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Challenges of African American Female Veterans Enrolled in Higher Education

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Walden University
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Abstract

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MEdAS, Virginia State University, 1989

BA, Virginia State University, 1979

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Education – Leadership, Policy, and Change

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Abstract

African American women represent 19% of the 2.1 million living female veterans. They are the largest minority group among veteran women; however, little is known about the challenges that they face when they transition to a postsecondary learning environment. The purpose of this qualitative study was to understand better how this cohort of veterans who served in the U.S. Army during military campaigns in the Middle East overcame transitional challenges to higher education. This study utilized Schlossberg's adult transition theory and identity formation as described in Josselson's theory of identity development in women. The focus of this study was on how female veterans constructed meaning as they overcame transitional challenges and coped with change. The research questions focused on understanding the perceived social, emotional, and financial needs and discerning to what extent faculty and staff helped or hindered their academic success. Purposeful sampling strategies were used to select 12 veteran African American females who attend higher education to participate in semistructured interviews. Thematic analysis of the data indicated that being a better role model and provider; facing financial difficulties; and balancing home, school, and career were among the key findings. These findings on challenges of African American female veterans' experiences can be used to inform university administrators, state employment agencies, the Army's Soldier for Life Transition Program, and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. This study contributes to positive social change by providing understanding to institutions of higher education regarding the transitional experiences of African American female veterans and the need to implement programs to assist them better.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my two daughters, Katrina Latrice Brantley, Esq. and Kiila Nicole Johnson, MD who have provided me with inspiration and purpose. Without your devotion and loving support, this endeavor would not have been possible. I would also like to thank my mother, Marilyn B. Jones, a life-long educator in Lunenburg County, Virginia for being the bedrock of our family and for establishing the importance of education during my developmental years. To my dearly departed brother and sister, Andre Jerome Jones and Patrice Jones Harris, who left this world far too soon, I miss you more than words can ever express. This study is meant to serve as a tribute to female veterans, past and present, who have paved the way, and who made my career success possible. I especially give thanks to the women who served with me in the U.S. Army for 30 years as we endured the hardships, challenges, and sacrifices of military service. We did so with honor, integrity, and grace. Your courage, dedication, and stories are the inspiration for this study.

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Marilyn B. Jones, my mother, a retired educator and the first in her family to earn a college degree. You always demonstrated to my siblings and me the importance of

having an education. You struggled so that we may have. You are my beacon and guiding light.

Katrina Latrice, Kiila Nicole, Bryce Anthony, Bryan Curtis, Brayden Alexander, and Blair Corinne my children and grandchildren. Your loving supported gave me the courage to stay the course and to see this dream to an end. You all are my greatest accomplishment.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The demographics of college students in the United States have changed over the last decade with more adults and first-generation students attending college. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2016), National Center for Education Statistics, while enrollment of traditional students remains higher than that of nontraditional students, projections have indicated that, in the coming years, the rate of increase for older students will exceed that of 18 to 24 year-olds, the traditional college age. Data also indicate that 40% of college-aged students are enrolled in institutions of higher education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015, Table 302.60). Twenty-nine percent of these students enrolled in 4-year schools, while 11% enrolled in 2-year institutions (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015, Table 302.60).

Although all educational institutions have experienced an increase in enrollment over the last 10 years, most students enrolled in 2-year schools are over the age of 25 years (Topper & Powers, 2013). Many of these students are parents whose lives are more complicated than those of traditional college students because they must juggle the competing demands of school, work, and domestic life (Giancola, Grawitch, & Borchert, 2009; Tate et al., 2015). They include military veterans who have served their country and are now intent on acquiring knowledge that can lead to steadily rewarding postmilitary employment (Evans, Pellegrino, & Hoggan, 2015).

With the initiation of the War on Terrorism, after the 2001 attacks on the Pentagon and destruction of the World Trade Center, many college-aged students postponed their studies to serve their country (Heitzman & Somers, 2015). The Veterans

Education Assistance Act of 2008 was created as an incentive to join the military by providing financial resources to earn a college degree during and after their tour of duty (Naphan & Elliott, 2015). To date, almost a million veterans and active service members have taken advantage of these educational benefits, as well as other federal and state grants, to attend postsecondary institutions (Dynarski & Scott-Clayton, 2013). To that end, there are two programs supported by the Veterans Administration: the Veterans Education Assistance Program, best known as the post-9/11 version of the G.I. Bill, and the All-Volunteer Force Educational Assistance Program or Montgomery G.I. Bill (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, Veterans Benefits Administration, 2015).

Background

I begin with a brief historical perspective regarding the contribution made by female veterans past and present and to those who have given so much in the name of freedom. Social issues such as single parenthood, problems in finding affordable childcare, higher divorce rates, and unemployment impacts the academic success and worldviews of these student veterans (Iverson, Seher, DiRamio, Jarvis, & Anderson, 2016; National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2015; Reppert, Buzzetta, & Rose, 2014).

According to the National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics (2015), women have participated in every period of U.S. military history. They dressed as men during the Revolutionary War, served as nurses during the first and second World Wars, and as helicopter pilots during the Persian Gulf Wars. Hundreds served in the American Civil War; 33,000 served in World War I and World War II, and over 700,000 served in

the Korean and Vietnam conflicts (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2015). In more recent times, over 400,000 women were deployed in support of Operation Desert Shield/Storm, the first Gulf War, and more than 280,000 women served in the campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan (The National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, 2010). Last year, there were more than 2 million living female veterans (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics: Female veterans Report, 2017). Media outlets did not broadcast women's service to the general public despite the fact that they have served in every war. As a result, they have not received the same benefits and protection as their male counterparts as supported by the claims in the PBS Documentary, *Unsung Heroes* (Howard, Rosetti, Ellis, & Hickey, 2015)

It was not until the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s that women service members received veteran status, allowing them to qualify for state and federal assistance programs (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2011, p. 6). Only with the 1980 census, 79 years after the establishment of the Army Nurse's Corps did the U.S. government begin to process data on the number of women serving in the military (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2011). Finally, on December 4, 2015, the Department of Defense granted women full integration into the U.S. Armed Forces (U.S. Department of Defense Memorandum, Implementation Guidance for the Full Integration of Women in the Armed Forces, 2015). This gave women the opportunity to serve in any Military Occupation Specialty (MOS) including

many that had been available only to men (U.S. Department of Defense Memorandum, 2015).

A Change in Policy

While women in the U.S. military accomplished much over the last 30 years, congressional policy restricted their ability to serve, relegating them to administrative tasks. Because women were not officially recognized as military combatants, they did not receive comparable pay or health care benefits. It was not until 1948, with the implementation of the Armed Services Integration Act, that enlisted women were allowed to occupy 2% of the total force and to play a permanent part (National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics: Women Veterans Report, 2017). The 2% restriction policy remained in place until 1967 when Public Law 90-130 repealed the restriction and opened new opportunities for women to serve (United States Government Publishing Office, 2016). In 1973, with the end of the military conscription and the beginning of an all-volunteer force, women's recruitment rates increased, although most were still assigned to supportive roles requiring minimal technical skills (Moore, 1991). Such limitations restricted their ability to advance in military rank, thereby limiting their employment opportunities after discharge (Moore, 1991).

The Gulf War Era

During the first Gulf War, unprecedented numbers of deployments from active and reserve units made women more visible to the general public. Congressional policy changed, allowing women to serve in roles that had been previously unavailable. In 1992, the Defense Authorization Act rescinded a policy that prevented women from

piloting combat aircraft. In 1994, women were permitted for the first time, to serve on combat vessels qualifying them for top positions in the U.S. Navy (The U.S. Congress, 2016). In 1998, women pilots flew combat missions in support of Operation Desert Fox in Iraq. Since 2001, more than 1.9 million Amy, Navy, Air Force, Marines and Coast Guard members participated in combat operations. Among them were 280,000 women who served in *Operation Iraqi Freedom* and *Operation Enduring Freedom* (The National Academies of Science, Engineering, and Medicine, 2010).

Problem Statement

The condition of the economy, the job market, unemployment statistics, and access to higher education were essential factors in the recruitment of women soldiers (National Center for Veteran Analysis and Statistics, 2011). Many female veterans have earned benefits under the G.I. Bill of Rights and have enrolled in college to pursue a postsecondary education. According to a 2013 report by the American Council on Education, female veterans faced higher rates of unemployment, underemployment, homelessness, single parenthood, and divorce rates than did their male counterparts. Mulhall (2009) noted that their support resources were also not on par with those of male veterans. Racism and gender discrimination further exacerbated this imparity for African American female veterans. While modern researchers have focused their attention on the increased number of veterans enrolling in institutions of higher education (Hamrick & Rumann, 2011), there were comparatively few studies about how female veterans are affected by their transition from military service to student status. Consequently, little is known about how African American female veterans

conceptualized their academic and social needs and how they could be better served by college leaders through on campus support services (Reppert et al., 2014). According to the National Center for Veteran Analysis and Statistics (2017), female veterans represent the fastest growing cohort. In 2015 alone, 149,375 women used their education benefits (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, 2017). As more and more women transitioned to veteran status, a noticeable gap remained in the literature that this study will address.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perceived needs of African American female veterans who served in the U.S. Army during the Gulf War era declared by President George H. W. Bush and President George W. Bush against the War on Terrorism and who enrolled in an institution of higher education after military service. As an African American woman who served 30 years in the military and a doctoral student in education, I wanted to understand how female veterans constructed meaning in their lives as they confronted social, emotional, and financial challenges while enrolled in an institution of higher education.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide this study:

Research Question 1: How do African American female veterans seeking a higher education degree perceive their social, emotional, and financial needs as they transition from a structured military environment to a less formal college setting?

Research Question 2: What have these African American female veterans perceived that faculty and staff have done to help or hinder their academic success?

Conceptual Framework

Schlossberg's (1989, 1995, 2012) ideas about making transitions and Josselson's (1987, 1996) concepts of identity development were the conceptual frameworks that guided this study. Schlossberg's concepts of the *4S model* and *moving in, moving through, and moving out* of transition and Josselson's stages of identity development as the *self-in-relationship*, and the *self-standing-alone* were of interest to me as the researcher.

Adult Transition Theory

Schlossberg's adult transition theory relates to adults' psychological development and interactions within a social environment. It examines life events and nonevents that affect the roles and relationships of individual's lives (2012). Schlossberg's framework has been used to support adult learners coping with change as well as students attending college for the first time (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012). Situation, self, support, and strategies are the components of the 4 S model that interested me. The concept of moving in, moving through, and moving out of transition seemed particularly applicable to this study (Anderson et al., 2012).

Theory of Identity Development

Josselson's theory of identity development draws on the work of two developmental and clinical psychologists, Erikson (1950/1968) and Marcia (1966), who are known for their research on adolescent identity development. Marcia, in expanding

on Erikson's work, posited that the various stages of adolescent development are not characterized by identity resolution or identity confusion, but by adolescents' commitment to identity formation relating to occupational choice, religion, gender roles, and political ideology. According to Marcia, identity development in adolescents consist of two stages: crisis and commitment. The first stage is a period of turmoil where young people reexamine old values and choices. Choosing meaningful goals and committing to accomplishing them is a personal investment. Marcia argued that identity development has four distinct stages: diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and achievement. Josselson (1987) expanded on "Marcia's work by developing four unique paths for women's identity development which she called 'purveyors of the heritage,' 'pavers of the way,' 'daughters of crisis,' and 'lost and sometimes found'"(pp. 42-140). I further explored these paths in Chapter 2.

Nature of the Study

This basic qualitative study was based on interviews with 12 African American female Army veterans, most of whom had taken classes at an institution of higher education. Interviewing a dozen informants provided enough narrative diversity to draw sound conclusions regarding their perceived needs. Face-to-face and telephone interviews were focused on the ways they managed their transition from a structured military environment to a less formal college setting. The basic qualitative approach was selected because it allowed me to understand how they assigned meaning to their transitional experiences (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2015). This approach aligned with the purpose, conceptual framework, and research questions of my study.

Definition of Terms

The following terminology is meant to help readers understand the constructs used in this study.

Global War on Terrorism: The campaign that was launched in 2001 in response to the attacks on the World Trade Center and the U.S. Pentagon by President George W. Bush.

Operation Desert Storm: The first gulf war declared by President George H. W. Bush that took place in response to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait from August 1990-February 1991.

Informant: A special type of participant because of the expertise and knowledge brought to qualitative research.

Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF): The war in Afghanistan from September 11, 2001 until the present time.

Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF): The war in Iraq from September 11, 2001 until December 2011.

Female veterans: Women who have served in the armed services, including members of the reserve components.

The following terms are used interchangeably and represented a broad range of women currently serving or who have served in the U.S. Army: *soldiers*, *service members*, *warriors*, *African American female veterans,* and *veterans-turned- students*.

Assumptions

Based on my military experience and my literature review, I assumed that African American female veterans had to prove themselves as worthy in a predominately male environment. I also believed that female veterans worked hard for recognition as legitimate and trustworthy soldiers. I assumed that African American female veterans experienced periods of anger, fear, and loneliness while deployed in austere environments far away from their families and friends. Finally, I assumed that some of my informants would be reluctant to recollect challenging experiences. However, I was confident I would earn their trust, and meaningful dialogue would ensue.

Scope and Delimitations

According to the American Council on Education (2013), student veterans reported experiencing barriers to successful integration when they transitioned from military to civilian society and, subsequently, enrolled in an adult educational institution. These obstacles included periods of unemployment, homelessness, and other health-related conditions such as depression, traumatic brain injury, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Additional challenges include family discord, divorce, alcohol/substance abuse, and physical disabilities. Because these problems are not the primary focus of this study, they were addressed only if they presented challenges to the informant's academic success, or if the informant herself brought them up during our interview. This study examines African American female veterans' identity development by employing the theoretical lenses of adult transition and women's

identity development to determine their ability to cope with the academic, administrative, and transitional pressures of a college-level course of study after one or more tours of military duty.

The selection criteria limited the study to veterans-turned-students who have served at least one year as soldiers in reserve components or 15 months as soldiers on active duty from August 2, 1990, until the present. The informants must have also completed at least one year of course work at an institution of higher education. Only two of the 12 participants were still in school. I am the originator and sole researcher of this study. However, I do not presume to understand all the challenges that this cohort of veterans may have experienced.

Limitations

My questions elicited a broad range of responses, depending on the life experiences of my informants and their willingness to explore them in our dialogue. My focus was on how these experiences influenced the way they interpret and confronted the socioacademic challenges of college life. The collection method involved face-to-face dialogue and telephone interviews. This research has limitations in generalizability, as the sample size was small, and the study focused on a specific population using purposeful sampling strategies with participants who had the requisite experiences to respond to my research questions (Maxwell, 2013, p. 97). Also, because the majority of my informants reside and work in Central Virginia, with only three coming from other states, this also limits the potential for generalizability.

Significance

I believe the study is significant for universities' offices of admission and financial aid because, according to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (2015), there were, at the time, almost 2 million 9/11 veterans enrolled in North American colleges and universities. These students need assistance with their college applications and require additional financial support to attend school. I also realized its potential significance for campus Military and Veteran Education Officer, the Army's Solider for Life Transition Program, and various state employment agencies that help soldiers-turned-students apply for veterans' benefits. I believe they needed to be informed about career skills and educational services, provided by the Army and meaningful employment, provided by the state. Academic affairs experts and provosts may also find this study valuable, as it will attempt to discern the academic and/or administrative barriers that make information retention and degree attainment more difficult for African American female veterans. Finally, I think this study will be useful to other African American women, to augment their knowledge about the experience of participating in postsecondary education.

Summary

In Chapter 1, I informed the reader of demographic changes that have occurred in postsecondary institutions in the United States over the last 10 years. I introduced the purpose, significance, and conceptual frameworks of Schlossberg's (1995; 2012) adult transition theory and the 4S model. I also mentioned her concept of moving in, moving through, and moving out of transition as pertinent to this study. I explained Josselson's (1987; 1996) theory of identity development in women and how their social

environment and relationship with others influences their identity. I also provided a brief chronology of historical events that highlighted the contributions of women patriots throughout U.S. military history. The study was intended to add to the body of knowledge regarding the lived experiences of African American female veterans and to determine their perceived needs as they transitioned to an institution of higher education.

Chapter 2 begins with a statement of the underlying problem and purpose of the study. The literature review focuses on analyzing empirical articles about adults in transition and women's identity development. The literature suggests African American female veterans conceptualize their needs to cope with a college environment that demands a level of personal autonomy and self-direction that were, in some ways, the antithesis of military discipline.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The state of the economy, the unemployment rate, and access to higher education are all factors that contributed to successful U.S. Army recruitment of African American women (Mankowski, Tower, Brandt, & Mattocks, 2015). Thousands of them have earned G.I. Bill benefits and have matriculated in postsecondary educational institutions (National Center for Veteran Analysis and Statistics, 2011). Researchers have focused their attention on the increased number of veterans enrolling in institutions of higher education (Hamrick & Rumann, 2011). However, little has been written about the academic and social challenges they confront or what college administrators, educators, and counselors can do to support them (Reppert et al., 2014). According to the American Council on Education (2013), female veterans have faced higher rates of unemployment and underemployment, homelessness, divorce, and single parenthood than male veterans' experience. It is imperative that these women receive career assistance and transitional services (Mulhall, 2009) and institutions of higher education are a proving ground for the success or failure of such assistance. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to examine how African American female veterans construct meaning in their lives as they transition from an order-driven military to an academic setting, especially when it came to making administrators aware of their needs.

Literature Search Strategy

The literature review was based on searches through the Walden University Library research databases, including Academic Search Complete, SAGE Journals, Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) Education Research Complete,

American Psychological Association (PsycINFO) and Government and Military Collections. Additional web resources included the American Council on Education (acenet.org), National Center for Education Statistics (nces.ed.gov), and PROQUEST. I also reviewed the Walden dissertation database and other dissertations with similar problem statements. Keywords used during database searches included *African American or Black women*; *veteran or military*; *higher education or college or university*; *nontraditional students or student-veterans*; *higher education*; *transition theory*; *women in the military*; *female-veteran*; *adult transition theory*; *women's identity development*; *community college education*; and *transitional challenges or adjustments.*

Because there was a paucity of independent research that examined the needs of African American female veterans, this literature review also included government sources, nonacademic books and news articles published from 1986 – 2017 about female veterans' pursuit of postsecondary education.

Conceptual Framework

Schlossberg's (1989, 1995, 2012) adult transition theory and Josselson's (1987, 1996) theory of women's identity development guided and informed this study. Schlossberg's theory guided my research on how African American female veterans learned to cope with change and to deal with events and nonevents that occurred in their lives as they departed the military and enrolled in a postsecondary learning environment while Josselson's theory was useful in tracing how their acquisition of self-knowledge and self-esteem in a settings and under strictures very dissimilar to those that prevail in military installations enabled them to focus on earning a college degree.

Adults in Transition

Schlossberg et al. (1989) developed a framework that I found useful to better understand the self-actualization of adult learners in transition. The authors claimed that the way adults see themselves in the transition process is just as critical as understanding life events or nonevents that influenced their roles, routines, or relationships at home and, in the case of my study participants, on campus. Adult learners are older, experienced people with needs and responsibilities that may influence their ability to process complex information. Some are confidant, others less so; some are bright, others dull; some are energetic while others lack the necessary confidence to retain and process vital information (Anderson et al., 2012). Older students' assessments of their social status and place in life are as variable as they are subjective. For example, there are many instances of adults who do not follow traditional sequences such as attending college after high school, finding sustainable work, getting married, and having children. Because people react to the stress of unfamiliar rules and surroundings in different ways, their transitional experiences can be idiosyncratic and unpredictable. Three decades ago, Schlossberg posited that adult learners defy categorization and institutions of higher education need to change the way they deal with them (Schlossberg et al., 1989). In the interim, the concept of moving in, moving through, and moving out of transition has become familiar to educators and school administrators who employ available resources to cope with change (pp. 184-186).

In 1995, Schlossberg published, with Waters and Goodman, a book that expounded the original framework to provide additional support for adults struggling

with change. They introduced three significant components of the transition model: (a) approaching transition, (b) using the 4 S system to take stock of coping resources, and (c) taking charge of change by strengthening those resources (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995, p. 26). Approaching transition involved identifying the nature of change and developing an understanding of how to deal with the event(s) that caused the change to occur. Taking stock of coping resources required understanding and utilizing the 4 S System (*situation, self, support, strategies*). When individuals move into new surroundings, they often acquire new role expectations. Adults learn to balance the competing values of home, school, and career by using their available resources. Each phase of the transition process demonstrates the importance of accepting loss and attempting to cope with the anxiety caused by new roles and surroundings, anticipated and unanticipated by change. Finally, taking charge means managing transition regardless of how good or bad the change might seem.

Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2012) integrated new and emerging theories into the original model. They revised the framework focusing primarily on issues related to cultural and racial diversity and needs for advocacy on behalf of a varied population. The authors argued that, when adult students struggle with the pressures of an unfamiliar environment and challenges become a way of life, the resultant complexity may feel overwhelming.

Situations that result in crises may result from an *event*, something unexpected that had to be dealt with spontaneously, or a *nonevent,* something expected that did not occur (Anderson et al., 2012). Such events and nonevents impact relationships, routines,

roles, and assumptions that can cause the process of change to be even more difficult. The authors argued that, regardless of the nature of the change, individuals involved in transitions must be willing to relinquish old identities and assume new ones because they tend to experience loss and grief, even when the event was one for which they had planned (2012).

Anticipated transitions. Anderson et al. (2012) maintained that there are different types of transitions that can affect roles, routines, and relationships, whether they are anticipated or unanticipated events. Anticipated transitions are predictable, normative events often involving perceived gains and losses (Anderson et al., 2012). These anticipated events include everything from a first job to marriage and childbirth and extends through to plans for retirement. Anderson et al. claimed many adults find that these events, whether planned or unplanned, less threatening to their sense of wellbeing if they are prepared to confront the transition process. This process is based on feelings or remained in the cognitive realm, but the anxiety caused by anticipated transitions is usually diminished. For instance, some people have found they can ease into retirement by working part-time or by participating in job-sharing opportunities. Others give back to their communities through voluntary work at a local hospital, church, or charity. However, individuals deal with change, adequate preparation helps diminish transitional turbulence (Anderson et al., 2012). The military has been known to force many soldiers out of active duty service because they sustained combat-related injuries, including physical and psychological disabilities that prevent them from performing their military occupational specialty. These unanticipated events may have initiate depression

or internal conflict that led to suicide or domestic abuse when it was undiagnosed and untreated. For these and other reasons, Schlossberg's adult transition theory (1989, 1995, 2012) has proven a useful framework for guiding this study of military veterans' return to civilian life. Reppert et al. (2014) argued that when people understand better where they are in the process of moving in, moving through, and moving out of transition, they can deal with expected and unexpected change more effectively.

Unanticipated transitions. Unanticipated transitions involve events that are unscheduled or unpredictable. These usually involve a crisis, an unexpected occurrence, or an eruptive circumstance, which are not a part of an expected existential sequence (Anderson et al., 2012). Such events included job loss, demotions in prestige or title, or being obliged to leave/lose work because of sudden, unexpected circumstances (having been wounded in combat or having endured the loss of a comrade). Other examples included natural disasters like tsunamis, earthquakes, floods, mudslides, and hurricanes. War and terrorism fall within the category of unanticipated events that have claimed the lives of thousands of innocent people (Anderson, et al., 2012). When unanticipated events occur, people make hasty decisions under less than favorable conditions, because they did not have adequate time to prepare to deal with change (Anderson et al., 2012).

Factors that influenced transition. Anderson et al. (2012) found significant factors that impact an individual's ability to cope with change. As adults got better at analyzing issues and coping with change, they experience less anxious transitions. Having taking stock of available resources, they learn to distinguish assets from liabilities. These assets are the focus of the 4 S system and the adult transitional

framework (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015; Heitzman & Somers, 2015).

Situation is the ability to control one's actions and reactions to change, whether temporary or permanent. An unexpected delay in when a student-veteran receiving her monthly benefits check may elicit a lapse of self-control (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015).

Self has to do with characteristics and psychological resources that enable people to adapt to mutable situations. Components such as age, socioeconomic status, and gender can influenced how individuals deal with change, impacting feelings of self-efficacy, optimism, resilience, and commitment to values. When individuals have a greater sense of control, their coping strategies resulted in positive outcomes (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015).

Support tends to be primarily social and demonstrates how the care, support and affirmation of others are able to facilitate one's ability to change (Anderson et al., 2012).

Strategies include the ability to manage one's behavior, modify the situation, manage stress, and understand the significance of the problem. Assistance offered by support services or the Veteran's Affairs Office on campus could help students manage stress and control meaning-making. Veterans-turned-students faced additional, distinct barriers in the area of strategies because they had to decide when and where to use their G.I. Bill benefits. The Executive Order No. 13,607 signed by President Obama in 2012 led to concerns about veterans making informed decisions in this regard. The government's assumption was that additional information would help veterans to make better decisions regarding when and where to use their benefits and prevent them from enrolling in schools that did not meet accreditation standards (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015).

Identity Development in Women

Josselson's theory of identity development in women draws on the work of two mid-20th century developmental and clinical psychologists, Erikson (1950/1968) and Marcia (1966), who theorized about adolescent identity-formation. Two decades later, Josselson expounded their seminal work on the "self in relationships" (p. 32) and focused on women's capacity for empathy. This resulted in her theory of women's identity-development, a critical concept in the present study. Like Erikson, she believed that character was an unconscious unification of a woman's personality, propelled by the acknowledgement of the importance of others in her social circle. She also believed that women continuously balanced their sense of independence by creating relationships with others (Josselson, 1987). The ability to balance personal autonomy with the flexibility required for relationships not only solidified a woman's identity, it facilitated her acceptance by others in her social sphere. Marcia's stages of identity development in adolescence (identity diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium, and identity achievement) served as the foundational underpinning for Josselson's work with women (Rowe & Marcia, 1980). These stages of development are similar to Schlossberg's transition theory because both recognize crisis as a necessary prelude to the solidity of identity-formation and accept the mutability of roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions when dealing with anticipated or unanticipated events (Anderson et al. 2012).

Identity and society. Society, according to Josselson (1996), is a compelling agent that can shape one's identity. It makes some things possible and others impossible. Josselson claimed that culture could influence an individual's status because it enables

potential, at the same time, sets constraints and boundaries that are not always observed. If a woman's identity formation resembles a cultural chrysalis, her colleagues, neighbors, family, and friends are primary influences in its shaping (Josselson, 1996). Society may impact human development, but the factors that form an individual's perspectives and personality are often much closer to home. Josselson (1996) found that the role of women in society had grown more complex. Before World War II, their husbands and societal limitations largely defined women's roles. Women were expected to marry and raise a family. If a woman sought employment before having children, it was usually as a nurse or teacher.

Seventy years ago, Erikson believed that a woman's attraction to the man she wanted to marry defined her identity. Forty years later, Josselson argued that women created lives for themselves and entered society expecting to be taken seriously as voters, workers, and citizens with contributions to make and voices to be heard. She argued that some women are capable of playing powerful roles in society and should not be constrained by the jealousy or judgment of others (Josselson, 1996). However, many women accepted the circumstances surrounding their birth and breeding without realizing that they have the power to transform their status quo (Josselson, 1996).

Josselson (1996) claimed that nature also plays a part in identity formation, and that ancestry, social class, gender, and race all contribute to an individual's status. However, the development of women's identity tends to be rooted in relational patterns rather than defined by separation from others (Josselson, 1996, p. 32). A woman's sense

of self as well as her values and beliefs, derives primarily from her connection to other people, at home and at work (Josselson, 1996).

Kyriakidou (2012) expounded on Josselson's framework when she conducted a study of 33 prominent women engineers to examine identity development under conditions of marginalized gender identity. The findings indicated that identity construction for minority women engineers involved a process which eventually included their redefinition of the profession vis-à-vis their gender disadvantage and led to a redefinition of self (2012). Kyriakidou's subjects in this study maintained their professional identities through the cultivation of proactive values, beliefs, and motives, which were also associated with career development and long-term success. Inversely, she proposed, it would be equally important to examine how feelings of inferiority influence professional identity-construction in groups of minority women employed in male-dominant environments (e.g., engineers and soldiers) are essential to this study, as women of color have been rendered marginal throughout the history of labor in the United States.

Schlossberg's (1989 & 1995) adult transition theory and Josselson's (1987 & 1996) theory of identity development in women are the lenses that guide and inform this study. They are important to this research because my informants have undergone changes that had impacted their roles, routines, assumptions, and relationships. By moving in, moving through, and moving out of change, my informants were able to use their available resources.

Literature Review of Empirical Studies Related to Veterans' Learning Experiences

The demographics of U.S. college students have changed significantly over the last decade with an increased number of nontraditional and first-generation students attending colleges (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016; Tate et al., 2015). Many of these students are significantly older than what used to be considered the appropriate age for college, 18-24 years (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2018).

Among these nontraditional students are military veterans whose intention on acquiring knowledge that can lead to steady and rewarding employment. A truly autonomous learning environment can be confusing after their top-down training and regimented military lifestyle. As soldiers, they receive clear guidance regarding the military's expectations of them, yet in a civilian environment, they have had to learn to navigate institutional structures on their own (Naphan & Elliott, 2015). Student veterans have faced many unique challenges after they enrolled in postsecondary institutions (Ghosh & Fouad, 2016; Norman, et al., 2015). Many arrive on campus as first-generation students lacking academic skills and the guidance to navigate university bureaucracies (Wurster, Rinaldi, Woods, & Liu, 2012). These students have found it difficult to simultaneously manage home life, school, and careers (Pellegrino & Hoggan, 2015).

A recent report issued by the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics (2016) found that 69% of the 1.1 million military veterans who attended school from 2011-2012, received benefits under the Post 9/11 G.I. Bill. The

remainder received benefits through other programs supported by the VA, such as the Montgomery G.I. Bill, Survivors' and Dependent' Education Assistance Program (DEA), or the Reserve Components Education Assistance Programs (REAP) (U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, 2013). Military enrollment represented 4.9 % of the 23.1 million undergraduates enrolled in 2011-2012 as compared to the 2007-2008 figures of 4.5 of the 20.5 million undergraduates. Kirchner (2015) claimed that the number of veterans in college classrooms would increase, as troop reductions got underway. While such numbers were an indicator of equitable entry, statements from government officials, news articles, and other reports indicate that transitional challenges put these students at-risk of not attaining their goals or degrees (Griffin & Gilbert, 2015).

Schiavone and Gentry (2014) conducted a qualitative case study at a large Midwestern university to understand better the challenges that student-veterans faced during their transition to higher education. The intent of this study was to provide administrators with information that would allow them to assist veteran-students more efficiently. The authors claimed that today's learning environment included men and women who survived combat injuries that were not survivable in previous wars and who shared classes with young people who have little idea what going to war means or the extent of their sacrifice. This can make the learning environment even more complicated for veteran students (Schiavone & Gentry, 2014). According to the authors, their study was consistent with research dating as far back as World War II. Student-veterans believed that the military provided them with levels of maturity, accelerated personal growth, and global awareness (Schiavone & Gentry, 2014). They also revealed that

education was the primary reason for their joining the military, and balancing home, school, and career were significant factors impacting degree attainment (2014). A woman veteran stated that she was unable to get along with other female students because she was accustomed to a military environment dominated by men (Schiavone & Gentry, 2014, pp. 33-34). The authors found that student veterans had difficulty in connecting with nonveteran peers and noted that postsecondary institutions must find ways to integrate them into the broader campus community (Schiavone & Gentry, 2014).

Tinoco (2015) claimed many veterans became students to enhance skill-sets acquired in the military. The majority of student veterans in Tinoco's study were first-generation college students with deficient academic skills and a lack of ambition, many of them suffering the prolonged effects of combat disabilities. Tinoco recommended that campus support services and disability-providers provide accommodations to meet the needs of veteran students.

Veterans in Transition

Graf, Ysasi, and Marini (2015) remarked that since the passage of the Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2008, colleges and universities have experienced a surge in the number of veterans and active duty service members whose needs they must address. Many of these young adults have experienced the adrenalized terror of combat where the destructive power and velocity of the weapons they bore and the enemy they encountered led to their replaying incidents that interfere with their ability to study, write, and retain information vital to their progress in school. Although campus social support services have attempted to provide veterans with a modicum of academic support,

researchers question whether they are adequately prepared to address the psychological needs of this uniquely vulnerable population.

Osborne (2014) claimed that veterans entering academic environments have trouble coping with the absence of hierarchical structure and may lack fundamental study skills. They feel misunderstood by instructors unacquainted with military culture. Osborne also observed a lack of initiative of administration to provide awareness training for faculty. The goal of the study was to identify ways that the school could deal with veterans more effectively. Osborne invited 280 undergraduates who were veterans to participate in the study consisting of 10 men and four women, ranging in age from 22 to 30 years (Osborne, 2014).

Osborne claimed that veterans believed the military's hierarchical culture contributed to their maturation and made it difficult for them to relate to nonveteran students who seemed immature (2014). Six of the 14 respondents cited harsh living conditions, long and stressful work schedules, and the hardship of being away from loved ones, as experiences separating them from nonveteran classmates (Osborne, 2014). One participant mentioned being shocked by the rude behavior of younger students and their lack of discipline and respect for their instructors (Osborne, 2014).

Naphan and Elliott (2015) claimed that when members of the military become veterans, they leave behind roles that were essential to their identities. These "role exits" (p.38) may be triggered by events such as the loss of a comrade, leaving the military for civilian life, or enrolling in college for the first time. These difficult transitions tend to disrupt an individual's life and social structure. Changing roles often entails sudden

separation from the established norms, values, and expectations of a previous self while beginning to build a new one. For military veterans, this process may be complicated because battlefield values like "hyper-vigilance, aggression, and paranoia" are contrary to the social expectations of civilian life (Naphan & Elliott, 2015, p. 38). Thus, the disorientation and confusion that many veterans experience on college campuses may derive from top-down military expectations which were inculcated as core values only to be challenged in a permissive college ambiance where autonomy is prized. The fact that there is a paucity of pertinent, empirical studies in this area means that a comprehensive picture of how their military experiences impact female veterans returning to civilian life has not yet been written.

Jones (2013) conducted a phenomenological study at a proprietary school in Florida that was granting doctorates to discern how student veterans modified their identities when they transitioned to new roles as civilians and college students. The intent was to determine how student-veterans achieved a multifaceted sense of self while attempting to consolidate their experiences as service members, veterans, and students. The author used Jones and McEwen's (2000) conceptual model of multiple dimensions of identity development (e.g., queer theory) to more clearly define the notion of a "core self" (Jones, 2013, p. 2).

The study consisted of three participants, an Army, a Navy, and an Army National Guard member. Two of the three were African American, one male, and one female. The other participant was a Caucasian male who served in the Navy. The two Army veterans had combat experience and one had served multiple tours in Iraq and

Afghanistan. The participants claimed that college registration and tuition were not major concerns for them because they received G.I. Bill benefits. All three agreed that higher education was challenging and that they found some college classes to be difficult. They also claimed that instructors' lectures often left them without a clear understanding of what was expected of them (Jones, 2013). Moreover, they found it difficult to sympathize with the whining of nonveteran peers who seemed oblivious to any notion of discipline or self-restraint (Jones, 2013). Three primary themes emerged from Jones's study: (a) The process of adapting or re-adapting to civilian life, (b) higher education's role in the acculturation process, and (c) the need for comprehensive services for student veterans (Jones, 2013). The author further contended that one of the most significant challenges that student-veterans face when they depart military service is the process of adapting to civilian life. He argued that it was similar to "leaving the priesthood" (Jones, 2013, p. 12), because these veterans-turned-students are not just leaving a job; they are leaving behind identities acquired in a more orderly and predictable setting than the one to which they would transition.

Combat-Related Experiences

Elliott, Gonzalez, and Larsen (2011) argued that thousands of veterans have arrived on college campuses after experiencing the trauma of battle which haunt their lives as students and made working with nonveterans peers and instructors problematic (Elliott et al., 2011). When veterans return to the U.S., they often confront ambivalent attitudes about the war from family and friends. The authors conducted a qualitative study at a medium-sized public university in the western United States. The study

included 104 participants with an average age of 31 years. The authors used the Ross's and Mirowski's (2002) index to measure the social support participants felt they received from family and friends. The findings highlighted a gamut of responses, from "I have someone to talk to when things get rough," to "My family does not seem to understand me since I joined the military," or from "When I have a problem, I have friends who are right there for me" to "I sometimes feel like I have no one to talk to," (Elliott et al., 2011, p. 284). Veteran service coordinators measured campus alienation by using a pretest developed for this study. Among the responses were the following: (a) "I sometimes feel like I do not fit in with other students," (b) "When I hear my teachers talking about U.S. military operations, I feel unfairly judged," (c) "I sometimes feel like I am looked down upon because I am a veteran," and (d) "I do not like it when people I meet want to know the details of my military experience," (Elliott et al., 2011, p. 284).

These and similar comments revealed that more than half of the students reported feeling they did not fit in daily campus life and nearly one-third felt unfairly judged by faculty and peers who have negative opinions about military service (Elliott et al., 2011). The findings mentioned instructors who humiliate veterans by making negative comments about the role of the military. Requiring faculty to participate in sensitivity training may rectify this behavior (American Council on Education, 2008).

Similarly, Schlossberg's adult transition theory may provide college counselors insight into traumatic experiences that would otherwise disrupt veterans' academic progress (Rumann & Hamrick, 2010). According to Schlossberg's model, a transition is an occurrence or nonoccurrence that results in altered roles, relationships, assumptions,

and routines (Anderson et al., 2012). Levinson (1986) argued that a transition is often a turning point between periods of stability and instability.

Certain questions touch on the depth and delicacy required to deal with student-veterans' pasts: Did they experience a loss of a friend on the battlefield? When did the bereavement occur? Was it six months or a year ago? Is the veteran moving into (less than six months), moving through (more than a year), or moving out of the transition process (two years since the event occurred)? Such chronological pinpointing can determine how ready he or she is to deal with change. For some, the transition itself may be viewed as a crisis, while others may be negatively affected by what Schlossberg called nonevents (e.g., not receiving the grades they expected, not measuring up to their own or the expectations of others). Whether seen as a developmental adjustment or a crisis, adult transitions presents challenges and opportunities for growth and transformation (Anderson et al., 2012). Change is only an adjustment if the person experiencing the event sees it that way (Anderson et al., 2012). Kirchner, Coryell, and Biniecki (2014) suggested that a transition from the military to college life is one of the most complicated changes that veterans-turned-students can face. Junger (2016) argued that American service members have a difficult time with reintegration after wartime service, because that they return with the realization that they live in a society that is "at war with itself" (p. 125). When returning veterans enter academic environments, they may experience profound orientation crises.

The transition from soldier to student and from combat to campus can be a complicated process, especially for those who have long-term career aspirations. These

students may experience many challenges on campus: feelings of isolation, transitional issues, and difficulties with classes and classmates. Some students may also suffer from the effects of combat-related injuries that make learning more difficult. Alschuler and Yarab (2016) suggested that a more in-depth understanding of their plight on the part of counselors and educators is key to their academic success. Because most veterans are older than traditional college students, campus social life many seem a puerile distraction from their existential concerns about work, school, rent, and children. Some veterans may also be coping with emotional and physical health issues not addressed by the Veteran's Administration. These conditions impact students' ability to learn and retain what they have learned (Shea & Fishback, 2012).

Female Veterans

Research on female veterans is limited, let alone studies that address the transitional experiences of post-9/11 African American female warriors reconstructing their lives. An exception is a study conducted by DiRamio, Ackerman, and Mitchell (2008) on multiple campuses which found that female veterans enrolled in an educational setting needed to instill effective study habits, learn to manage their finances and to connect with nonveteran peers. They admitted they were unfamiliar with the kinds of challenges female veterans face when they begin postsecondary education. In response to a questionnaire distributed to female veterans at community college by researchers Rumann and Hamrick (2010), respondents agreed that they were not who they used to be before military deployment. The American Council on Education (2010) reported that female veterans are not visible on campus. Perhaps that is why most researchers

overlook them as a group worth studying. Female veterans need to be mentored by faculty and nonveteran peers to develop a network of support that will allow them to acclimate to college life. According to the American Council on Education (2010), 64% of these students claimed that they do not associate with extracurricular activities on campus. Another 41% reported difficulty embracing integration efforts, feeling misunderstood, or out of place on college campuses. Student veterans admitted that their isolation and discomfort increased when faculty reacted negatively to U.S. military involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan (Gonzalez & Elliott, 2016).

According to Greer (2017), female veterans more than men have experienced higher rates of unemployment. This means that their reintegration to civilian society is even more difficult. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2016) indicated that more than 3.6 million veterans have served in Iraq and Afghanistan. Of that number, 18% of them are women with an unemployment rate of 6.4%, significantly higher than male veterans' 5.7%. While scholars have observed the disparities in hiring practices, research has not focused on their impact (Greer, 2017). Most job training programs are targeted at men and have proven less effective in enhancing the employability of women. Therefore, the authors suggested that there is a need for female veterans to develop strategies for securing meaningful employment (Greer, 2017).

Another area impacting the employability of women is that they are more likely to have had traumatic premilitary life experiences and may be suffering from PTSD or sexual abuse, conditions that continue to impact their daily lives (Greer, 2017). These one of a kind experiences make their transitional needs different from men.

In 2014, according to a Disabled American Veterans Group, the nation has not sufficiently recognized the contributions of women in the military, nor have they been treated with the respect that they deserve. Some female veterans need to have their service legitimized in order to successfully transition to civilian society. A military discharge may lead to one woman's homelessness and loss of identity; while another may use what she has learned in the army as a springboard into a new career, taking advantage of military skill-sets (Schlossberg, 1981). Women more efficiently cope with transition when their awareness of situations and sources of support help them initiate proactive strategies to deal with change (Anderson et al., 2012). Women veteran's development comprises of three distinct categories: relationships, individual development, and work. Relationships involve issues of intimacy and belonging with family and friends. Individual development is internally motivated, making room for autonomy, spirituality, and a sense of self-worth. Above all, finding fulfilling work relates to the importance that a woman places on her work-life, which directly affects her resilience, self-efficacy, and balance (Greer, 2017).

Greer posited that the transition for female veterans is complicated because they experience all three transitions types at once (2017). Greer's findings revealed that continued research of female veteran's transitional challenges is needed to assist human resource personnel in determining evidence-based and the most effective practices when working with this cohort (2017). Greer also contends that researchers should explore other demographic variables such as socioeconomic status, race, and culture of female veterans and, in so doing, establish inclusive pathways for their success (2017).

Cultural Challenges

Wheeler (2012) noted that when members of the military return to college after wartime service, they confront challenges. Their migration from an obedience-driven culture rich in tradition to one that caters to consumers, advertising autonomy, and flexibility complicates this process. Veterans tend to have physical and mental issues that make learning more difficult (Norman et al., 2015). Their challenges are adjusting to the system, maintaining self-esteem and academic preparedness, as well as navigating the bureaucratic quagmire surrounding G.I. Bill benefits. Wheeler concluded that most of their professors have no idea why these former soldiers became community college students and tend to ignore their often-courageous attempts to adjust to college life (2012).

Blaauw-Hara (2016) posited that, as the U.S. decreases its military presence overseas, more and more veterans have enrolled in community colleges to continue their education. These trends have led to an increased number of studies conducted to discern how community college administrators can offer a higher quality of support to this crescent demographic. The author also argued that, contrary to what many believe, military veterans are exemplary students in classes that involve them and are consistently loyal and committed to each other. Veterans are also worldlier than many of their peers, which can make integration efforts difficult (Blaauw-Hara, 2016). Hart and Thompson (2013) contended that student-veterans have a heightened sense of initiative, leadership, professionalism, and achievement. Lighthall (2012) reported that they are mission-driven, goal-oriented, and emotionally mature. However, despite the strengths that

veteran can and do bring to campus, many struggles with the challenges of transition (Blaauw-Hara, 2016).

As a part of a broader study, Blaauw-Hara (2016) explored how veterans perceived themselves and how their military service helped to shape that perception. The study took place in 2013 at a small rural community college with an enrollment of 3,000 students. Of that population, 109 students received veteran's benefits, 84 men, and 25 women. None of the 25 female veterans participated in the study. Although small, the school was considered *veteran friendly*. The research focused on the skills that veterans developed while serving in the military and whether they believed those skills helped them adjust to college life. Blaauw-Hara concluded that while veterans bring experience and strength to academic institutions, their limitations often overshadow their talents (Hart & Thompson, 2013).

Military Support Services

Faurer (2014) conducted a study of 350 military personnel to discern the effectiveness of the Veteran Transition Assistance Program (TAP) in reducing the unemployment rate among former soldiers. Although Congress implemented the program in the 1990s to provide job training and career and educational assistance for solders leaving the military for civilian society, its overall effectiveness has been limited, as unemployment among military veterans remains high (Faurer, 2014).

Of the 350 military personnel who participated in the survey, 227 reported taking advantage of veteran transition services. Seventy-five percent were still on active duty, while 15% had already left active service, the remainder included members of the Army

Reserve. The findings revealed that 84% reported finding employment after using transitional services, while 16% indicated that they did not find meaningful employment. The author discovered that the majority of services provided were in the areas of résumé preparation and writing skills (Faurer, 2014).

Campus Support Services

Colleges and universities around the country have marketed themselves as military-friendly institutions with the ultimate goal of increasing student enrollment. Although veterans benefit from a wide range of educational choices, conflicting definitions of what constitutes as military friendly, often confound student veterans (Wilson et al., 2016). The intent of this study was to standardize the definition of military friendly institutions, by identifying educational practices deemed important to service members seeking higher education degrees. The authors believed it essential that the administration understand the methods of instruction that former military members viewed as critical and to develop a flexible profile informed by their perspective and determined by their needs (Wilson et al., 2016).

Ackerman, DiRamio, and Mitchell (2009) claimed that former military students, unlike traditional students, face many unique obstacles that can hinder performance, delay graduation, and prevent degree attainment (Norman et al., 2015). These challenges include frequent relocations, physical and psychological disabilities, and a lack of social and family support (Ryan, Carlstrom, Hughes, & Harris, 2011). Unresolved issues can also threaten their academic efficacy and student-learning outcomes. Wilson et al. (2016) review of the literature revealed the need for a structured support system to improve

service-member-to-student transition. Schlossberg's 4 S Model was used to raise awareness of the needs of these students. It also assessed their sense of control, their motivation for self-development, and their ability to build support networks (Wilson et al., 2016, p. 2). The authors also created a pragmatic Service Member-Focused Educational (SM-FEP) tool to gain a better understanding of the critical needs of service member turned students. Phase 1 was a descriptive study that described educational practices agreed upon by advocacy groups, military members, and educational practitioners. During the implementation phase, 1,107 former military members participated. Sixty-five percent had served in the Army, 26% had served in the Navy, and 8% in the Air Force and Marine Corps. These numbers also included members of the Reserves Components for all services. At the beginning of the study, students were enrolled or had previously taken courses at more than one institution. The author ranked 73 educational practices around 12 critical areas: "(a) accreditation practices, (b) educational program practices, (c) admissions and transfer credit practices, (d) economic assistance practices, (e) employment practices, (f) college readiness practices, (g) academic practices, (h) transition practices, (i) health practices, (j) campus culture practices, (k) community partnership practices, and (l) family support service practices" (Wilson et al., 2016, (p. 4.)

The results revealed that, if institutions of higher education were to achieve acceptable levels of quality, accreditation would be the most important factor for soldiers-turned students (Wilson et al., 2016). Economic assistance was another priority: they believed that information about fees, refund policies, facts and practices related to

in-state tuition for military veterans should be clearer and more forthcoming. The same was true with respect to admissions standards, transfer credits, and the lack of clear definition of terms like *readiness and flexibility* (Wilson et al., 2016).

Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, and Renn (2010) claimed that there are an abundant number of support systems in place to assist returning veterans. However, there is limited evidence regarding the effectiveness of these programs. The authors concluded that the implementation of targeted support systems is unlikely at community colleges because most 2-year schools are dealing with the effects of long-term budget cuts. While community colleges can provide service members an affordable alternative, they lack sufficient funding to support many of their most pressing needs (Evans et al., 2010).

Alschuler and Yarab (2016) found that colleges and universities use many strategies to assist student-veterans in their transition to college life. For example, some schools have placed an Office of Veterans Affairs on campus. Other schools have implemented veteran-specific organizations and support groups. Numerous universities have Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) and undergraduate degree programs in military science. Other efforts include veteran resource centers and faculty-development programs to assist administrators to better understanding veterans' particular needs. Although colleges and universities have implemented a variety of programs, some veterans have reported that their transition from the military service to an academic environment was as stressful as a combat deployment overseas (Kirchner, 2015).

Southwell, Whiteman, MacDermid Wadsworth, and Barry (2016) argued that, while schools have implemented some programs to support veterans, there are few

studies that examine which campus support services or administrative personnel are most influential in creating and maintaining positive student experience. Young-Jones, Burt, Dixon, and Hawthorne (2013) used Tinto's (1975; 2007) model to examine institutional features that prevent or counteract student attrition. To establish a supportive college environment, they argued, five conditions must exist: (a) expectation, (b) support, (c) advice, (d) involvement, and (e) learning. These conditions supported Tinto's claim that student-faculty interaction can improve student levels of responsibility, ability to believe in one's self, study skills, and persistence among student veterans. Consistent with this argument is that academic and social learning provided by instructors, advisors, students' organizations, and university officers can result in positive outcomes for students (Tinto, 1993). On the other hand, Bean and Metzner (1985) claimed that nontraditional student interaction with extracurricular activities differ from traditional college aged students. They attributed this difference to student age, off-campus residence, part-time enrollment, and fewer opportunities to socialize with faculty and friends. Their findings also revealed that additional research is needed in this area to determine the impact of faculty contact on student retention and success (Young-Jones et al., 2013).

Consequently, Southwell et al. (2016) conducted a study of 16 institutions in the Mid-Western states totaling 386 undergraduate students. The study comprised of 154 male and 45 female civilian students and 87 male and 100 female student service members/veterans. The eligibility criteria required current enrollment in a 2 or 4-year school. The authors used a variety of instruments to determine the impact that the frequency of visits with faculty, academic advisors, and university office personnel had

on student academic persistence. These students also developed a positive perception of the university that increased the likelihood that they would persist and attain degrees (Southwell et al., 2016).

Degree attainment. Ryan et al. (2011) reported that a majority of the 71% of veterans that have used their G.I. Bill benefits did not earn a college degree. Gonzalez and Elliott (2016) claimed that faculty members' overall failure to comprehend student veterans' unique challenges had a negative impact on their success. A study conducted by Barnard-Brak, Bagby, Jones, and Sulak (2011) indicated that faculty members reported that they were both anxious and ill-prepared to deal with students diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Also, despite the scholarship and social services that community colleges provide, many student veterans fail to get their associate degrees. López, Springer, and Nelson (2016) argued that course design and institutional practices could be a part of this problem. They presented five principles based on cognitive psychology to improve long-term persistence and degree attainment: (a) build on students' previous experiences, (b) socialize the classroom learning experience, (c) differentiate the instructional context, (d) prepare, connect, and organize relevant content, and (e) schedule feedback and active evaluation activities (López et al., 2016, pp. 4-7).

Lack of persistence. In the course of an archival study, Alschuler and Yarab (2016) found that veterans' lack of persistence strongly impacted their failure to graduate. Nearly half the students that participated in their study withdrew from school before attaining a college degree. Also, because the university where the research was

conducted did not require students to provide prior notification of their intent to leave school, they could not gather sound conclusions as to their reasons for withdrawal. As a result of this study and others of the kind, President Obama outlined *eight keys to veterans' success* aimed at ensuring that institutions of higher education fulfilled promises made to military veterans. Six of the eight strategies impacted students directly, while two focused on faculty and staff development:

1. Create an environment of trust and connectedness across the campus community to promote feelings of success and wellbeing in veterans-turned-students.
2. Create an environment of sustained and consistent support from administrators and campus leaders.
3. Ensure that all student/veterans receive career, academic, and financial advice.
4. Coordinate and disseminate veterans' events on campus.
5. Align community agencies with campus services.
6. Create a uniform data-set to track and broadcast information on veteran student demographics, retention, and degree completion.
7. Implement faculty and staff workshops to address issues and challenges experienced by student/veterans.
8. Develop effective sustainability practices for veterans (The White House, 2014, pp 1-2).

Markle (2015) also claimed that student persistence depends on various factors such as role strain and role conflict. Role strain occurs when students struggle to meet

the demands of multiple tasks (wife, mother, employee, and student). Role conflict occurs when by meeting the demands of one of these roles increases the pressures associated with one or more of the others.

While the strategies introduced by the Obama Administration and the U.S. Department of Education significantly influenced student persistence, factors such as the large number of single mothers, untreated mental illness, and difficulties in finding gainful employment have a sizable impact on student persistence. Wheeler claimed that, if these challenges are not dealt with, they could lower students' self-esteem and increase alcoholism, drug use, relationship difficulties, violence, and social isolation. Veterans-turned-students will remain at-risk if they do not deal with issues that impact their successful reintegration into civilian society (Wheeler, 2012).

Identity Motivation and Development

Taylor and House (2010) conducted an exploratory study to identify the motivation and concerns of nontraditional psychology students. They argued that these students have increasingly made-up a large percentage of the student body which included students from various ethnic, socioeconomic, residential, disability, and age groups. The foci of this study were as follows: (a) what factors motivate young people to go to college, (b) what are students' post-university aspirations, and (c) what are their concerns regarding academic, financial, and fitting in with less mature students? A qualitative study was conducted using a questionnaire that collected data on a cross-sectional sample of the population. Forty-two students participated, 66% female and 34% male. Thematic analysis revealed common patterns and themes regarding students'

maturity levels and life experiences (e.g., divorce, retirement, and children leaving home). Male students valued intrinsic factors as reasons for attending college; however, female students appreciate extrinsic motivations for attending college such as the prospect of better jobs and careers. Researchers also found that first-year students were more critical of the area of self-identity descriptions than second and third-year students. Students were even more concerned about academic issued than social ones. Financial matters and managing work/life balance were also high among student worries. Finally, being classified as "notraditional" (Taylor & House, 2010, p. 55) was an additional concern for older students.

A case study comprised of 60 single mothers pursuing postsecondary education took place in California to help scholars understand how experiences affected their desire to earn a college degree (Cerven, 2013). Also considered were student interaction with family, friends, significant others, and institutional structures, (e.g., welfare departments that referred them to higher education). The research was a part of a 5-year mixed methods study that focused on maximizing educational opportunities for low-income mothers. Cerven posited that support services were as crucial to student academic success as family and significant others (2013). This study intended to shed light on the different effects that institutional support structures and personal relationships had on single mothers' educational pursuits (Cerven, 2013). Although this study does not relate specifically to women in the military, the effects of single motherhood cross all boundaries and professions when it comes to the mother's pursuit of higher education.

Similarly, Winkle-Wagner (2015) in her review of 119 quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods studies determined that, for an African American woman, college success resides in three areas: the role of the individual self (self-efficacy, motivation, and academic self-concept), the influence of relationships (peers and family), and the role that institutions play through positive academic mentors and other campus support programs. Winkle-Wagner's meta-review revealed that African American women held themselves responsible for their college success, placing minimal emphasis on the importance of their relationships and the institutions they attended (2015).

Jackson (2013) conducted a qualitative study using triple quandary theory to highlight the experiences of African American female community college students in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) courses who subsequently transferred to historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs). The goal of the study was to highlight factors that study respondents attributed to their success in science, technology, engineering and mathematics courses. Jackson maintained that, because minority groups will represent over half of the U.S. population by the year 2050, it is reasonable to assume that a large percentage of STEM talent will reside with students of color. She also contended that community colleges and HBCUs have played a vital role in educational experiences of African American students, as many of her respondents were enrolled in community colleges before they transferred to 4-year schools. However, the graduation rates of minority and low-income students in STEM remained low, especially among African American, Native American, Hispanic, and female students of color. Therefore, if minority students are to be successful in science and technology, they

must receive the foundational instruction in those disciplines while attending elementary and secondary schools. This evidence points to a significant gap in the literature regarding the educational experiences of African American female students in STEM disciplines that must be addressed if they are to overcome barriers that impact persistence and long-term success in STEM (Jackson, 2013).

Summary

Chapter 2 began with a demographic overview of African American female veterans serving in the U.S. military. Next, I introduced Schlossberg's adult transition model and Josselson's theory of identity development in women as two important components of this study's conceptual framework. I added to the body of knowledge by describing what is known and what is still unknown regarding African American female veterans' perceived needs as they transitioned to an academic learning environment. The conceptual framework included Schlossberg's paradigms for moving in, moving through, and moving out of transition; coping with anticipated and unanticipated change, and the 4 S framework regarding personal resources. I also explored Josselson's theory of adult identity development in women, and the importance of relationships with other to their developing identities.

The literature indicated that all students experienced some transition-related anxiety as they left the comforts of home to move into unfamiliar environments. Leaving home for the first time, young people realize that independence and autonomy elicited choices that are often painful. Military veterans in transition have far more significant challenges, as they needed to become familiar with new role expectations while

readjusting to civilian life. Some also struggle with the demands of home, career, and school and find that coping techniques learned in the military did not apply to civilian life. Little is written about female veterans' transitional challenges and even less about African American female veterans in academic settings.

In chapter 3, I will cover the research design, methodology, and rationale for this study. I will also address the roles of the researchers, instrumentation, and the process of data collection and analysis. I will articulate issues of trustworthiness and internal and external validity. In the latter part of chapter 3, I will address ethical procedures and how I intend to control bias.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perceived needs of African American female veterans who served in the U.S. Army during the Gulf War and the War on Terrorism declared respectively, by President George H. W. Bush and President George W. Bush and who enrolled in higher education after military service. As an African American woman who served in the military for 30 years and a doctoral student in education, I wanted to understand how women constructed meaning in their lives as they confronted social, emotional, and financial challenges while taking courses in institutions of higher education.

In this chapter, I explain my selection of a research design that aligned with the research questions. The methodology included sampling strategies, selection criteria, and my rationale for participant selection. I discuss instrumentation, collection methods, sources of data, and my analysis plan. Analysis, coding conformability, credibility, dependability, transferability, and triangulation are also covered.

Research Design and Rationale

A basic approach to qualitative inquiry was conducted to determine how African American female veterans dealt with everyday matters as they transitioned from a military to a civilian environment with education as a goal. The significance of such experiences was established by using a basic qualitative design and by asking open-ended questions of informants. This study focused on a representative group of African American women Army veterans. My research followed qualitative guidelines because I wanted to understand the stressors that these women experienced in unfamiliar

surroundings, the meaning they ascribed to them, and the actions they took to combat or relieve them.

I did not select a case study approach because the research I proposed was unrestricted by a particular time, place, condition, or behavior. It was not focused on a family unit, organization, or specific classroom. According to Patton (2015), the unit of analysis for case studies often involves students, participants in a program, or individual people, because data collection procedures concentrate on what occurred in the setting and how it impacted them as individuals. This study was focused on how female veterans with academic ambitions proceeded despite financial difficulties, divorce, and the daily exigencies of family care. First-hand observation would have not helped me to understand how they coped in their initial year as my informants were in their second and third years or had already completed their academic studies. Moreover, the phenomena of interest were not intrinsically bounded: the veterans-turned-students who comprised my informants did not join the military as a single cohort and were not the subjects of a longitudinal study. They enrolled in different courses and had distinct areas of interest. I eschewed a phenomenological study because it was unlikely, I could get to the core meaning of the phenomenon without repeated interviews, and my informants were constantly on the move between jobs, family, and school. While some of these women may have had disturbing experiences in the military, they were not the focus of this study. After much deliberation, I decided a basic qualitative design was best as it aligned with the conceptual framework and the research questions.

Research Questions

The following questions aligned with the elements of a basic qualitative study and guided and informed this dissertation.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1: How do African American female veterans seeking a higher education degree perceive their social, emotional, and financial needs as they transitioned from a structured military environment to a less formal college setting?

Research Question 2

Research Question 2: What have these African American female veterans perceived that faculty and staff have done to help or hinder their academic success?

The Role of the Researcher

As the sole researcher of this study, I was responsible for collecting, recording, and analyzing the data. Because my eyes and ears were the primary tools used in this process, I had an obligation to the principles of human conduct when dealing with my informants. This methodology entailed collecting data that met the ethical standards of the university, the Institutional Review Board (IRB), the National Institute of Health, and other U.S. federal guidelines established to protect the rights of human subjects. Based on my extensive experience, I presumed that certain factors influenced the lives of these female veterans. I assumed that the majority had had some financial difficulties. I also believed that childcare and balancing home and life duties were significant factors for many of these students. Finally, I expected that some of them had struggled with challenges presented by school administrators, professors, and nonveteran peers. To

control any perception of bias, I was careful to inform students they did not need to answer questions that made them uncomfortable. I only asked questions that were approved by my committee and the Walden IRB.

The conceptual framework analyzed in Chapter 2 informed and guided this study by collecting information through face-to-face interviews and telephone conference calls. I maintained the highest ethical standards to ensure the reliability and trustworthiness of the data. I asked relevant questions that pertained to the phenomenon under investigation. Finally, triangulation was used to add credibility to my findings.

Methodology

This section addresses how I collected, analyzed, and protected the research data. I kept a researcher's journal in which I noted relevant information and any reflections that occurred during the interview and analysis processes. All field notes, memos, and transcribed data are being kept in a locked safe and stored for 5 years after the completion of the dissertation. Pseudonyms were used to ensure informants' anonymity. I obtained IRB approval #05-29-18-0165667 from Walden University before data were collected from any informants. I will use the word *informants* throughout this chapter as it implies the special knowledge and expertise that is brought to qualitative research.

Informant Selection Logic

Purposeful and convenience sampling was used to select African American female veterans who served in the U.S. Army in active or reserve status between August 2, 1990 and the present. These female veterans who participated had completed at least one year of academic coursework. I explained the purpose and intent of my study

through personal and professional networks. Because these methods did not yield a sufficient number of participants, I advertised by word-of-mouth to appeal to potential informants who met the criteria. I also used a technique called "snowball sampling" (Patton, 2015, p. 298) by talking to one person who was wellinformed who directed me to another person who was knowledgeable about the phenomenon under investigation.

Once students indicated to me that they were interested in participating, I provided them with a Notice of Informed Consent. The Notice of Informed Consent required students to acknowledge that they had read the information and that I had not pressured them to participate. I have maintained a copy of the Notice of Informed Consent for my records that will be stored for a period of 5 years.

Instrumentation

I used a semistructured data collection procedure that helped me to maintain focus and to set realistic boundaries and goals. The interview questions that I constructed with the assistance of my committee helped me to understand the perceived needs of African American female veterans and how they overcame transitional challenges. I tested my interview questions with female veterans who shared similar transitional experiences and who had no problems answering the questions I asked of them. These were some of my initial interview questions: (a) Tell me about yourself and your decision to enroll in college after military service; (b) What factors were important in your decision to enroll in school after military service?; (c) How would you describe your first encounter with higher education?; (d) Have you met other

military veterans-turned-students on campus? (Appendix contains a complete list of interview questions).

Data Collection

During our initial meeting, I introduced myself to potential informants as a doctoral candidate in education. I did not mention my military career or rank to avoid their perception of "power imbalance" (Creswell, 2013, p. 56). I used semistructured and opened-ended interview questions to collect my data. The same set of interview questions was used for each informant. However, I used optional probes depending on the answers that I received from the initial interview question.

Once interviews began, I scheduled no more than three per day and recorded field notes between sessions. No interview lasted more than 60 minutes. I asked my informants' permission to use a recording device to record our dialogue. I prepared a data collection worksheet and field notes guide that helped me to document relevant information during the course of the interview. It included a description of the informant and my personal observations before, during, and after the interview. At the end of each interview, I provided each informant with a $20 Starbucks or Amazon gift card as a token of my appreciation.

Data Analysis Plan

According to Maxwell (2013) and Merriam and Tisdell (2016), data analysis begins early in the data collection process and continues throughout the entire study. To assure my data collection and analysis were simultaneous, I determined which interview questions worked best and adjusted them early in the process to enhance our

dialogue. As I reviewed and transcribed the interviews, I remained conscious of the purpose of my study as articulated by the research questions. I was aware of emerging codes flagged by informants' words as well as feelings, tone, anger, or frustration. I applied first cycle coding by sorting data into chunks as probes and triggers for deeper reflection. During second cycle coding I made note of patterns and categories. I further condensed large data chunks into smaller analyzable units to discern themes. This approach helped me to keep track of my thoughts as I proceeded through the raw data to data analysis according to Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) model.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

To establish credibility in my research, I used purposeful or convenience sampling strategies and selected informants who met the prerequisite requirements. I collected data in an ethical way and ensured that it represented informants' intent. I used journaling to capture my thoughts and ideas before I transcribed the data. I stayed open to the data as patterns and themes emerged. The findings attempted to provide meaningful parallelism across all data sources (context, participants, and time). I provided my informants with an opportunity to review their transcriptions to ensure that I had accurately captured their intent.

Transferability

The characteristics of the setting, processes, and participants were described in detail to permit research comparisons. Participant selection was as diverse as possible, given the selection criteria and research constraints. The findings included enough "thick

description" (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014 p. 314) to determine the potential of transferability. I also made suggestions about how to successfully test further research.

Dependability

I was aware that context-rich descriptions of interview data could provide new meaning for research participants and inform the body of knowledge. I made accounts that were plausible and reported findings that were coherent, transparent, and systematically related. Areas of uncertainty were identified and discussed with my informants.

Confirmability

I have fully explained my research methods, processes, and procedures to demonstrate my dedication to transparency throughout the collection, analysis, and application processes. I kept a personal journal to capture what I saw, heard, and thought during the course of this study. I followed a logical sequence of how data were collected, analyzed, and condensed to draw sound conclusions. I am acutely aware of the destructive power of personal bias and assumptions. I considered and examined competing conclusions for plausibility. Study data will be retained and made available for reexamination for up to 5 years upon the completion of this study.

Ethical Procedures

To *first do no harm*, I abided by the standards of the Institutional Review Board and any other comparable oversight agency that protects the rights of human subjects from the wrongful use of collected data. I provided informants with a full explanation of the goals and intent of the study. I ensured that my informants knew that their

participation was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. If sensitive subjects arose during routine interviewing and students wished to speak with a counselor, I was prepared to refer them to the crisis centers in the local area or the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs VA Medical Center as agreed upon in the Notice of Informed Consent and the Walden IRB.

Treatment of data. Hard copies of informant data will be kept confidential and stored in a safe for up to 5 years. Pseudonyms have been used to ensure informant anonymity. As a safety precaution, I also stored a digital copy onto a memory stick of the raw data in a separate, safe location.

Summary

I began this chapter by restating the purpose of this study. I also reiterated the research design and research questions, and their alignment with the study instrument. My role as a qualitative researcher was also explained. I described the participant selection logic, instrumentation, and interview procedures. Issues of trustworthiness, ethical processes, credibility, and dependability were also addressed to ensure that the study met the highest moral code and complied with all procedures recommended by the IRB when dealing with human subjects.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perceived needs of African American female veterans who enrolled in an institution of higher education after military service, and to understand how they constructed meaning in their lives as they confronted social, emotional, and financial challenges. I placed particular emphasis on the adult transition process and women's identity development to discern how this cohort of female veterans implemented coping strategies to deal with change. This chapter is divided into four major categories: The data collection process, the data analysis process, proof of trustworthiness, and the findings/results of this study. In the data collection process, I explained my methodology for identifying informants and the procedures that I used to collect data. In the data analysis section, I described how I examined and coded data as patterns and themes emerged. I also provide background information on study participants' length of service, military occupation specialties, and degree earned. I used excerpts from their interviews to highlight what they believed was important to their social, emotional, and financial needs and as a method to ensure the trustworthiness of my data and my research findings. In addition to answering the research questions, I explained unusual phenomena I encountered during the data collection and analysis process. Chapter 4 concludes with a summary and an introduction to Chapter 5.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: How do African American female veterans seeking a higher education degree perceive their social, emotional, and financial needs as they transitioned from a structured military environment to a less formal college setting?

Research Question 2: What have these African American female veterans perceived that faculty and staff have done to help or hinder their academic success?

Research Settings

As outlined in Chapter 3, and in spite of submitting several written requests to conduct research at a number of community colleges in Central Virginia, a community partner agreement was not forthcoming. Because time was a critical factor, I requested Walden IRB approve my using social media and word-of-mouth as conduits to qualified participants. I also changed the focus of my study from veterans who are active community college students to women who had attended institutions of higher education. Broadening the parameters of my study included utilizing the telephone as an interview tool. After receiving IRB approval [#05-29-18-0165667], I relied on a substantial web of acquaintances to assist me in identifying potential informants who met the established criteria. After notifying potential participants of the purpose and intent of this study and the prerequisite requirements, I decided to also expand my criteria to include veterans of the first Gulf War and not just veterans of the Global War on Terrorism. I used snowball sampling using trusted colleagues to suggest potential informants (Patton, 2015, p. 298). This method bore immediate fruit.

Participants. Twelve African American female veterans served as participants for this study. In writing up the findings, I have provided them with pseudonyms to safeguard and protect their identities and to ensure their confidentiality. Each informant served in the U.S. Army during periods of conflict and has earned the right to be called veteran. These women served in various capacities as both active duty and reserve soldiers and reported they have suffered from the sacrifices and stress of wartime service.

Although I concentrated my recruitment efforts in Central Virginia, there were three informants from other states. All lived and worked in the Southeastern region of the United States. Ten of the 12 had enrolled in traditional colleges while pursuing their undergraduate degrees. Five had enrolled in online programs for their graduate studies. Two completed all of their education through online degree programs. One participant attended the U.S. Military Academy as an undergraduate and enrolled in a traditional university for her graduate degree. Two participants did not complete college. Two are currently enrolled in advanced degree programs: one to complete a second master's and the other, a nurse practitioner's program.

Table 1 lists informants' pseudonyms, years of service, and learning environments, whether they were G.I. Bill recipients, and the type of degree they earned. All participants identified as African Americans who had completed at least on year of college work.

Demographics

Table 1

Demographics of African American Female Veterans Who Returned to Higher Education

Informants (pseudonyms used)	Years of active/reserve service	Learning environment	G.I. Bill recipient	Highest degree earned
Jasmine	7	Traditional/Online	Yes	MS - Clinical Mental Health Counseling
Ebony	12	Online	Yes	DBA
Isiah	8	Traditional	Yes	N/A
Brianna	11 ½	Traditional/satellite	Yes	N/A
Michelle	8 ½	Traditional/Online	Yes	MS - Health Administration
Destiny	7 ½	Traditional/Online	Yes	MS - Nursing
Rehana	11	Traditional/Online	Yes	MBA
Jada	13	Online	Yes	BS - Business Administration
Kayla	7	Traditional	No	MBA
Aliyah	7	Traditional	Yes	AA - Applied Management
Elena	18	Traditional	No	MS - Global Supply Chain
Lacy	7	Traditional	Yes	MS - Nursing

Jasmine. Served in the military for 7 years. Her military occupation specialty was information management. She primarily served as a paralegal assistant. Jasmine took several courses while on active duty but realized that her military duties made it impossible for her to complete her academic requirements. Upon discharge from active

federal service, Jasmine acted on her desire to assist people with mental illness, earning a bachelor's in social psychology. Jasmine realized that she needed an advanced degree to fulfill her goals of supporting individuals with mental disabilities. She earned a master's in clinical mental health counseling. Jasmine's former spouse deployed many times in support of the War on Terrorism. She is a single mother of three daughters.

Ebony. Served in the military for 12 years. Her military occupation specialty was administrative specialist. While Ebony did not deploy into the Theater of Operations, her service occurred during the first Gulf War era. Ebony already had a bachelor's degree upon entry into the U.S. military; however, she continued to pursue advanced degrees after discharge. Ebony loved business and went on to earn a master's in business administration and continued her studies to earn a doctorate of business administration degree. She is a single mother of three children.

Isiah. Served in the military for 8 years. Her military occupation specialty was information systems specialist. Isiah served one tour overseas during the first Gulf War. Upon her discharge she pursued a bachelor's in information technology. However, Isiah found it difficult to manage the certification requirements of her job and the academic requirements of school. She did not complete her degree. She is single and has a daughter.

Brianna. Served in the military for more than 11 years. Her military occupation specialty was personnel administrative specialist. Brianna served one tour overseas during the first Gulf War and took several college courses as a first-generation student. She found it difficult to balance home, school, and career, because her husband deployed

many times in support of the War on Terrorism. Brianna married a career military spouse and they have two daughters.

Michelle. Served in the military for more than 8 years. Her military occupation specialty was supply specialist. Michelle served one tour in the Middle East during the first Gulf War. She entered the military with two years of college coursework and continued her education while still on active duty. Upon discharge, she had earned enough credits to receive a bachelor's degree in business administration. Michelle continued her education and earned a master's in health administration. She had a difficult time with concentration and focus after her combat tour in Iraq. She attends focus group sessions to cope with symptoms of PTSD. Michelle is married to a career military spouse.

Destiny. Served in the military for more than 7 years. Her military occupation specialty was army health care specialist. Destiny served on active duty during the first Gulf War although she did not deploy into the Theater of Operations. Upon discharge she pursued a bachelor's in nursing and went on to earn a master's in nursing with a focus in education. Destiny is married to a career military spouse who deployed many times in support of the War on Terrorism. They have a blended family of five children.

Rehana. Served in the military for 11 years. Her area of concentration was logistics officer. Rehana served one tour in the Middle East during the second Gulf War. Upon leaving the military, she resolved to continue her education, find meaningful employment, and provide for her 5 year-old son. Rehana earned a master's degree in business administration but found concentrating difficult because of PTSD. Rehana is

currently enrolled in her second master's program and encourages military veterans to seek reasonable accommodations, [a part of the Americans With Disabilities Act] to assist with combat disabilities sustained in the war. Rehana is now married and has more children.

Jada. Served in the military for 13 years. She had two military occupation specialties: administrative specialist and motor transportation specialist. Jada served in the military during the first Gulf War. She obtained an associate degree while on active duty and continued her academic studies and earned a bachelor's degree in business administration upon discharge. Jada's motivating force for going to college was self-development. As a first-generation high school and college student, she wanted to ensure that she could care for herself. Jada is married to a career military spouse and they have two daughters.

Kayla. Served in the military for 7 years. Her area of concentration was transportation officer. She was among the first graduating classes of women who entered the U.S. Military Academy and earned a bachelor's degree in industrial psychology and counseling psychology. Being one of the few African American women in her class, she admitted that her educational experience was difficult. Kayla pursued and earned a master's degree while still on active duty. However, because of her leadership roles, military deployments, and finding time for her soon-to-be spouse, she had to put strategies in place to cope with her competing roles as a military officer, student, and intended wife. Although Kayla feels that her experiences in graduate school were not

very supportive, she developed lifelong friendships during her years at West Point. She is planning to begin a doctoral program in the near future.

Aliyah. Served in the military for 7 years. Her military occupation specialty was drafting and surveying. Her motivating force for going into the military was to take care of herself and her young daughter. Aliyah earned an associate degree in applied management after military discharge. She began a bachelor's program in human resources management but found it less flexible and more demanding than her associate degree program. Aliyah's motivation to continue her studies diminished. She found it difficult to balance the demands of school, home, and career. Aliyah is now the single mother of two daughters.

Elena. Served in the military a total of 18 years. She has more than 3 years on active duty and 15 years in the National Guard and Army Reserves and continues her service today. She has two military occupation specialties supply and transportation. Elena entered the military with a bachelor's degree in business administration and continued her education after leaving active duty service to earn a master's degree in global supply chain management. Elena admitted that the driving forces for going to school were her love of learning and the desire to be respected for her accomplishments. She married a career military spouse and they have a blended family of five children.

Lacy. Served in the military for more than 6 years. Her military occupation specialty was supply clerk. Lacy served during the first Gulf War and was also deployed in support of Operation Restore Hope in Somalia. Her motivating factor for attending college was that she did not want the same type of job that she had done while serving in

the army. Therefore, she pursued a bachelor's in nursing and continued her education and earned a master's degree in nursing. Lacy then enrolled in a traditional university to become a nurse practitioner. She married a career military spouse and they have two children.

The research settings comprised face-to-face interviews and telephone conference calls. Eight of the 12 interviews took place in public locations that were agreed upon by my informants. One interview took place at my informant's home. Three interviews utilized telephone conference calls. All research settings proved to be conducive to our uninterrupted dialog. My informants did not have to be coaxed to share details of their transition from the military to higher education. There were laughter and tears of frustration as they described the delicate process of balancing home, school, and career.

All of my informants would have been considered nontraditional students, because they were older than 24 when they began their studies (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2018). While in active service, the informants varied in their level of responsibility either as an enlisted soldier, noncommissioned officer, or commissioned officer. Their military occupation specialties and areas of concentration also differed; however, all served in supportive roles.

Table 2 lists informants' occupation and their respective designations as officers or enlisted soldiers.

Table 2

Informants' Military Occupation Specialties (MOS) and Areas of Concentration (AOC)and their designations.

Name	MOS	AOC	Designations
Jasmine	25B		Infor. Mgmt. Spec.
Ebony	71L		Admin. Spec.
Isiah	74B		Information Tech.
Brianna	75B		Pers. Admin. Spec.
Michelle	92A		Supply Spec.
Destiny	91B		Health Care Spec.
Rehana		90A	Logistics Off.
Jada	71L/88M		Admin/Trans Spec.
Kayla		88A	Transportation Off.
Alayah	51T		Drafting and Survey
Elena	92Y/88M		Supply Spec./Trans
Lacy	76C		Supply Clerk

Data Collection

As I began data collection, I introduced myself to potential informants as a doctoral candidate in education. I did not disclose my former career or military rank to prevent the perception of "power imbalance" (Creswell, 2013, p. 56). I used my developed interview questions that created rich dialogue that described the transitional experiences and coping techniques used by this cohort of female veterans to deal with change (see Appendix). Additional probes stimulated deeper reflection. I took care to align the interview questions with the research questions that established a basis for reflective analysis and understanding of the phenomenon. An interview protocol guide kept me focused on the question at hand. The interview guide drew on the two research questions and I had five opened-ended questions and 20 probes. My informants' coping strategies proved as diverse as the schools they attended. While the ultimate goal of qualitative inquiry is to achieve saturation, my informants' diverse learning

environments, the differences in their marital status, and levels of professional responsibility convinced me that adding a few more interviews would not create a solitary key finding. Nonetheless, I was able to answer the research questions by selecting a minimum sample size that provided reasonable coverage of the phenomena under investigation.

For the purposes of data collection, although I allocated 120 minutes for the completion of each interview; the majority took approximately 60 minutes to complete. I also made two telephone calls to different informants and four text messages also to different informants to ask for clarity when the initial transcriptions were unclear. This approach allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of their perceived needs as they developed coping strategies to deal with change. It also helped me to clearly articulate how my informants overcame transitional challenges and developed relationships versus being or feeling alone while pursuing their studies. I provided my informants with the opportunity to read and amend their transcripts. I received one request: the correction of an area of concentration. At the conclusion of each interview, I asked my informants if they wanted to share any additional information that influenced their worldviews and enabled them to better cope with change.

Data Analysis

As described in Chapter 3, I began data analysis during the data collection phase, as it is most effective when done simultaneously. When I first listened to the recorded data, I remained conscious of the purpose of my study as articulated by the research questions. I was also mindful of emerging patterns and codes flagged by informants'

words, tone, and frustrations. I recorded my initial thoughts in my research journal. Data were collected from informants who attended various learning environments consisting of traditional institutions, online degree programs, e-learning or hybrid education, including satellite academic programs offered on military installations. These diverse environments allowed me to highlight various perspectives regarding how informants viewed the world that provided answers to the research questions, as patterns and themes emerged.

I used Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) six-step approach to analyze my data. I began the analysis process by implementing the following:

1. I focused on the purpose and the intended outcome of my study.
2. I considered the epistemological frameworks that grounded this study to discern how did these African American female veterans constructed meaning in their lives as they put strategies in place to deal with change.
3. I listened to the recorded tapes several times before I transcribed the voice into text. I listened for tone, voice inflections, hesitations, and periods of silence during the interview process. I coded my data by focusing on patterns and insight as it related to the research questions.
4. I looked back through the data and codes to distinguish the main patterns and themes that surfaced.
5. I reacquainted myself with the purpose and intent of this study to ensure that the data-bits supported what I thought I saw in the patterns.

6. After developing first cycle coding and second cycle coding, I placed new codes into subthemes and rearranged like codes into existing themes. In an effort to demonstrate the transparency of data analysis, I inputted the data onto a spreadsheet to clearly see the subthemes and themes as they emerged. I compared the subthemes and deleted comparable codes.

In addition to the aforementioned, I reexamined my research questions to eliminate replication. I analyzed what informants said versus what they did not say. For instance, eight of the 12 informants indicted that tuition and fees were not a factor in their decisions to attend a specific school. However, all indicated that they would not have been able to go to college without the G.I. Bill or tuition assistance, benefits paid for by the U.S. Government. Therefore, cost was a factor in their decisions to attend college. I also reexamined my research questions and dissected the purpose and intent of my study. Research question number one focused on the *social*, *emotional*, and *financial needs* of African American female veterans. I analyzed these words and determined that I would characterize *social* as a part of community, a collected group, needing companionship, and belonging. I considered *emotional* as feelings, sensitivity, demonstrative, and the self-in-relationships versus the self-standing alone. *Financial* I characterized as the ability to care for oneself, family, as well as other financial obligations. This reexamination allowed me to further delineate categories into themes.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Qualitative research design assumes that people who engage in the world can construct meaning of phenomena, experiences, and activities in an ongoing fashion as

they live and work in the world (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This assumption contradicts the belief that knowledge already exists and is just waiting to be discovered (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). A common characteristic of all qualitative inquiry is that people construct meaning through interaction with their social world. Patton (2015) believed that one can make interpretations through in-depth interviewing, for instance in a basic qualitative study, such as this, to answer straightforward questions without categorizing the inquiry into an explicit theoretical orientation. While quantitative analysis tends to see the world in terms of variables, and the statistical relationships that occur between the variables, qualitative research studies seek to view the world in terms of people, events, and situations (Maxwell, 2013). Interpretation is the researcher's view of how these components have influenced their informants' worldviews. Therefore, the intended outcome of this qualitative study is to determine how my informants constructed meaning in their lives as they overcame transitional challenges such as finding balance between home, school, and career; financial difficulties; meaningful employment; and finding solutions to the associated problems of single parenthood.

Credibility (Internal Validity)

To establish credibility in my research, I used purposeful and convenience sampling strategies and selected participants that met the prerequisite requirements. I ensured that my data collection procedures complied with the ethical standards of the IRB and other oversight agencies that protect(s) the rights of human subjects. I used the same interview questions for each informant. I also used journaling to capture my thoughts and ideas before, during, and after I transcribed the data into text. I stayed open

to the data as patterns and themes emerged (Patton, 2015). The findings provided meaningful parallels across all data sources (context, participants, and time). I also provided credibility to this study by analyzing discrepant cases. I identified these cases by reexamining informants' transcripts and the responses that they provided to the interview questions. Finally, I provided my informants with an opportunity to review their transcripts to ensure that their content was accurate.

Transferability (External Validity)

To ensure the transferability of this study, I used preplanned interview questions and probes to stimulate further discussion. I gathered rich description of my themes to provide transparency of my findings. I described the processes in detail to collect and analyze my data. The findings include enough "thick description" (Miles et al., p. 314) to determine the potential of transferability for researchers wishing to replicate the results.

Dependability

To ensure the dependability of my results, I worked under the tutelage of my doctoral committee. I kept detailed descriptions of my data collection and analysis procedures. I inputted my data on spreadsheets and created graphs, so I could recognize the patterns and themes as they emerged. I maintained a reader's journal that described my thoughts before, during, and after I collected my data. I made explanations that were systematically related, plausible, and made sense to the reader. Finally, I followed the procedures as described in Chapter 3.

Confirmability

I have fully explained my research methods, processes, and procedures to

demonstrate my dedication to transparency throughout the collection, analysis, and application process. I kept a personal journal that captured what I saw, heard, and thought during the course of this study. I collected, analyzed, and condensed data in a logical manner so as to draw sound conclusions. I am acutely aware of the destructive power of personal bias and assumptions. Therefore, I recorded and described informants' responses in the way they were verbalized. I also examined discrepant views to be considered for plausibility. Study data will be retained and made available for re-examination for up to 5 years upon the completion of this study.

Findings

The themes, subthemes, and codes that follow refer to the shared experiences, statements, and stories of 12 African American female veterans who were my informants. Some were expressed with pride while others spoke of their sacrifice, anger, and frustration. I condensed the codes to provide clarity and to capture the nuances of events under investigation. Themes emerged as I transcribed and analyzed what they told me, using the themes and conceptual frameworks that guided this study as lenses.

Listed in Table 3 are a summary of the themes, subthemes, and codes as discerned from the data analysis. The first column represents the research questions associated with the emergent themes, subthemes, and codes. The second column contains the five themes that emerged from data analysis. The third and fourth columns contains the subthemes and codes that appeared and reappeared during my examination of the data. I also highlighted several subthemes within my findings that were the product of informants' concerns.

Table 3

Theme, Subthemes, Codes, and Discrepant Cases

Research Questions	Theme	Subtheme	Codes
RQ1:	1. Be a better role model and provider	Single Parenthood	Wanted to *show* children rather than simply *tell* them of the importance of higher education.
		Personal self-development	First in my family to graduate from high school and college.
	2. Financial difficulties	Loss of financial assistance	G.I. Bill funding or Tuition Assistance to go to school.
		Meaningful employment	Single-income family made remunerative work a concern.
			Did not make much money. Needed meaningful employment to pay the bills.
			Single parenthood strained financial resources.
	3. Balance home, school, and career		Had difficulty balancing roles: wife, mother, student, employee. Always juggling duties and demands.
			Took classes online because I was a single parent at the time.
			Did without so that children would have.
RQ2:	4. A sense of belonging, of welcome, and of community	Identity development	Was not accepted as a valued member of the team.
			Was not respected for what she contributed.
			Had to fight for everything, fair evaluations, and to have her voice heard.
	5. External support	Education environments	Faculty provided the required support.
		Importance of support groups.	Faculty did not understand military deployments, were unwilling or unable to support them.
		Military leadership, discipline, and structure.	

Research Question 1 focused on African American women and their transitional concerns and how they implemented strategies and constructed meaning as they enrolled in institutions of higher education. As depicted in Table 3, the common themes that emerged from data analysis were: to be a better role model and provider, financial difficulties, and balancing home, school, and career.

Research Question 2 focused on whether the informants felt that faculty and staff helped or hindered their academic success, and if student veterans felt a sense of welcome and community on campus. The themes that emerged from data analysis were: a sense of belonging, of welcome, and of community and external supports. At the conclusion of the data analysis, the study was concentrated around five themes.

While the majority of my informants indicated that they felt a sense of pride and accomplishment as female veterans, Kayla stated that her commanders would tell her, "You are different because you went to West Point," or "You are different because you went to school with all guys." She said, "It was difficult, I was lumped in with the fellows because of my education at West Point."

The results of this study emerged from the analysis of interviews with 12 African American female veterans who served in the U.S. Army during and after Presidents George H.W. Bush and George W. Bush declared war in the Middle East, and who completed at least one year of academic course work at an institution of higher education. My informants revealed similar responses to the interview questions. I developed these responses around eight subthemes and five themes to answer the two research questions. The two research questions that guided and informed this study were:

1: How do African American female veterans seeking a higher education degree perceive their social, emotional, and financial needs as they transitioned from a structured military environment to a less formal college setting?

2: What have these African American female veterans perceived that faculty and staff have done to help or hinder their academic success?

In addition, there were a few discrepant responses, discussed following the findings.

Findings Related to Research Question 1

Research Question1 centered on the perceived social, emotional, and financial needs of African American female veterans and the strategies they used to cope with change. Informants provided explicit, detailed responses about their struggles as single parents, their feelings of sacrifice and loss, their financial difficulties, their attempts to keep up with the demands of family members, teachers and employers, their attempts to deal with anxiety and stress. The following three themes emerged from this research question: being a better role model and provider, financial difficulties, and balancing home, school, and career. The first two of the three themes have subthemes that are included in the discussion below:

Be a better role model and provider. The first theme emerged as nine of the 12 informants described that "being an example for their children" was an important factor as they transitioned from active military status to that of college students. Several described themselves as "first generation" high school graduates and the first in their families to go to college. Briana said, "None of my brothers or my sister completed high

school and I wanted to be an example for my children." Aliyah mentioned, "My prime motivation for going into the military and for attending college was always my kids. I kept thinking of my daughters," and "I wanted to improve myself so that I could compete and be considered for a better-paying job." Also, of the 12 informants, six were single parents or became single parents during the course of their transitions. These women passionately expressed that they wanted to show their children that education was important to their future success. Destiny commented:

> I was just telling my son who is going off to college this year that it is easy to get an education when someone else pays for it, but when you have to pay for it yourself, it can be more difficult.

Kayla described a situation where she encouraged her daughter to develop perseverance and the will to continue to *make it* in a society that was calculating and cold. On the other hand, Isiah explained that education was important to her long-term career success and that she wanted to demonstrate this to her daughter and not just tell her to get a degree. She replied,

> When I left the military, my daughter was 5 years-old and I wanted to show her rather than tell her how important it was to get a degree. I wanted to be on the academic path, so she could see me working hard. I wanted to set that example for her.

Briana was more pragmatic about her educational pursuits and her commitments to the military and to her family. She stated,

> I started taking courses when I was in the military. Due to my commitments, I had to drop out and by then I had both girls. So, my main commitment was to the military and raising my girls. The timing wasn't there for me to graduate, I just raised my family.

This theme relates to Research Question 1 because all of the informants desired meaningful employment and the ability to care for themselves and their families was a priority. For most of them, education meant an increase in long-term mobility. It also supported the social aspect of being accepted as a valued member of the team.

Single parenthood. While single parenthood did not emerge as a primary theme, it did emerge as a subtheme of being a better role model and provider. Six of the 12 informants identified as being single parents at some point of their academic studies. Single parenthood influenced informants' ability to attend a traditional university or necessitated the need to take online courses. Informants responses also revealed that it was the linchpin that influenced the social, emotional, and financial ability to care for oneself and family.

Personal self-development. Personal self-development is the second subtheme related to the first theme. Many of the informants reflected the assumption that taking pride in your accomplishment is a healthy trait. Personal self-development leads to respect for yourself, your children, and your present or future partner and supplies the confidence to live a healthy and creative life. They recalled conversations that they had had with their children, urging them not to minimize the importance of education for which their parents had paid dearly. The majority also described scenarios where they

decided to continue their *personal self-development*. Jasmine wanted to contribute to social change by helping people with mental illness in her community. She earned a bachelor's degree in social psychology and a master's in clinical mental health counseling. As Destiny and Lacy did not want to continue along the same career paths for which their military assignments prepared them, they realized they needed to earn a college degree. After completing their undergraduate studies at a traditional university, they both attained master's degrees in nursing at cyber universities. Lacy is currently studying at a local university in Central Virginia to become a nurse practitioner. Ebony loved the principles of business and continued her education to earn a doctorate in business administration. Elena said, "I loved school, I loved studying and learning something different. It was actually a personal goal to earn a master's in global supply chain management." In retrospect, Jada reflected, "My main goal was securing my future. I did both my associate's and bachelor's degree online, because I had small children at the time. I had to look at myself and find what I had inside me."

Personal self-development pertains to both the social and the emotional needs of this cohort of female veterans. To be accepted as a member of the team is an unwritten goal to achieve in the military and that has served them well in civilian settings, both academic and professional. To feel welcomed by colleagues and mentors in a workplace setting, to enjoy the benefits of a long-time career, and to contribute in meaningful ways to social change for your family and your race are some of the keys to a rewarding life.

The majority of my informants described conditions where "care for my family" was an important factor in their decision to pursue a degree after military service. Four

of my informants already had bachelor's degrees upon entry into the U.S. Army but realized that they needed additional certification to get the types of jobs they wanted. Ebony said, "I did all of my classes online, that was better than being away from my children." Isiah confessed, "I put my daughter's educational needs before my own because I was already employed. I just wanted to focus on her." Lacy, who already had a nursing degree and who is currently enrolled in school to become a nurse practitioner stated,

> Nursing is a great career. My husband was still in the military, so when we traveled from one duty station to another my masters of nursing helped me land profitable jobs. I always made enough money to take care of my kids.

Rehana, who is also working toward her second master's indicated that she needed to obtain educational relevancy and to provide for her son. She confessed,

> My wellbeing was important and being able to support my family financially by acquiring an education degree that would assist me in getting employment that interested me. I was a single mother at the time, so I had to provide for my 5 year-old son.

Financial difficulties. Financial conditions impact every aspect of dealing with change, reflecting this second theme. Having enough money to pay the bills influences a mother's ability to care for herself and for her family. Childcare costs also put a strain on her ability to put strategies in place to cope with change. Destiny admitted, "After I got out of the military, we became a single-income family, so our finances were definitely a concern. Having the G.I. Bill helped. Without it, I would not have been able to go to

school." Jada said, "I did my research on what the tuition provided, because I wanted to make sure the cost would not affect my family." On the other hand, Elena recalled being under pressure to find employment. "My husband filled out a job application for me because I had to find something to do. I ended up getting the job." Brianna remembered, being married young and of not having much money at the time. She confessed,

> Having our kids when we were young, money was an issue. We were not making a lot of money, so I had to find a job and it was a transition. It took me a little while to get comfortable. Like I said, college was not on my mind at that time. It was raising my girls and trying to make it through, financially.

Loss of financial assistance. Although most participants indicated that "money was not an issue" as they returned to higher education, they all agreed that, if not for the G.I. Bill and/or tuition assistance, they would have been unable to continue their education. I characterized the second subtheme as loss of financial assistance. Kayla did not qualify for the G.I Bill, because she attended the U.S. Military Academy for her undergraduate degree and did not have to pay tuition. She also indicated that she received tuition assistance for her master's degree that required her to remain in the military for an additional year for every year of tuition the stipend covered. Elena was in the U.S. Army Reserves at the time and because she already had a bachelor's degree, the government would only grant a small stipend for her graduate program.

Meaningful employment. Most participants described that they desired work that remunerated them for their education and experience. They indicated that when they began civilian jobs, they had to start at entry level positions as if they did not have prior

work experience. Kayla recalled, "although I was a military officer who was responsible for policy implementation and leading soldiers, I had to begin at an entry-level management position." Jasmine, Ebony, and Alayah described that because they were single parents who had to work to care for their families, they accepted work that was far below what their education and experience commanded. Jada admitted, "based on my thirteen years of military experience and my education, I should be further along in my civilian career than where I am today." Alayah said, "I pursued a college education so that I could compete for a better paying job."

Balancing home, school, and career. The third theme, related to the first research question is balancing home, school, and family, and there were no subthemes. The question of balance generated the greatest number of responses, as half of my informants were single parents or became single parents during the course of their transition to civilian society and academic studies. Not being able to balance home, school, and career triggered both Isiah's and Briana's early college withdrawals. Alayah also indicated that she had difficulty finding balance between her career and her roles as wife and mother. She compromised, completing her associate but not her bachelor's degree. Jasmine confessed, "My marriage ended because my husband thought I cared more for school than for him. To find balance, I relied on my faith." Rehana credited, "the coping strategies that I have always had in place as a woman and mother for seeing me through." These included "friends and family, time management, patience with others and letting them have a perspective." For Ebony, finding balance was difficult as a single parent because she had to put the needs of her children before her own.

Therefore, she decided taking courses online was the best use of her time. She asserted,

> The prime factor for me was being a single parent. You are already faced with the challenge of having children, but now as a single parent going from a structured environment like the military into a school setting, how do you balance your time? I went without, so that my children would have and that, if anything suffered, it was my sense of wellbeing.

Lacy who is still enrolled in school to obtain a nurse practitioner certification acknowledged that she has a difficult time in finding balance between home, school, and career. She confessed,

> I try to set plans, they don't usually work. But I try. Going to school requires a commitment. Because I have a family, a husband, and children, it's hard. I should have more structure, but I don't. Sometimes it's too much with the fatigue and all of that. I am keeping the balls afloat, but it is a matter of sheer perseverance. I feel like I am just pushing through because I don't have a choice. I have been doing this for a long time. It's something I want to do, and there is nothing else I can do other than push through it. My graduation date of May 2019 can't come soon enough!

Kayla completed her master's degree while she was still on active duty. At that time, she was not a veteran. She commented that during that period in her life one of her biggest challenges was finding time for herself. She said she pushed herself hard to get things done, but she did not do a good job in taking care of herself. She replied,

> What fell through the crack, was me. I did not make sure that I was physically and mentally okay. I pushed myself hard during those times to get it all done. It was late night and early morning wakeup calls and working through lunch to get things finished. Sometimes I had a supportive commanding officer, other times I did not. It was chaotic all of the time. I could not spare a minute.

Isiah also described that she often did her school work in the early morning hours when her daughter was in bed and when there were not any distractions such as people calling or texting her.

> I had to wake-up at 2:00 A.M. in the morning. I would spend an hour and a half studying for my certification requirements at work, and an hour and a half preparing for school. I could study at work if we were slow. That worked as well. In the middle of the night was my best friend, because that is when I got the most done.

Rehana described a similar experience with early morning study hours and the strategies that she had to put in place to be successful. She replied,

> Because I suffer from PTSD and have problems sleeping, I would record the lectures or have another student take notes for me. I was mostly a night owl or early in the morning person, studying from 1:00 to 4:00 A.M. That's when I would listen to the recordings because I had memory loss issues and studying in advance was not advantageous for me.

Elena described a different experience as she pursued her master's degree in global supply chain management. She indicated that she was working full-time, was in the

National Guard, was a mother of a newborn baby, and in school at the same time. She confessed,

> I was in a cohort that met for 2 days out of the month for 12 hours each day. It was extremely hard, paper after paper. I was good a multitasking. I am a good time manager. I am very good at that. Sometimes I would ask my husband to take the baby, so I could do research. I don't know how I was able to do it. I just did it. I am very good at prioritizing my life.

Findings Related to Research Question 2

Research Question 2 centered on faculty and staff support, feelings of welcome and community, adaptation strategies, respect, and the positive influence on academic success of leadership, discipline, and structure inculcated in the military. Informants clearly articulated their views regarding whether or not faculty and staff provided the needed support. They also described instances where they felt faculty did not comprehend the unpredictable nature of military deployment and were unwilling or unable to prevent wasteful expenditure of time and tuition.

A sense of belonging, of welcome, and of community. A sense of welcome and community, the first theme related to Research Question 2, was important for this group of African American women as they described events that hurt them deeply when they were excluded as members of the team or did not feel that sense of welcome on college campuses. Rehana indicated, "I had to constantly fight to be included and to have my voice heard in the classroom, in my unit, and on my team." Elena described the pain of

being excluded from her master's degree cohort and finding her input was not deemed valuable. She stated,

> I was in Alaska at the time. We were working on team assignments where we had to study a company. We picked Fred Myers. It's like a grocery store. We were supposed to work in groups, but one of my classmates went to the professor to have me taken off of the team because I was a junior noncommissioned officer and everyone else were senior officers or senior civilian employees. Seemingly she believed that I was incapable of doing the work, and it would affect her grade. I almost quit over that, because it hurt me so much. My professor explained that it was not her place to make that decision.

Kayla also described a negative experience when she was working on her master's degree. She recalled not receiving any type of outreach for minority students and felt lucky that she had earned a master's degree.

> I do not remember any type of outreach office for minority students. I do not remember any contact person for us. It wasn't given to us. I truly felt siloed. I felt lucky that I was able to get my degree, because I was doing due diligence on my own in terms of what classes I needed to take and in what order I needed to take them. I also recall fighting for an Incomplete or Withdrawal versus an "F" grade. I actually had to get my Army Colonel involved. She wrote a letter explaining that I was in the U.S. Army, and that I could not be discriminated against because of military requirements.

Michelle recollected, “I did not have anyone who did not make me feel welcomed. Some classmates mouth things at you, but they’re just trying to get ahead.”

Identity development. My informants described various identity issues as they changed their routines, roles, and relationships after leaving a structured military setting and reentering civilian society, which I characterized as the only subtheme related to the theme of belonging. Transitional challenges included having a difficult time in dealing with civilian employers because their expectations were not the same as those of their sergeants and officers in or near the battlefield. What is more, there was no visible chain of command to provide needed guidance or to help them make difficult decisions. Ancillary problems included difficulty discerning who was in charge, the absence of military spirit and camaraderie and having a clear, common goal to provide orientation and direction. Elena stated, “it’s hard to transition from being in the military to civilian life, especially when you are in a leadership position. You have to always remember, ‘I am not in charge here.’” According to Destiny,

> I think for us veterans when you are first getting out of the military, it can be difficult. You have to think about who you are. In the military you are structured, you are told, you know what the expected outcomes are. When you get out you have to figure out who you are and make adjustments. If you don’t take a step back to figure it out, it can be difficult. I was young, I was only 23, and already had my son and had a blended family. I was on medication to cope with depression, but I am not ashamed to admit it. My mother helped me a lot. She would fly to Puerto Rico where we were stationed to help me with the kids.

> She also helped me get through the postpartum depression that I was dealing with. That's my story, and that's what I had to deal with at the time.

Kayla recalled,

> I had a difficult time in dealing with civilians, because in the military we had a common goal and a sense of camaraderie. Dealing with the civilian world, it was hard to get everyone on a common ground. We felt siloed. A situation recently occurred on my job where a White male was brought into the organization as a director. However, he did not have any prior experience in the kind of work we were doing in pharmaceuticals. At the performance evaluation time, he received the top rating. I had to prove to my boss that my team was the top performing team in the region. I had to show him the numbers, I actually had to lay them down for him. I had to fight for a fair evaluation.

Elena, who is currently serving in the U.S. Army Reserves, described her anguish when, after 18 years of combined service, a Military Review Board informed her she was being "medically discharged," without even thanking her for her service.

External support. The last theme relates to external support valued by the informants. The majority of my informants believed that faculty and staff supported their academic endeavors. However, all of my informants commented on certain faculty members' lack of familiarity with what military deployment and preparation for wartime service entailed. Some instructors provided what students believed was necessary; however, others were less flexible regarding unanticipated withdrawals and the need to make up missed assignments when they returned. Aliyah said, "I don't think the

professors were as flexible as they were during my associate degree. It was rough."

Jasmine recalled an experience that she had when she was in the field and her professor was unwilling to work with her to make up missed assignments.

> I had one professor who gave me an "F" grade. We had just come out of the field. His classes were mostly conducted in a lecture style. His exams were challenging because, if you were not present on the day they were given, you could not go to the book to make up the work. You had to be in class. He did not work with me despite my work situation. He later ended up failing me and was unwilling to work with me.

Isiah believed that she was fully prepared for her classes in information technology. However, some of the classes that required more study like accounting, she was not prepared. She confessed,

> I would be up all-night crying, because I couldn't get it. My professor at the time was not very helpful, so I ended up asking my daughter's teacher to help me. I ended up getting an "A" grade out of the class, but that's when I stopped asking my professor for help. I pursued other resources and YouTube videos that were helpful as well.

Rehana, on the other hand, described a positive experience and believed that faculty provided the supported that she needed as a disabled veteran. She stated,

> I felt they supported me when I requested accommodations due to my disability. A lot of people think that your disabilities have to be visible, but I suffer from fibromyalgia, migraines, and things like that. I reported them to my healthcare

> provider and applied for reasonable accommodations under the Americans with Disabilities Act. They supplied me with recorded materials, in print versus electronic. Faculty have definitely been supportive. Today, they actually respect what we are doing. I think they are educating themselves by dealing with us. The institutions have benefitted from our experiences.

This theme relates to Research Question 2 as it pertains to whether faculty and staff supported or hindered academic success. Informants also indicated instances where faculty could have been more flexible in their support of soldiers who needed to drop or rearrange classes because of unforeseen military deployment orders. There were three subthemes related to the theme of external supports.

Educational environments. All of my informants believed that one of their biggest challenges in returning to higher education was making the adjustment from the military concept of education to more formal, academic speaking and writing. Jada commented, "The paperwork, writing papers and everything, the APA format made me nervous because you don't have to do that in the military. You don't write those types of papers. That was my challenge." Rehana recalled that she had to clear her mind of her military education, as it was clearly different from the formal speaking and writing of the academic environment. She replied,

> Veterans need to purge themselves of military education because it is a different type of learning, speaking, and writing. You need to adapt to the formal education of college. It was like starting all over again when I pursued my first graduate degree.

Lacy confessed that she was unfamiliar with a lot of the technology and software because it was different than what she had been using. She stated,

> I might be a little overwhelmed because of the technology and software and different things that younger students are doing in the traditional classroom. It's just difficult as the time goes by to keep up with students who are comfortable with multitasking. As soon as the instructor delivers the information, they record it on their laptops. I have to think for a while to process the information. I cannot even type.

Michelle explained that she had 2 years of college at an HBCU before joining the military. She said that she got married, went into the Army, and joined her husband overseas. She also described that when she went back to school her educational experience was challenging, because she had been out of school for almost 5 years. She stated,

> I had to regroup back to be a student again. The format was different than what I was used to in the military. Once I got that balance, I was okay. It was a challenge. I tried the traditional route, but that did not work for me because I travel a lot for my job. So, I decided to take my courses online. That was challenging as well, because I am a hands-on person. Once I began to understand the online process and doing work with teammates, it became easier. It was easy for me to transition from college to the military, but to convert back to college was difficult.

The importance of support groups. Two of my informants suffered from conditions of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and, in transition, attended support groups to help with dilemmas brought about by disabilities sustained in the war. Other informants participated in study groups or formed friendships with people who supported their pursuit of academic success.

Michelle said she experienced difficulty with concentration and focus due to her PTSD. She participated in support groups and counseling to help her to develop coping skills.

> I participated in several support groups where I heard others share their experiences. It is difficult for me to comprehend some of the challenges I have had. For example, trying to balance my home and family life. I am working with a support group and a therapist every chance I get, trying to better understand myself and deal with what is going on at home.

Rehana also indicated that she participated in support groups to help with symptoms of PTSD. She explained,

> I have attended many PTSD clinics, because it helps. You find other people who have had similar experiences. You can attend women-only clinics or ones with a mixture of men and women or just go to the psychologist for individual support. Yes, attending these types of groups has helped.

Kayla stated that she participated in a study group of five female veterans and the support she received there enabled her to be academically successful and to develop life-long friendships. She elucidated,

> I developed a friendship with a group of five other ladies and we really gelled. We still keep in touch today. We helped each other by taking notes if one of us could not be in class. We would say, "okay here are the notes for class." We were veterans and we eventually became sorority sisters.

While participation in a support group did not emerge as a recurring theme, its significance cannot be ignored. Perhaps as faculty and administration learn more about how to deal with veterans, particularly women of color, by becoming familiar with some of the challenges that they have had to endure, programs with support groups will be implemented to attend to them more effectively.

Military leadership, discipline and structure. Military leadership, discipline and structure is the last subtheme under external support. It generated a great deal of discussion regarding whether it provided the tools that enables student success. All of my informants believed that the discipline and structure learned in the military provided organizational skills that contributed to their academic success. Destiny said, "I think just the work ethic and what I brought to the table from the military were important: Getting things done requires discipline, paying attention to details, and knowing how to meet deadlines, and staying calm." Michelle recalled, "the structure really worked for me, because I knew the game plan and I could follow that, even though I am a hands-on person." Isiah recollected that her first day in the military was the beginning of her maturity. She also believed that because she was a single parent, her outlook was different from other students that she encountered. She stated,

> The first day in the military was Basic Training. We were so young, but I think that was a step toward maturity. You don't know anything until you have learned it. But, being a mature adult who had a child to provide for, I think my outlook was a little different. I realized it was not playtime. I had to go in there, get it done, then go home and take care of my child.

This subtheme also relates to Research Question 2 as the organizational skills learned in the army allowed this group of African American female veterans to set milestones, respect deadlines, and accomplish their work on time. Their leadership and discipline also enabled them to take charge in academic group assignments and to guide their peers to task completion.

All of my informants experienced challenges with balancing home, school, and career as they continued to juggle the competing demands of being a wife, a mother, a student, and an employee. Such challenges made their transition to civilian society and higher education more difficult. I also discovered that single parenthood can be the fulcrum of home, school, family, financial difficulties, and the ability to pursue and earn a college education. The majority of my informants believed that they needed to be an example for their children: They wanted to be able to show them, rather than tell them, about the importance of having a college education. This realization directly aligns with their search for remunerative employment in line with their education and experience and their desire to receive the credit that they so rightfully deserve. Finally, a sense of welcome and community meant a lot to this group of female veterans. Each felt she

deserved to be accepted as a valued member of the team and respected for her service and the contributions she made to the safety and wellbeing of this country.

Discrepant Cases

Patton (2015) contended that, while most qualitative inquiry involves inductive analysis that focuses on discovering patterns, categories, and themes, deductive analysis is just as critical because it tests and affirms the inductive process. Deductive analysis also includes careful examination of *deviate cases* that do not fit into the common categories, patterns, and themes that emerge from the data (p. 542). According to Patton, failure to recognize negative cases could influence the credibility of the study (Patton, 2015). Patton also claimed that there is "…no clear cut yes or no answer, about whether alternative explanations supports the data" (p. 645). Instead, Patton argued that the researcher must look for the "best fit" or the "preponderance of evidence" (Patton, 2015, p. 654). To ensure the reliability and credibility of this study, I included a category for discrepant cases that included words, events, and feelings described by my informants that did not fit into the emerging themes. Listed below are the discrepant cases that emerged in this study.

A sense of belonging of welcome and community. While the majority of my informants indicated that they felt welcomed on college campuses and that college professors supported their academic success, three described conditions where they felt unwelcome. Kayla described how college professors referred to military students as *transients* because they were unavailable to participate in alumni affairs, attend sporting events, or contribute financially to their schools other than paying tuition. She also

described an incident where she had to take a course over again, because the professor was unwilling to work with her when she deployed for wartime service. Elena indicated that she felt discrimination, because she was the lowest-ranking student in class and was not accepted as worthy by cohort. Jasmine indicated that there was de facto segregation when it came to team assignments.

Lack of acceptance, respect, and accomplishment. Although the majority of informants believed that they had to work harder than their male counterparts, Rehana stated that not only did she have to work harder, she had to fight for fair evaluations, to be respected as a worthy members of the team, and to be treated as equally responsible for programs, policy, mission accomplishment, and the lives of other soldiers. Rehana also described how she was often the only African American female officer in the unit or in her advanced military education courses. As a result, she felt an obligation to speak-up when biased comments entered classroom discussions, which caused her to be viewed as *confrontational* rather than as a *team player*. Kayla reported that military evaluations had been difficult.

Summary

The analysis of my Research Question1 related to the perceived social, emotional, and financial needs of African American female veterans who enrolled in institutions of higher education. My findings revealed that African American female veterans perceived that they needed to be a better role model and provider, to overcome financial difficulties and obtain meaningful employment, and to put strategies in place to balance home, school, and career.

The analysis of Research Question 2 related to whether faculty and staff supported or hindered academic success. The findings revealed that my informants believed they received the support that they needed from faculty and staff, however, they also felt that, at particularly stressful moments, some faculty were unprepared to deal with the exigencies of what may have seemed to them *spontaneous* military deployment. Family and community were also essential factors to the perceived growth and self-respect of this cohort of female veterans who, without exception, described themselves as in relationship with others rather than isolated and alone.

In Chapter 5, I include an interpretation of my findings through the lenses of Schlossberg's adult transition theory and Josselson's theory of identity development in women. Also included are the implications for social change, and recommendations for practice and future research.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the perceived social, emotional, and financial needs of African American female veterans who returned to higher education after military service and to discern how they constructed meaning in their lives as they overcame transitional challenges. I interviewed 12 African American female veterans who attended various learning environments and pursued various careers. These women also responded to semistructured and open-ended questions regarding their transitional experiences as they departed a structured military environment for civilian society and subsequently enrolled in an institution of higher education. The data were analyzed using Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) six-step approach along with a personal self-reflection as described in Chapter 3, of my analogous experiences to minimize the potential for bias. The key findings are the results of my analysis of informants' recollections and perceptions regarding the strategies that they put in place to deal with change. Two research questions guided and informed this study that also aligned with the conceptual frameworks and the body of knowledge.

Research Question 1: How do African American female veterans seeking a higher education degree perceive their social, emotional, and financial needs as they transitioned from a structured military environment to a less formal college setting?

Research Question 2: What have these African American female veterans perceived that faculty and staff have done to help or hinder their academic success?

Summary of Key Findings

Research Question 1 yielded three key findings that resulted from data analysis. The first of these revealed that being a better role model and provider was a worthy goal, especially for those who were single parents. These women wanted to show their children rather than simply tell them about the importance of earning a college education. The second finding had to do with financial difficulties induced by their inability to find meaningful employment. Informants' responses revealed that they wanted work that recognized and remunerated them appropriately for their skills and experience. They described difficulties finding trustworthy mentors and getting ahead in the civilian world. They complained about finding dead-end jobs while looking for careers that would support them and their children. The third finding was the importance informants ascribed to balancing home, school, and career. These women dealt with tremendous losses and sacrifices as they sought out solutions to everyday life problems. Half of them described how they relied on an extensive network of family and friends to provide the support they needed. Others developed strategies such as taking online courses and apportioning specific times of the day for family, for domestic and professional duties, and for schoolwork.

Research Question 2 produced two key findings. The first involved the importance informants attributed to a sense of belonging, of welcome, and community support. They described how hurtful it was to be excluded and how hard they fought to have their voices heard, whether in the military, in academic surroundings, or in their civilian jobs. However, they all felt that the leadership, discipline, and structure they

developed in the military provided them with feelings of self-worth and organizational skills that enabled their successful transition to institutions of higher education. The last theme focused on external supports. While the majority said they received adequate support from college professors; they all indicated that some faculty did not understand the nature of military deployment and so were unwilling or unable to take into account their students' preparation for wartime service.

Interpretation of the Findings

I used Schlossberg's (1989, 1995, & 2012) adult transition theory and Josselson's (1987 & 1996) theory of identity development in women as analytical lenses. Both theories provided compass points to orient this study. They also provided the epistemological framework to understand how these women dealt with everyday matters. The frameworks were also excellent resources for understanding adults in varied transitional states: going to school for the first time, planning relocation and retirement, marriage and divorce, the birth of a child, or dealing with events or nonevents.

The themes were perceived as crucial components that changed the roles, routines, assumptions, and relationships of this cohort of African American female veterans. The women that I interviewed coped with change by relying on family and friend support, taking online classes, and studying in the early morning hours. Josselson (1987 & 1996) believed that women developed their identities through relationships at home, at work, in accordance with their values and beliefs. These ideas are reflected by what my informants considered important: their voices be heard, and their contributions

be valued by other members of their workplace teams. These women also formed identities in relationships with their families, coworkers, and friends.

The informants in this study perceived the crucial components that changed the roles, routines, assumptions, and relationships of this cohort of African American female veterans, as reflected in the themes, were: (a) being a better role model and provider, (b) managing financial difficulties and finding meaningful employment, (c) maintaining balance between home, school, and career, (d) feeling a sense of belonging, of welcome, and of community by one's peers and leaders and, (e) receiving external supports.

To be a better role model and provider was an area nine of the 12 informants described as their primary reason for returning to school. They expressed that they wanted to make a better life for themselves and their children and believed that obtaining a college degree would make that happen. Brianna, Rehana, and Jada explained how they were the first in their families to earn a high school diploma and pursue a college education. Jada described that she and her husband decided before having children that they would provide for them without any assistance from family or social programs. Therefore, Jada and her husband pursued and earned a college degree as a means of getting better paying jobs.

Dealing with financial difficulties was a significant challenge for this cohort of female veterans. Although the majority indicated that college tuition and fees were not of major concern, they all indicated that, if it were not for the G.I. Bill or tuition assistance, they would not have been able to go to school. Six of my informants identified as single parents and described situations where they were unable to find affordable childcare

services. This singular problem strained the resources available to pay the bills and to provide for their children. Thus, some indicated, that they went without so that their children would have.

While meaningful employment, did not emerge as one of my five key themes, it emerged as a subtheme of the theme of financial difficulties. Finding work at wages commensurate with their experience and abilities appeared to be the *cause and effect* of financial difficulties, because it threatened their ability to be better providers. It also challenged their desire to be active role models as they were under constant stress to make ends meet. Consequently, the majority of my informants described jobs that rewarded them for their hard-work, education, and experience. Three described conditions where, regardless of what they did to improve workplace conditions, (e.g., making recommendations for policy and procedural changes or managing the most successful sales force in their region), it was difficult to progress.

Finding balance between home, school, and career impacted the majority of my informants' everyday lives. Several described strategies they had to put in place to deal with the competing demands of multiple roles as wife, mother, student, and employee. Jasmine, Ebony, and Rehana indicated that they relied on spiritual faith to get them through the most trying times of holding full-time jobs while working toward degrees. Ebony indicated, that once she put her faith in God, everything else fell into place.

Feeling a sense of belonging and community was prized by this cohort of veteran women. The majority described how hurtful it was not to be included and accepted as a full-fledged member of a team whose voice was heard and whose contributions were

recognized and appreciated. Isiah, Elena, and Jada described feeling disrespected, because they worked in military careers that were typically staffed by men. Josselson (1996) claimed that women develop their identities through relationships forged at home and at work that corroborate their values and belief systems (p. 32). She also claimed that women develop a sense of who they are through communicating with others, discovering their innermost feelings by building relationships. These claims are consistent with my findings, because it was important to this group to feel welcomed by and communal with erstwhile military colleagues, professors, staff, and administrators, and especially family and friends.

External support is the last theme that emerged from data analysis. Nine of the 12 informants believed that they received the support that they needed to be successful as they transitioned to institutions of higher education. Michelle and Rehana described situations where faculty went above the call of duty to assure reasonable accommodations for disabilities sustained at war. However, the majority also believed that faculty was less than accommodating during their preparation for wartime service, noting that they misunderstood the need for unforeseen academic withdrawals and having to rearrange classes and curricula or makeup schoolwork when they returned. Their lack of experience and flexibility in this process caused hardships for students who had to get their legal documents in order or initiate Dependent Care Plans at short notice to provide for their children while they were deployed.

Transition Theory and the Theory of Identity Development in Women

Schlossberg (1989, 1995, 2012) adult transition framework was designed to assist

adults who are undergoing change to better understanding where they are in the transition process and how to use their available resources to manage change more effectively. The informants who comprised this study have overcome extremely challenging situations as they transitioned from the U.S. Army back to civilian society, and subsequently enrolled in institutions of higher education. While the aforementioned frameworks provided a detailed roadmap and techniques to deal with change, my informants knew nothing about them. Yet they survived, overcame challenges, and continued to function effectively at home and in the workplace, despite their feelings of underpaid and receiving little acknowledgement for their service.

While I initially believed that earning a college degree would be a challenge for these women, in and of itself, maintaining their equilibrium while raising kids, writing papers and studying for exams demanded organization, self-discipline and goal acquisition-skills. Most of the women I interviewed claimed that they had inculcated and applied these successfully over time. They wanted to be a good role models for their children and to be able to provide for them financially. However, they did not expect that they would come home to a society that was not yet ready to acknowledge the accomplishments of African American women. They did not realize that they would have to deal with outdated employment policies, that they would be left to stagnate at entry-level jobs despite their education and practical experience. Their stagnation aligns with the American Council on Education's (2013) claim that female veterans face higher rates of unemployment and underemployment, homelessness, divorce, and single parenthood than male veterans. Although my informants did not encounter all of these

social problems, six were single parents, three experienced divorce, and nine believed that they were chronically underemployed, despite their education and experience. Finding balance and maintaining psychosocial equilibrium affects our sense of community and of self-worth, as well as our ability to lead healthy and productive lives. The stress of going back to school can be overwhelming even when one is academically prepared for it. Finding balance requires developing a mental toughness along with the will to succeed. Some of my informants have admitted they got through school by sheer perseverance, surmounting all kinds of physical and attitudinal barriers and reaching the finish line broken but unbowed. Others implemented some of the coping strategies mentioned in Schlossberg's (1989, 1995, & 2012) adult transition theory and seemingly unshakeable belief in their ability to succeed.

The theory of identity development in women draws on the premise that a woman finds her "*self in relationships*" (Josselson, 1996, p. 32) rather than "standing alone," and that her sense of who she is stems from close contacts with her family, at her job, and in her personal values and belief system (Josselson, 1987). This framework also aligns with my informants' sense of identity as they described relationships with their spouses and children as the foundational *rock* on which they depended as they transitioned from an army at war to a civilian job, and later enrolled in an institution of higher education. That said, these women have a strong sense of who they are based on character-forming experiences and accomplishments during their military service, on their civilian jobs, and within their families.

Making the adjustment from one learning environment to another is subject of many responses elicited by Research Question 2. It can be a difficult transition, especially when intensified by simultaneous adjustments to civilian society. Levinson (1986) described it as a turning point that entailed letting go of one aspect of oneself to make room for another. This period of relative instability modified the roles, routines, assumptions, and relationships of my informants, more often than not making their transition to civilian society an arduous (Anderson et al., 2012).

Josselson (1996) argued that some women are capable of playing powerful roles in society and should not be constrained by the jealousy or judgment of others. These ideas concur with my informants' narrative in regard to their workplace tribulations, with having to deal with jealousy and aggression from coworkers and bosses who have never experienced comparable levels of responsibility or leadership. Identity development is imperative for African American women who have been historically marginalized and made to believe that they are less worthy than white people. Many researchers are vulnerable to criticism in this area, because their models fail to identify social issues endemic to the African American experience (Gooden, 1989).

Relationship to Current Research

Some of the current research that focuses on military veterans or women as a cohort supported my findings. Studies have shown that military veterans have difficulties as they return to civilian society with the goal of continuing their education. Researchers find that military veterans have a difficult time with college professors and nonveteran peers and perceive that they do not understand military life and know or care little about

what wartime service entails. Current findings indicate that some veterans quickly tire of campus life, because of all the bureaucratic red tape. Ghosh and Fouad (2016) and Norman et al. (2015) found that veterans face many unique challenges after they enroll in postsecondary institutions and discover they lack the skills needed to successfully navigate academic traditions and demands. While these claims were reflected in part by the women I interviewed, the majority completed their education 10 to 20 years ago and may have forgotten the quantity of nuisance they had to abide. Many also completed their master's degrees through online programs and did not experience the constraints and prejudices of academia on a daily basis.

Pellegrino and Hoggan (2015) claimed that military veterans have found it difficult to simultaneously manage home life, school, and career. These claims are reflective of what my informants described as their most significant challenge. They told me that they have had to depended on a network of family, friends, and coworkers to help them through the difficult times. Kayla, Lacy, and Rehana described that although they managed to stay afloat, self-care was the area that suffered most. They failed to practice a daily regimen of physical exercise and meditation and pushed themselves too hard all the way through. When asked how they got through, most replied, "I just did it."

Mulhall (2009) discovered that female veterans' support services are not on a par with those of men, and what services were available seemed to be geared toward the latter. Greer (2017) claimed that obtaining meaningful employment and finding fulfilling work related to the importance that women place on their work-life, which directly affects their resilience, self-efficacy, and balance. These ideals are also reflective of

recurring comments from the women that I interviewed. Nine of the 12 reported that they wanted meaningful and rewarding jobs reflective of their interest, training and experience. While it did not emerge as one of my key themes, it surfaced as a provocative subtheme worthy of further research.

DiRamio et al. (2008) found that female veterans needed to inculcate effective study habits, learn to manage their finances, and to connect with nonveteran peers. These claims partially coincide with my findings. They align in regard to the importance of connecting with non-veteran peers and in developing effective study habits. When DiRamio's et al. study was conducted, they did not take into consideration their subjects' ancillary roles as mothers, wives, students, and full-time employees, all of which must have made it even more difficult to develop personal relationships. In retrospect, it could be that the female veterans in the present study are older and more mature than soldiers who stayed in the military for a short time and enroll in institutions of higher education shortly after discharge. Also, these findings may differ, especially if DiRamio's participants lived on campus and experienced the social aspects of campus life.

Naphan and Elliott (2015) and Osborne (2014) argued that veterans entering an academic environment have trouble coping with the absence of hierarchical structures and may lack fundamental study skills. The authors also contend that veterans leave behind roles that were essential to their identities and are obliged to find replacements. Seemingly these results coincide with my findings, because over half the women I interviewed told me they had to make adjustments in their everyday lives, as they missed the structure, the camaraderie, and the sensation of having common goals and vision that

the Army provided. Half of my informants also described personal challenges with civilian employers who did not share the same work ethics, which caused them to be less confident in their leaders. They articulated having to deal with the insecurities of coworkers and bosses who did not tolerate women speaking frankly about the issues at hand. These and other challenges made transition difficult for women who had served in leadership positions and who were accustomed to making difficult decisions regarding how to support an army at war only to find themselves sidelined from career paths open to white men and women. In that same regard, Jones (2013) claimed that one of the most significant challenges that student-veterans faced when they departed military service was the process of adapting to civilian life. He argued that it was similar to "leaving the priesthood" (Jones, 2013, p. 12), because these veterans were not just leaving a jobs; they were leaving behind identities acquired in a more orderly and predictable setting. Junger (2016) also argued that American service members have a difficult time with reintegration after wartime service, because that they return home with the realization that they live in a society that is "at war with itself" (p. 125).

Finally, Winkle-Wagner (2015) in her review of 119 quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods studies determined that, for an African American woman, the formula for college success resided in three areas: the role of the individual self (self-efficacy, motivation, and academic self-concept), the influence of relationships (peers and family), and the role that the institutions they attend play by hiring positive academic mentors and making support programs available. She also revealed that African American women held themselves responsible for their college success, placing minimal emphasis on the

importance of their relationships and the institutions they attend (Winkle-Wagner, 2015). This claim was reflective of what I heard from the African American female veterans I interviewed. It also aligns with the findings of Reppert et al. (2014) and Kyriakidou (2012) regarding how African American women view their self-efficacy and their journey toward academic success. Some have relied on family and friend support, but the majority faced their challenges alone with an inherent belief in their ability to succeed, as suggested by Winkle-Wagner's findings.

Limitations of the Study

Many of my research limitations were intentional. I required my informants to have served in the U.S. Army during the periods of warfare in the Middle East and to have completed at least one year of academic course work at an institution of higher education. The informant population consisted of two former military officers, nine former noncommissioned officers, and one enlisted soldier with varying levels of responsibility and years of service. These female veterans had distinct areas of concentrations, military occupational specialties, and rank, that may present some challenges when it comes to generalizability and transferability with other African American female veterans currently enrolled in institutions of higher education, or female veterans enrolled at the same school and have developed different worldviews. I used social media, vis-à-vis, word-of-mouth and snowball sampling as the conduits to sample selection. Although this approach provided me with a variety of informants, it did not provide me with the opportunity to interview students who are currently enrolled. Also, the majority of my informants completed their education 10-20 years ago and may not

remember the details that enabled their transition. They may also not recall the network of support that enabled their successful transition. In addition, five of the 12 informants attended satellite schools on military installations and their experiences may not be reflective of student experiences at traditional schools. Although the results indicated areas of repeated commonalities for African American female veterans in general, information regarding the size of the school, number of graduates, or the economic income of the region or students enrolled could not be discerned.

As a retired military officer with a career that covered three decades, I acknowledge that in so far as my background is in some ways similar to that of my informants, there is the possibility of bias. To control the bias, I did not interview anyone who had previously served under my command as a military officer, or when I was a civilian government employee and teacher, attended my classes. I kept my personal opinions to myself and only asked questions that were approved by my committee and the Walden IRB. I did not add any personal observations during interviews so as not to influence or skew informant responses. When I transcribed their narratives into text, I only wrote what informants said, not what I thought they implied. When something they said was unclear, I followed up with a telephone call or a text message, asking her to clarify it. Finally, I gave each participant the opportunity to review a transcript of her interview to ensure that it was accurate.

Another limitation of this study is that, although I had allocated 120 minutes to conduct the interviews, the majority did not have two successive hours available, preferring lunchtime interviews or interviews immediately following their workday.

Also, while the geographical focus of my study was Central Virginia, three of my informants came from other states. This necessitated telephone interviews that prevented me from observing their nonverbal communication. In each case, I was particularly conscious of the significance of the respondent's inflection, laughter, tonal variations, and periods of silence.

Recommendations

Because there is a paucity of research about female veterans and even fewer studies of African American female veterans, I believe this will be only the first of several such studies to bear my name and I encourage other scholars to join me. For these reasons, I recommend that future researchers consider why African American women feel that they have not received the respect that they deserve in the larger U.S. culture, and what are the consequences resulting from their beliefs? I also recommend that future researchers consider studying institutions that have a prize-winning veteran support office, and that is more aligned with meeting the needs of student veterans. I recommend that future researchers consider studying student veterans who are currently enrolled, and who are closer in age and experience to traditional college students. Also, because some of the informants articulated issues regarding PTSD, I believe it would be worthwhile for someone who has more time and institutional knowledge to study how higher education can implement programs to better support their needs. Finally, I also recommend that when researching military personnel, it would be worth expanding on my research because it was a small sample, and many were past their student years.

Implications for Social Change

The results of this study could benefit the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs as African American women represent the largest minority group of women serving in the U.S. Army. The offices of admissions, provost, and student affairs could benefit from this study as the number of veterans enrolling in institutions of higher education will continue to increase in the coming years, according to the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (2016). Financial aid and student services offices in our institutions of higher education should also be aware of the financial and social challenges that these women deal with on a daily basis and implement programs to better assist them.

Other African American female veterans could benefit by reading how this cohort managed to overcome issues regarding single parenthood, meaningful employment, effective budgeting, and eliciting community support. Such awareness might lead to students graduating and experiencing academic success and increased self-esteem. All of this sheds light on larger societal issues such as race and gender disparity.

Conclusion

What inspired my sense of purpose in this research and my ability to continue was my desire to help women realize their goals of obtaining a college degree. Women often sacrifice the opportunity to continue their education so as to provide for their children, spouses, or elderly parents often putting the needs of others ahead of their own. This study highlighted the experiences of African American female veterans and discerned how they overcame social, emotional, and financial challenges as they juggled the

competing demands of everyday life. It also examined whether they believed that faculty and staff helped or hindered their academic success. It also examined how this cohort of female veterans implemented strategies to deal with change described in Schlossberg's et al. (1989,1995 & 2012) adult transition theory and Josselson (1987 & 1996) in the theory of identity development. Finally, this study adds to the body of knowledge as it fills a gap in the literature that articulates the concerns of African American female veterans who stayed the course and served their country.

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Appendix: Interview Questions

Research/Interview Questions:

RQ1: How do African American female veterans seeking a higher education degree perceive their social, emotional, and financial needs as they transition from a structured military environment to a less formal college setting?

Interview Questions:

1) What factors were important in your decision to enroll in an institution of higher education to pursue a college degree?
    a) Can you provide me with specific examples(s)?
    b) Do you receive G.I. Bill benefits to attend school?
    c) Were tuition and fees a factor in your decision to attend your school?
2) How would you describe your academic readiness to attend college?
    a) Did you have the prerequisites courses and skills to attend college?
    b) Did your school provide you with the academic skills to transfer to a 4-year school if you first enrolled in a community college?
    c) Were there things you didn't expect about going back to school?
    d) Where their challenges in transition between the structured military environment and your school?
    e) Can you tell me about them?
    f) What were they?
    g) How has your experience here made you feel as a woman?
    h) What about your experiences as a veteran-turned-student?

3) Do you feel that you belong at your school?
    a) Who or what made you feel welcomed?
    b) What prevented you from feeling a part of your campus community?
    c) How did it compare to your first days in the military?
    d) What did you do to cope with the situation in which you found yourself?

RQ2: What have these African American female veterans perceived that faculty and staff have done to help or hinder their academic success?

Interview Questions:

1) Has faculty or staff supported or hindered you in your academic success?
    a) If so, can you tell me how have they supported you?
    b) How have they hindered you?
    c) Oh, how about staff?
    d) What about adaptation strategies?
    e) Were you experiences in the Army applicable here?
2) Can you tell me about any experiences you've had that you think may have helped you to be successful, (e.g., like meeting with other vets on campus or attending a focus group intended to assist veteran students)?