Research

Two different types of recommendations will be discussed. The first type is that related to the primary findings of this study, and the second type is for future studies. Recommendations that are based on the findings of this study are centered around the TAP class that all veterans and retirees must attend. Recommendations for future studies center around continuing to explore this infrequently studied population of military retirees and how the COVID-19 pandemic might have impacted military retirement.

Recommendations Based on Findings

There are several recommendations based on the findings of this study. The results and the statements made by the participants pointed to an issue with the military preparing veterans and retirees for the psychological transition to being a civilian and existing within the civilian workforce. The participants were used to the military culture and policies, preparing them with anything that they needed to be successful. The TAP class is supposed to prepare the veterans and retirees to be successful civilians, and in a

mechanical way, it did do that. However, where it appears to fall short is the psychological portion. The TAP class does not address the potential losses of social identity and organizational socialization (military culture) and how that might feel. Keeping in line with the military culture in general, the class does not address emotions, change, and the potential for pain and struggle. At the suggestion of many of the participants and the results of this study, the TAP class could include a discussion of how leaving the military might feel emotionally. Several of the veterans not only said the class was unhelpful psychologically but that it actually set them up for failure when the speakers told them they would be coveted assets in the civilian world. Even if the veterans and retirees are not convinced they will experience negative emotions after leaving the military during the TAP class, they may at least be made aware that it is a possibility.

The second recommendation is connected to the first: if veterans and retirees leave the military with an awareness that they could experience negative emotions after they potentially experience losses of social identity and military culture, they could be provided resources to deal with those losses. Retirees, in particular, have continued care through either Tricare or Veterans Affairs, as some of the participants mentioned. Mental health resources could be provided to those veterans who realize they may be experiencing losses of social identity and organizational socialization. The retirees are used to having access to the resources they need and could be amiable to a mental health resource through these organizations, should they desire them. The marketing would have

to address the military cultural element of failure not being an option, and asking for help and discussing emotions is not a failure, for this recommendation to be useful.

Future Studies

There are also several recommendations for future studies that would make it possible to understand the long-serving retiree population better. One recommendation is to conduct a quantitative research study with the same criteria as was conducted with this study so the results may be better generalizable to the retiree population. The much larger sample size in a quantitative study would potentially allow for a wider range of both men and women and a mix of respondents from the different branches of the military. A quantitative study may allow for a relationship between the struggle felt by many veterans and retirees to be measured. The relationship between the losses of social identity and organizational socialization, and the loss of belonging may be better understood. A quantitative study may allow for an even greater understanding of this particular population.

Another recommendation is for research to be conducted on how the global pandemic of COVID-19 may have impacted these participants and others who retired or even just got out of the military during this timeframe. The interview protocols for this study did not include this concept, but it was mentioned by several participants and how it changed their retirements. The participants reported that the military is steeped in tradition, with retirements being celebrated and recognized with retirement ceremonies and retirement parties with family and friends. Due to the pandemic, some participants were not able to engage in these activities. Exploring the lived experiences of those who

retired or got out during the pandemic could provide insight into how it impacted that group differently than those who did not retire during a pandemic.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of long-time serving retired military officers and how they may have experienced the losses of social identity and organizational socialization. It was also to understand how those potential losses impacted the retirees' second careers in a civilian workplace. The results of the study are complicated. Each theme is compounded by the one after it, and they all relate to each other as well. The loss of belonging is the overarching theme for the entire study. It could be reasoned that each theme could be tied back to the idea of belonging while in the military and losing that sense of belonging when it is left. The loss was felt and vocalized in different ways, but the string through them was clear.

Two research questions were posed for this study, with clear themes emerging from the results of each. The first research question produced the themes of (a) loss of belonging, (b) loss of security or stability, (c) cultural elements that made up social identity, (d) shades of social identity loss, and (e) the elements that aided mitigation of the losses of social identity and organizational socialization. The participants answered the interview protocols in different ways, but the meaning behind the words was clear in the themes presented above. The second research question produced the theme of (a) civilian incomprehension of the military and military culture caused frustrations that (initially) stunted growth of new social identity and therefore belonging, (b) cultural differences between military and civilian cultures caused frustrations that (initially)

stunted growth of new social identity, but they adapted so they could belong, (c) the participants utilized portions of their long-standing military social identities to adapt and also form new social identities so they could belong, and (d) strategic civilian job choices were made for the purpose of belonging.

Although many of the participants of the study felt psychologically prepared when they transitioned due to an awareness caused by various reasons, they were not prepared psychologically by the military. The TAP class does not include the psychological aspects of the transition, nor does it include a discussion of the potential negative emotions stemming from the potential losses discussed here. If the TAP class included such a discussion for awareness of the potential challenges, and if resources were made available to veterans and retirees specifically addressing these issues, it could make for a better military to civilian transition. Many of the participants expressed a desire to continue to serve. If they were given psychological tools in addition to the other resources that the TAP class provides, they could continue to serve more successfully.

In conclusion, the participants of this study, and the military retiree group as a whole, spent decades and a large portion of their lives serving and protecting the United States. Understanding this population and how their service may be repaid, even in small ways, is imperative. The hope is that this research study produces positive social change for this group of participants and for future military retirees. Continued research to create social change will honor this population as they have honored us.

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Appendix A: Sociodemographic Data Collection Form

All information provided on this form will be kept strictly confidential

Participant Identifier (Researcher Assigned) _____

Branch of Service at Retirement: _____

Rank at Retirement: _____

Years of Service at Retirement: _____

Calendar Year of Retirement: _____

Prior Enlisted? _____

VA Disability Rating: _____

Combat Deployments: _____

Age: _____ Ethnicity: _____

Highest Education: _____

Marital Status: _____

Previously Divorced: _____

Children living with: _____ Children not living with: _____

Civilian Occupation: _____

Years at Current Civilian Occupation: _____

Annual Income at Civilian Occupation: _____

Appendix B: Interview Questions

1. How would you describe the military culture?
2. Describe your thoughts and feelings on how the military is or is not a part of your identity.
3. What are some of the reasons you stayed in service for longer than 20 years?
4. Describe your thoughts and feelings on the idea that because you stayed in past the obligatory retirement mark, that your military identity is more deeply ingrained than if you had left the military at 20 years or before 20 years.
5. Describe your thoughts and feelings leaving the military but specifically how you felt about leaving the military culture.
6. Describe your thoughts and feelings with regard to no longer having membership in the military "group."
7. Describe your thoughts and feelings about the possibility that when you left the military culture, you may have experienced it as a loss.
8. Describe your thoughts and feelings about the possibility that when you retired from the military, you lost part or all of your identity.
9. How did the military-to-civilian transition impact you psychologically overall?
10. Describe your level of awareness that your psychological impact could have been attributed to a loss of identity?
11. How did you cope with any negative emotions you experienced leaving the military?

12. Describe what you believed to be your transferable skills from your military experience prior to joining the civilian workforce.
13. With regard to your military experiences, describe your expectations with joining the civilian workforce.
14. How long was it after you retired from the military that you joined the civilian workforce?
15. Describe your experiences with gaining employment in a civilian organization.
16. Describe your experiences with the differences between the military culture and the civilian workplace culture.
17. Describe, if any occurred, any challenges or stresses you had assimilating into the civilian workplace culture.
18. Describe your thoughts and feelings with feeling like a valued member of a civilian organization.
19. Describe how you and your military experiences were respected within the civilian workplace?
20. Describe any methods or strategies you employed to mitigate these challenges or stresses.
21. Describe your thoughts and feelings with regard to how well-prepared psychologically you were for the transition to the civilian workforce.
22. Describe your thoughts and feelings with how well the retirement transition assistance program was at preparing you psychologically for the civilian workforce.