2018

The Readjustment Experiences of Single Women Returning from Combat in Iraq and Afghanistan

Joanie Rainey
Walden University

Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

This is to certify that the doctoral dissertation by

Joanie T. Rainey

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
and that any and all revisions required by
the review committee have been made.

Review Committee
Dr. Anne Hacker, Committee Chairperson,
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Dr. Joyce Haines, Committee Member,
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Dr. Mark Stallo, University Reviewer,
Public Policy and Administration Faculty

Chief Academic Officer
Eric Riedel, Ph.D.

Walden University
2018

Abstract

The Readjustment Experiences of Single Women Returning from Combat in Iraq and Afghanistan

by

Joanie T. Rainey

MS, George Washington University, 2005

BA, Morgan State University, 2003

AA, Central Texas College, 1986

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Policy Administration

Walden University

November 2018

Abstract

On January 24, 2013, the Secretary of Defense rescinded the 1994-ground combat exclusion policy to integrate women into all occupations previously closed to them, particularly special operations, infantry, and armored divisions. This change in policy required military policy makers to establish gender-neutral standards for physically demanding jobs to meet the military's needs. Extensive research exists on the readjustment experiences of male veterans and families adapting to new lives after a service member returns from combat, yet the experiences of single women returning from combat remain empirically unexplored. The purpose of this study was to fill the gap in this area of military research. This phenomenological study used Ingram, Schneider, and DeLeon's theory of the social construction of target populations and policy design to explore the ways in which single women returning from combat perceived their social construction changed as they reintegrated into their units or transitioned from the military back into their communities of origin. A purposive sample was drawn using snowball sampling. Data from interviews with 13 single women who served in combat were analyzed using Moustakas' modified version of van Kaam's method. Seven key themes emerged from the data**:** anticipation and perceptions of deployment in a combat zone, as well as readjustment experiences including social activities, people who influenced readjustment, value derived, needs, and social interactions. Positive social change may occur by raising the awareness among military leaders, military scholars, and policy makers about the need for policies and further research that could possibly aid future generations of single women returning from combat.

The Readjustment Experiences of Single Women Returning from Combat in Iraq and Afghanistan

by

Joanie T. Rainey

MS, George Washington University, 2005

BA, Morgan State University, 2003

AA, Central Texas College, 1986

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Public Policy and Policy Administration

Walden University

November 2018

Dedication

I dedicate this project to my mother, Dorothy Louise Solomon-Davis, who always knew I would someday finish the journey; I only wish I had done so before her death. I know she is in heaven still cheering me on. May you always rest in His perfect peace.

I also dedicate this project to the women who shared their personal stories and made this research project come alive; finishing this journey would not have been possible without you. Thank you for your sacrifices, both professional and personal; I shall forever be in your debt!

Acknowledgments

God, without Him, this would not have been possible. He deserves all my praise!

Lilly, you pushed me to finish my bachelor's degree in 2000 and never stopped pushing and cheering me on. I am eternally grateful for your friendship.

Dr. Hacker and Dr. Haines, thanks! You refused to let me quit, and you helped me get to the finish line. I will keep your kindness and encouragement forever etched in my memory. I will not forget what you did for me, and, in turn, I will do unto others.

Cousins Doris and Bob, thanks for never giving up on me.

Ms. Lucille, thanks for all the encouragement and laughter.

Susan, when I broke both my hands, thanks for helping me heal properly, keeping me encouraged and motivated.

Ms. Passaro, without your skills as an accomplished librarian I would have simply died from the exhaustion of having to find research articles on my own.

Kay, thanks for the great hugs and smiles; you will always be my favorite girl!

Jessica, Mary, and Michial, thanks for your invaluable support and friendship.

Latonia, Shelia, Tyeara, and Connie, "aka" BBGs, you had my back, never doubted me, listened to me whine, and always made me laugh, I love you…BBGs 4-Life!

"Coach" Cason, thanks for teaching me new ways to train my mind and body.

Finally, yet most importantly, thanks to my wonderful and loving family for checking on me and understanding when I missed all the wonderful events you planned and enjoyed in my absence. (The Facebook updates and pictures were awesome.) I love you all enormously!

Table of Contents

List of Tables

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

In 2013, during a "Champions of Change" event at the White House, First Lady Michelle Obama honored 14 women veterans who, after serving honorably, continue to serve as leaders at the local, state, and federal levels of government. The First Lady told the honorees:

> You all are part of a long line of women who have broken barriers, defied expectations, and served this country with unparalleled courage and determination. You've been on the front lines, often in the line of fire, and generation after generation, women like you have proven you not only serve alongside men, you lead them as well. (Lyle, 2013, para. 3)

Women became integral members of the U.S. Armed Forces following the end of the draft and the establishment of an all-volunteer force (AVF) in 1973; however, they were always a minority (Kamarck, 2016). During the Iraqi and Afghanistan wars, even though their roles expanded beyond their normal specialties and occupations, the full integration of women into the Armed Forces was not yet evident because of the long-standing policies that banned women from serving in direct ground combat units (Women in International Security, 2017). While the 1994 rules of engagement (RoE) policy restricted women from direct ground combat, women assumed more combat-related roles in Iraq and Afghanistan than at any other time in history (Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 2012). These roles included, but were not limited to, commanding battalions, patrolling dangerous areas to gather intelligence, guarding bases

and prisoners, combat medics and handling human remains, military police, explosive ordinance personnel, convoy truck drivers, and other duties that did not involve direct ground combat.

Although their roles were not combat-related, in some cases, many of the women performing these duties came under attack from enemy fire. They served without the combat infantry training provided to the men who served beside them, yet they were able to defend themselves and their comrades (Mattocks et al., 2012; Monahan & Neidel-Greenlee, 2010). During these firefights, some women sustained injuries, became prisoners of war, or were killed in action while fulfilling their service commitment (U.S. Army Official Report on 507th Maintenance Company, 2003). After more than a decade of war, in January 2013, Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta announced his decision to rescind the 1994 ground combat exclusion policy and the integration of women into occupational fields to the maximum extent possible (Goldberg, 2016; Hardison, Hosek, & Saavedra, 2015; McSally, 2007). Secretary Panetta's announcement changed the long-standing policy that kept women out of direct ground combat units, particularly special operations, infantry, and armored divisions. This shift in policy pointed not only towards the evolving role that women have played in the nation's defense, but also to a paradigm shift in the full acceptance and integration of women into the Armed Forces.

As the number of women entering the military continued to grow, the various policies, legal restrictions, societal resistance, and attitudes that previously limited the direct ground combat unit assignment options available to women have decreased (McSally, 2007). With varying degrees of both speed and success, many of the

occupational barriers routinely encountered by women in the military are beginning to dissolve (Schaefer et al., 2015). By viewing policy changes in the military in the context of social change and policy design, as it relates to the use of women in combat, researchers and policy makers can better understand, appreciate, and respond to the increasing role of single women in executing the military mission in future combat operations. Although there have been numerous studies conducted on the challenges and concerns of married service members, single parents, and dual-military couples returning from deployment (Institute of Medicine [IoM], 2010, 2013) in a combat zone, there remains a void of comparable research that involves single, never married, and nonparenting women, based on my review of the literature. To provide single women the appropriate services and resources they need following combat exposure, military leaders and policy makers should initiate research documenting their specific and unique readjustment experiences and needs. In addition, research that specifically targets single women will add to experts' understanding of the factors that may affect these women's readjustment and well-being following future deployments.

Readjustment plays a vital role in a service member's (SM's) transition home after time served in a war zone. For some, homecoming and reunions are not always easy; nor do they always go smoothly, or provide the type of relief SMs might expect. Depending on the length of the deployment, returning combat veterans must get to know their families, friends, and communities all over again; the readjustment process takes time. For instance, according to Mattocks et al. (2012), simple everyday tasks like driving down the highway become problematic for many service members dealing with the

lingering effects of war. Others have nightmares and feel their friends and family members would not understand what they have experienced, so rather than reach out to share their difficult memories, they keep them to themselves. For service members working in the medical field sharing their memories of the horrific damage of what they have witnessed to human bodies while working in trauma units is especially difficult because treating people who have been blown up is not something that is relatable to any experience most people outside of the medical field experience.

Historically, the U.S. Armed Forces exclusively focused on the readjustment experiences and needs of men. Romaniuk and Kidd (2018) emphasized that in a number of recent studies conducted within the last 4-years, recruiting 10 or more participants, researchers noted that samples were mostly homogeneous, consisting predominantly or entirely of male veteran participants from a range of conflict eras. Approximately, 9 of the 12 studies conducted in the U.S. focused primarily on the Iraqi and Afghanistan wars or post-9/11 era. Furthermore, in the limited number of mixed gender studies following war zone exposure ("Returning Home," 2014; Street, Gradus, Giasson, Vogt, & Resick, 2013; Woodhead, Wessely, Jones, Fear, & Hatch, 2012), researchers did not make a distinction between those who were married, single with children, or single never married and nonparenting in their sampling of women. Leslie and Koblinsky (2017) explained, when examining how women veterans of the Iraqi and Afghanistan wars are coping it is important to understand the sociocultural aspects of gender. In their study on the return to civilian life and family reintegration and readjustment, the authors noted that one third of the women deployed in support of the wars were either married or in a relationship, and

slightly more than one half were mothers. Equally important, 44% of the women who participated in the five focus groups were single. The omission of this subpopulation of the military from programs and studies suggests that modern-day women may not fit into the traditional framework of the military.

A plethora of Department of Defense (DOD) programs and policies exist that support SMs facing deployment-related issues. In general, such programs and policies tend to focus solely on married, heterosexual couples and their children (IoM, 2013). Consequently, few researchers have examined issues as they relate to single SMs (IoM, 2013; Maffucci & Frazier, 2015; Mankowski, Haskell, Brandt & Mattocks, 2015; "Returning Home," 2014). The number of peer-reviewed studies has grown on the impact deployments have had on those deployed in support of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan (Dutra et al., 2011; Hoge, Clark, & Castro, 2007; Maguen, Luxton, Skopp & Madden, 2012), yet a gap remains in studies related to single SMs. Because of this, single SMs are an underserved and underrepresented subpopulation of the military. In addition, the communities in which this population transition back into when their tour of military service is over has caused community leaders to raise concerns as to whether single SMs have leaner, or less supportive, social networks than those of their married counterparts (IoM, 2013). The committee further concluded that, in the absence of strong support networks and social activities, behavioral health issues may surface among this young single population of SMs returning from deployment. Researchers also recommended that DoD expand its definition of "family" to include the full constellation of military families and extend support to "nontraditional" households, which include unmarried

partners, same-sex couples, single parents, and stepfamilies ("Returning Home," 2014).

According to a report published by the Disabled American Veterans (2014), the challenges of readjustment to postmilitary life affect women differently than men and should receive attention from local communities and the federal government that is at least comparable to that received by men. As Thomas and Plummer-Taylor (2015) and Junger (2015) have noted, any loss to one's social community may cause significant problems during transition. Collectively, challenges like financial instability, family caregiving responsibilities, and lack of social support contribute to stress injury and depression rates that are over 2.3 times higher for women veterans leaving active duty than for male veterans (Thomas et al., 2015; Washington & Yano, 2013). In specifically addressing the knowledge gap related to single, never married, and nonparenting U.S. women returning from combat, this study serves as a precursor to future research studies regarding this subpopulation of the military and the current topic under investigation.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to focus on the actual readjustment experiences and needs of single women after exposure to combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. Another intended purpose was to fill a gap in the scholarly literature to obtain a better understanding of the phenomenon under investigation as experienced firsthand by this population. In future combat operations, policies restricting women from serving in direct ground combat units will no longer be applicable; therefore, women assigned to combat arms at the battalion and brigade level in infantry and armored divisions, Ranger Regiments, combat engineer, field artillery, and low altitude air defense units (Women In International Society, 2017) may face a new series of challenges.

Perhaps the most obvious challenge in the total integration of women in combat may be a culture shift as previously closed all-male career fields open to women. Other challenges may include combat-associated trauma and stress, which can negatively impact physical, mental, and emotional well-being, and social support in protecting women against posttraumatic stress disorder (Zagorski, 2016). In view of these policy changes, as well as projected military and societal changes, I sought to gain insight into the perspective of single women following deployment in a combat zone.

Such knowledge may be useful to policy makers in planning future readjustment programs and services that address the needs of single women. This study may provide military leaders, policy makers, health care professionals, and community leaders an opportunity to play a vital role in developing a multidisciplinary support network system capable of easing the transition home for single women. This type of support system for these women may discourage isolation, provide recommendations on coping with readjustment issues, and the stressful memories of having served in a combat zone in the years following their return.

Background

During President Lincoln's second inaugural address to the nation, he pledged America's solemn obligation "to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan" (Mulhall, 2009, p. 1). In support of this initiative, Lincoln authorized the establishment of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). More than 149 years later, women too are engaged in the defense of the nation, having served in every U.S. military conflict since the American Revolution. However, the VA paid little heed to

the specific needs of women veterans for much of its early history (Downes, 2012; Murdoch et al., 2006), and there is only scarce research focused on women veterans, based on my review of the literature. In the 19th century, female gender was often an exclusion criterion in research studies, and women veterans' voices in research were muted at best (Frayne et al., 2013; Thomas, Haring, McDaniel, Fletcher, & Albright, 2017). In the 20th and 21st centuries, research studies regarding women in the military are more inclusive and positive towards women and their contributions to the defense of the nation.

For instance, with the opening of its doors to the general public in the fall of 1997, the Women in Military Service for America Memorial acknowledged the accomplishments of more than two million U.S. women who had served in domestic and international crises since the Revolutionary War. The Education Center within the memorial tells the stories of these forerunners and then focuses on women of the 20th century who have served both in and with the military in ever-expanding roles (Biesecker, 2002). In addition, the vast majority of indicators in the force today recognized the role and contributions that women made in the last 13 years of the Iraqi and Afghanistan wars. Commencing in 2013 and culminating in 2015, TRADOC led a *Gender Integration Study* examining the cultural and institutional factors affecting the integration of women into previously closed occupational skills and units (Cone, 2016; TRADOC Analysis Center, 2013). This study included extensive research that provided insight into full gender integration into the all aspects of the Armed Forces.

Despite the VA's achievements to improve its support, services, and research

efforts regarding its fastest growing segment of veterans, women (Disabled American Veterans, 2014; Leslie & Koblinsky, 2017; Women Veterans Report, 2017), the chasm between existing resources and services for men and essential resources for women remains wide, according to experts (Roberts, Kovacich, & Rivers, 2018). In comparison to the deployment of men, the deployment of women creates unique and very different effects that remain unaddressed. Since the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783), women have been involved in the defense of the United States (Biesecker, 2002; Sherrow, 2007). Their participation in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is no different than in previous conflicts; yet this marks the first time in U.S. history in which large numbers of women have deployed into a combat zone and actually engaged the enemy. As a result, it may take researchers years before they learn of the long-term effects of the exposure combat has on women and what their readjustment experiences and needs are following their return from Iraq and Afghanistan.

Long-term readjustment in this study encompasses a multitude of issues ranging from medical treatment and health care, payment of disability compensation, pensions, and other benefits. In addition, other areas of concern include reintegration assistance, counseling, and the statistical documentation necessary to move veterans seamlessly from the DOD payroll into the VA for medical care, and a smoother process for filing VA disability claims (Bilmes, 2007, 2013; Edwards, 2014, 2015; Edwards & MacLean, 2014; Geiling, Rosen, & Edwards, 2012; Smith, 2013). Calculating the total cost of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan necessitates consideration of the potential disability benefits distributed to veterans over the remainder of their life span and to their dependents.

Without careful attention, or dedicated sufficient resources, the next three to four decades may potentially have a long-term impact on society and the government's financial ability to take care of the significant costs and requirements involved in caring for service members (SMs) returning home from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Women are the fastest growing segment of military veterans (Disabled American Veterans, 2014; Frayne, et al., 2014; Harris et al., 2014; Leslie & Koblinsky, 2017; Women Veterans Report, 2017); yet a review of the available literature to date reveals that while their numbers are steadily increasing, women remain the most understudied and highly trauma exposed group of veterans (Dobie et al., 2004; Lehavot, Hoerster, Nelson, Jakupcak, & Simpson, 2012; Mankowski et al., 2015). As often expected, following most wars the U.S. may face difficult trade-offs in funding when it comes to dealing with the long-term obligations involving combat operations and the aftermath of taking care of those impacted by the harmful exposure to war. In short, the dividend for peace is costly, and the legacy of funding the Iraqi and Afghanistan wars may persist for decades, which will also include women's health care.

In support of this fast-growing population of veterans, this study offers an opportunity to learn about the readjustment experiences and needs of single female veterans, in particular those who are returned from deployment. Findings may provide insight regarding the expansion and development of veteran-centered programs and services to meet these veterans' unique needs. The paucity of research on single, never married, and nonparenting women returning from a combat zone makes it difficult to predict what their common readjustment experiences may be. Therefore, research

following single women after deployment in a combat zone is crucial, especially since so little is known regarding this military subpopulation and the topic under investigation.

Problem Statement

The most profound unforeseen and unplanned consequence the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks had on the United States were the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Previous researchers studying the stressors of combat have focused on men; no studies have been conducted, based on my review of the literature, which solely examined the readjustment experiences and needs of single U.S. military women returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. According to Myre (2013), approximately 280,000 women were deployed in support of the Iraqi and Afghanistan wars. The death toll among women for both campaigns totaled 166, and approximately 1,033 women were wounded (Defense Manpower Data Center, 2017; Kamarck, 2016). These figures have reshaped the social construction of society's view of women in today's military. Earlier studies conducted by the IoM (2010, 2013) following the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan focused on the readjustment experiences and needs of military families and married SMs. In its 2013 study, the IoM acknowledged that single SMs remain the most understudied subpopulation of the military. To date, there appears to be no current literature about the readjustment experiences and needs of single women returing from deployment in a combat zone, according to my review of the literature. Thus, I believe that my study is the first to explore this phenomenon in a research context.

After deployment, the period of reintegration and reunion with family and friends can be a time of joy, celebration, and relief. At the same time, however, it can be difficult

and challenging. Although in this phenomenological study I sought to understand the readjustment experiences and needs of single women, it is imperative to note that the post-deployment concerns of female veterans are no worse than they are for men even though their roles and responsibilities may differ while they are serving in a combat zone. Single women exposed to various war stressors may potentially be left without adequate resources, coping skills, and social support systems to readjust to their normal former lives. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the readjustment experiences and needs of this target population (single women) after deployment in combat to Iraq and Afghanistan and fill a gap in the scholarly literature that provides a better understanding of the experiences of this subpopulation of the military.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore, from the perspective of a sample of 13 single women, whether current postdeployment tools and strategies are appropriate in meeting the readjustment needs of this segment of the military population returning from combat. As positions once closed to women begin to open (Women In International Society, 2017), the findings may highlight practical measures that support the personal well-being of thousands of single women returning from future combat operations. In addition, this area of research may offer single women returning from combat coping strategies to sustain healthy social networks and relationships. Likewise, the population under study may be encouraged and motivated to seek psychological counseling as needed in the readjustment phase whether they are still serving on active duty, or transitioning back into their communities of origin after their military tour of duty ends.

Research Question

I sought to answer one research question for this study: How do single women returning from combat perceive their social construction has changed as it relates to their readjustment experiences and needs, compared to men in their unit, or communities as they transition from the military? In gathering and analyzing the data for this study, I sought to contribute to the body of knowledge on the unique challenges' women face in the readjustment phase of their long journey home. The primary goal of this study was to determine whether there are existing gaps in the programs and services that may fall short in meeting the readjustment needs of single, never married, and nonparenting women returning from combat.

Ultimately, the findings may potentially serve as a catalyst in policy changes to close the gaps between programs and services available for women in general and single women in particular. To learn as much as possible about the phenomena as experienced by the participants, I used interview prompts to elicit useful data to lead participants towards providing a rich substantive description of their experiences. The research question and interview prompts provided a link to the theoretical foundation used in this study. Chapter 3 contains a detailed description of the complete interview protocol including the research question and the interview prompts.

Theoretical Foundation

The theory of social construction of target populations and policy design provided the theoretical foundation for this study (Ingram & Schneider, 2005; Ingram, Schneider, & deLeon, 2007, Neshkova & Guo, 2016; Schneider & Ingram, 1993, 1997, 2005;

Schneider, Ingram, & deLeon, 2014; Smith & Larimer, 2009). Schneider and Ingram (1997) understood social construction to mean the "varying ways in which realities are shaped" (p. 73). To understand the development and implications of policy design the theory incorporates the social construction and power of target populations. The theoretical foundation serves to evaluate the findings of the readjustment experiences and needs of single women returning from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. In addition, the theory provided the perspective used to explore the research question: How do single women returning from combat perceive their social construction has changed, as related to their readjustment experiences and needs, when compared to males in their unit, or within their communities as they transition from the military? The incorporation of social construction of target populations as part of policy design helped to explain why public policy, which can have such a positive effect on society, sometimes and often deliberately fails in its nominal purpose. For example, public policy may fail to solve important public problems, perpetuate injustice, fail to support democratic institutions, and produce an unequal citizenship (Ingram, Schneider, & deLeon, 2007, Schneider, Ingram, & deLeon, 2014; 2014).

The intent, as with all laws, is that each citizen is presumed equal, yet the construct of some polices by their sheer nature tend to benefit some while causing undue hardships to others. Because of this, the theory of social construction of target populations sometimes depart from the typical reproduction of power and social constructions to introduce change in institutions, power relationships, and target groups and populations (Ingram et. al., 2007, Schneider et al., 2014). To illustrate this point, the

last bastion of male dominance, the Armed Forces, no longer has a separate policy for the assignment of women, yet it took well over a century for this change to occur. On April 1, 2016, all combat positions and assignments to direct ground combat units once closed to women now allows them to serve in more than 200,000 new roles including Army Rangers, Green Berets, Navy SEALS, Marine Corps and Air Force Para-Jumpers (Burylo, 2016).

Advocates of the theory of social construction and policy design contend that it serves as a leading theory in understanding the policy process and incorporates the social construction and power of target populations to understand the development and implications of policy design (Pierce et al., 2014). Schneider and Ingram (1993, 1997, 2005), Ingram, Schneider, & deLeon (2007), and Schneider, Ingram, & deLeon (2014) insisted that the point at which the theory of social construction and policy design differs from other policy process theories is that it seeks to explain why some groups receive recognition as more advantageous than other groups independent of traditional notions of political power. The authors further explained how policy designs can reinforce or alter such advantages. Still, in other studies, a wide-range of scholars, authors, and researchers across a variety of policy domains, where meaning varies in a generalizable context, consistently applied or referenced the theory of social construction of target populations and policy design. More details related to the theory appear in Chapter 2.

In the context of evaluating the findings of the readjustment experiences and needs of single women returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, the feed forward proposition

in the political environment of the social construction and policy design theory provide opportunities that allow for the creation of new policies and politics. This point is especially true within the social construction of military organizations as evident by the longstanding pattern of male dominance and power relations slowly fading away. In particular, the gender demographics of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan changed significantly. While on paper women were not officially assigned to ground combat units in support of the contingencies in Iraq and Afghanistan, more women than ever before deployed. Because of this, many of them were forced to make direct contact with enemy forces than at any other time in the history of the U.S. For this reason, military leaders and policy makers can certainly argue that their ability to handle themselves in such hostile environments may very well have contributed to lifting the ban that, on paper, prohibited women from assignments in direct ground combat units.

Nature of the Study

For this study, I took a qualitative phenomenological approach as a means to analyze the experiences and needs of single U.S. women who served in combat between the war years 2003 and 2013. The phenomenological approach allowed for the examination of the readjustment experiences and needs of single women returning from Iraq and Afghanistan from their perspective. Using this approach provided the basis for interpreting the meaning and essence of the participants' experiences, as described by them, from the original description of the phenomenon (Polit and Beck, 2007, 2017). In other words, using phenomenology as a method allowed insight from the first-person perspective for all who experienced the phenomenon related to the topic of interest. This

perspective provided an opportunity to describe and understand the meaning and importance of the participants' experience through a cluster of various themes, both common and individually.

Definitions

Although several of the terms used are common and well known, the principle audience for this study may not be members of the Armed Forces who are familiar with the complexity of language in the military setting. For the purposes of this study, the following terms are important to define:

Combat: An individual, or unit engaged in a physical and violent conflict with another individual, or unit considered to be an enemy with an inherent risk of capture, or death in contested territory, waters, or airspace (Center for Military Readiness, 2004, "Combat, Cohesion," para. 1).

Combat zone (CZ): An area the president of the United States designates by executive order in accordance with section 112 of title 26, United States Code (USC), as an area in which U.S. Armed Forces are, or have engaged in combat. In this context, in general, the CZ is generally designated in response to a national emergency and involves persistent, violent confrontations with hostile forces. Usually, an area becomes a CZ, or ceases to be a CZ on the dates the President designates the CZ by Executive order (DoD Instruction 1340.25, 2010).

Direct ground combat: Engaging an enemy on the ground with individual, or crew served weapons while being exposed to hostile fire and to a high probability of direct physical contact with the hostile force's personnel. It takes place well forward on

the battlefield while locating and closing with the enemy to defeat them by fire, maneuver, or shock effect (Barry, 2013, p. 20; Burrelli, 2013, p. 4).

Policy design: The substantive content of policy: the problem definitions, goals, benefits, burdens, target populations, rationales, social constructions, tools, rules, and the other empirical elements of policy (Cairney, 2016a, 2016b; Schneider & Ingram, 1993; Schneider, Ingram, & deLeon, 2014).

Single women veterans: Defined by the researcher refers to women in the military who have never been married, have no children, and are non-parenting. In addition, it refers to women who have transitioned from the military and remained single for approximately six (6) months after their transition.

Social construction: The stereotypes about particular groups of people created by politics, culture, socialization, history, the media, literature, religion, and the like. Policy makers often use various evaluative dimensions, both positive and negative, to portray groups. There are four "types" of social constructions: advantaged (powerful groups with positive images), contenders (powerful groups with negative images), dependents (powerless groups with positive images), and deviants (powerless groups with negative images) (Cairney, 2016a, 2016b; Schneider & Ingram, 1993, 1997, 2005; Ingram, Schneider, & deLeon, 2007; Schneider, Ingram, & deLeon, 2014).

Assumptions

The assumptions upon which a study rests usually flow from the research methods employed and are essential to the meaning of the research conducted. A clear assumption statement prevents any misunderstandings of the material bearing on the problem

(Leedy& Ormrod, 2010; Ormston, Spencer, Barnard, & Snape, 2014; Trafimow, 2014). A key assumption of this study is single women returning from combat have different readjustment experiences and needs following deployment than female SMs who are married, or those who are single parents. Other key assumptions underlining this study include: (a) Participants responded honestly to the inquiry into their readjustment experiences and needs, especially those who have exited the military, as the goal was to obtain accurate information; (b) I assumed the interview questions asked provided responses for the group I made inferences to; (c) I assume military leaders and policy makers use of the recommendations would be successful because of the thoroughness of the research and the information provided by those who experienced the phenomenon; (d) I assumed when the request for participants to enroll into the study went out, single women who deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan from all branches of service and ethnic backgrounds would volunteer to participate in the study, as a diverse group of participants were ideal; (e) I assumed active duty SMs would not be concerned about reprisals because of their participation in the study and will not be hesitant about providing honest answers to the interview prompts. Therefore, it was imperative to establish a culture of trust with the participants from the very beginning by reassuring them they would have full anonymity, their interviews would remain confidential, and used only for its intended purpose; and (f) The outcome of this study may serve as a template by military leaders and policy makers to assess the needs of single women who deploy in future military combat operations in support of the nation's defense.

Scope and Delimitations

All research must acknowledge the scope and delimitations, or intentional constrictions placed on the study and serve as the boundaries upon which the study is based (Ellis & Levy, 2010). Although there were delimitations involved in this study, they did not prevent me from conducting a beneficial study that contributed to existing research with new and useful insights. This study involved single women returning from combat zones in Iraq or Afghanistan and delimited to those never married, and non-parenting. My intended focus in conducting the study was to determine from the perspective of single, never married, and non-parenting women whether current post-deployment tools and strategies were appropriate in meeting the readjustment needs of this target population of the military.

I did not intend to recruit married or single women with children, as most of the current research, based on my literature review, following deployment focus on the readjustment needs and strategies of men and families rather than single individuals (IoM, 2013). The exclusion of males from the study stems from society's historical viewpoint, as warfighters, that men defend the nation. Therefore, following previous military conflicts, studies have primarily focused on the readjustment experiences and needs of men (Grieger, 2018). In an effort to close the knowledge gap regarding single women as an understudied population of the military, I recruited 13 single U.S. women who had never been married, nonparenting, and deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan anytime between the war years 2003-2013 to participate in the study.

Limitations

As in the case of assumptions, the limitations of this study might be identified prior to the start of the research project, during, and after data collection, as all research projects contain limitations. Limitations are generally items that are out of the researcher's control (Antonellis & Berry, 2017). Marshall and Rossman (2016) argued there are no perfectly designed studies. The limitations of a study are usually associated with the research methods employed and the conceptional framework and study's design (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). As a qualitative study, an associated limitation is validity and reliability, because qualitative research occurs in a natural setting it is often difficult to replicate studies of this nature (Wiersma, 2000). Discussing these limitations early in the proposal highlights what the study is and is not, its boundaries, and how its results can and cannot contribute to understanding.

On the other hand, the qualitative approach brings the reader closer to the phenomenon under study and qualitative research accommodates different paradigms and different styles of research and research reporting (Bansal & Corley 2011; Dawson & Hjorth, 2012). The signature of qualitative research is its grounding in the phenomenon, and each researcher uncovers the phenomenon in his or her own unique and nonlinear way. Qualitative researchers have considerable latitude in their methods, how they conduct interviews, and the techniques used to analyze data. Thorough communication of the journey gives meaning to the accounts of the data and emergent theory, the quality of the research exercise, the credibility of the researcher, and, ultimately, the trustworthiness of the data (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). From initiating the project to submitting the

manuscript it was critical to document a thorough detailed account of the data sources and analysis.

Study participants encompassed a homogeneous sample of single U.S. women returning from Iraq or Afghanistan. The sample of participants were small and as a phenomenological study, the findings are not necessarily generalizable to all female veterans. In addition, I conducted the study to explore the personal account of the readjustment experiences and needs of single women returning from Iraq and Afghanistan from their perspective. Therefore, in an effort to understand the experiences of single U.S. women returning from a combat zone, future research should follow this subpopulation of the military longitudinally in order to assess their support networks and whether they are adequate, assess whether the deployment stressors of single women differ from those of single men, and if so, in what ways. Finally, the primary limitation of this study, as with any study, is the potential of having missed relevant research material that would add to the body of knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation. In an effort to ensure that the most current and relevant literature was included in the study, consultation with the literature was ongoing, especially at the end of the research project.

Significance

This phenomenological research study is significant for several reasons. Based on my research, studies on the readjustment experiences and needs of single women returning from a combat zone are none existent. Next, this study examined the essence of the participants' experiences through statements from which thematic clusters about the meaning of their readjustment experiences are developed. Third, based on the perspective

of single women, this area of research may offer future generations of single women returning from deployment various coping strategies to sustain healthy social networks and relationships. Finally, the findings resulting from the data analysis may encourage more single women to seek help as needed in the readjustment phase following wartime exposure while still serving on active duty, or within their communities well after their transition from the military. Others who may find the study significant include military and VA health care professionals, federal, state, and local community leaders, military leaders, and policy makers.

Implications for Social Change

In unconventional situations, such as combat, the perspective of U.S. women in combat operations is unique especially since they are an untapped and underappreciated capability on the battlefield. In addition, there are economic implications related to this topic and the price of not capturing key information regarding the readjustment experiences and needs of single women returning from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan may well exceed the cost of sending them there. For instance, those who have difficulty readjusting may have an undermining effect on social networks in the community and difficulty finding and maintaining employment. Some may require treatment for alcohol and substance abuse. Others may develop health and mental health conditions that worsen following their transition from the military because of inadequate coping strategies, resources and assistance, and public assistance in the form of shelter for those who unfortunately become homeless.

Deployment places a unique demand on service members and their well-being.

Because of such a demand, addressing the needs of women earlier following their deployment experiences in combat can provide a more economic and comprehensive approach to implementing effective coordinated programs. Such programs are needed to handle emotional and mental health challenges, provide coping strategies, assistance with access to health care services, and dealing with issues related to readjustment and reintegration. Although the sample size of this study was small and may not be representative of all women seeking services after serving in Iraq and Afghanistan, it does however provide a starting point to raise questions, stimulate other related research, and document the stories of women whose voices may otherwise remain silent and unheard.

Additional research into the long-term effects of combat exposure and the impact on single women is important for several reasons. Chief among these reasons are the historic reversal of centuries of policies that once barred women from serving in and leading infantry soldiers into combat. Following a 30-day congressional notification period, on January 2, 2016, approximately 125,318 additional positions once closed to women were open for recruitment (Secretary of the Army, 2016). This policy change allowed women to seek recruitment into these new roles provided they met the same physical and professional standards as their male counterparts.

Summary

In Chapter 1, a brief overview was provided regarding the various challenges women often faced in support of the Iraqi and Afghanistan wars and the need to conduct a deeper exploration of this phenomenon to capture the meaning and essence of their

experiences. This chapter began with an introduction of the study describing the unprecedented roles women played in lieu of the 1994 rules of engagement (RoE) policy, which restricted the assignment of women to direct ground combat units. A brief background of the study highlighted just how little was known regarding the readjustment experiences and needs of single women returning from a combat zone in Iraq and Afghanistan. A problem statement was also provided along with the purpose, nature of the study, the research question, and how the use of interview prompts would be used to elicit useful data to lead participants towards providing a rich substantive description of their experiences during the data-gathering process.

Also presented in Chapter 1 are the operational definitions, assumptions, scope and delimitations, limitations, significance of the study, implications for social change, and a chapter summary. Chapter 2 consist of an introduction, the literature search strategy and the process used to gather the literature for this study. Also contained in Chapter 2 is the theoretical foundation, literature regarding the selected research method, and concludes with a summary. In Chapter 3 the role of the researcher is described, the research method, design, and the process for analyzing the data, issues of trustworthiness, and the summary. Found in Chapter 4 are the results of the pilot study, the setting in which the data was collected, the data collection and data analysis process, the purpose for obtaining participants' demographic information, evidence of trustworthiness, results of the findings, and the summary. Chapter 5 started with an introduction, interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations for future research opportunities, implications for social change, and the conclusion.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The Women in Military Service for America Memorial contains a very inspiring quote written by a nurse corps officer, First Lieutenant Anne Sosh Brehm (1990), which encapsulates the way in which women felt they too had contributed to the U.S.'s wartime mission, both past and present:

> Let the generations know that women in uniform also guaranteed their freedom. That our resolve was just as great as the brave men who stood among us. And with victory our hearts were just as full and beat just as fast – that the tears fell just as hard – For those we left behind. (109 Congressional Record, 2006, p. E854)

For many decades, women veterans were unrecognized for their contributions in defense of the nation and prohibited from actively serving in combat roles, yet they played an integral part in the U.S. military and its wars. Based on my review of the literature, despite widespread coverage of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, there is scarce data that focuses on single women and their readjustment experiences following exposure to combat. This lack of research is problematic considering the extensive knowledge of the hardships combat veterans face readjusting to their normal former lives following deployment (Herman, & Yarwood, 2014; Koenig, Maguen, Monroy, Mayott, & Seal, 2014; Mobbs, & Bonanno, 2018). The transition from military life, especially following combat, is an on-going process and not a singular event.

Since 2000, the number of women joining the U.S. military significantly

increased as did their presence in operational deployments in which women served in unprecedented roles and in unprecedented ways. While women were identified as noncombatants in the Iraqi and Afghanistan wars, they share the same dangers as active combatants. In addition, the various roles they served in resulted in recognition of their efforts, which came in 2013 in the form of policy changes that opened up hundreds of positions once closed to women including combat roles (Burrelli, 2012; Kamarck, 2016; King, 2013). The most profound impact the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks had on the United States are the wars in Iraq, Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), and Afghanistan, Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). The impact of war is particularly felt in terms of the readjustment experiences of those who deployed in support of these conflicts.

Physically and psychologically, deployments are demanding on both male and female combat veterans. However, conceptualizing a comprehensive approach to women's health and medical needs in deployed environments is important to account for gender-specific health and medical requirements that encompass a wide range of physical and psychological issues, including combat-related injuries (Dye, Eskridge, Tepe, Clouser, & Galarneau, 2016; Trego, Wilson, & Steele, 2010). This approach is important because there are no studies, based on my research, which have focused on examining the readjustment experiences and needs of single U.S. women who served in Iraq and Afghanistan. According to Braun, Kennedy, Sadler, and Dixon (2015), research with military women is often challenged by logistical, cultural, social, ethical, and methodological issues which may hinder exploration of potentially sensitive issues. This qualitative phenomenological study is the first step in exploring the topic under

investigation in a research context.

The purpose of this chapter is to analyze and synthesize the literature relevant to the readjustment experiences and needs of single women who deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. After deployment, the period of reintegration and reunion with family and friends can be a time of joy, celebration, and relief. At the same time, it can be difficult and challenging getting use to those left behind again, which can become overwhelming (Disabled American Veterans, 2014). The post-deployment concerns of female veterans are no worse than they are for men even though they may differ on particular gender issues related to deployment roles and responsibilities, according to researchers (deKleijn, Lagro-Janssen, Canelo, & Yano, 2015; Washington, Bean-Mayberry, Riopelle, & Yano, 2011; Washington, & Yano, 2013).

A large military civilian culture gap exists between women in the military and those who make up the civilian population. Many women in society have very little understanding of the sacrifices that women in the military make on their behalf, especially sacrifices related to defending the nation (Wright, 2018). A review of the literature uncovered many difficulties women in the military face and the gaps relevant to understanding the full readjustment experiences and needs of single women returning from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. Perhaps this study will serve to close the gap regarding the readjustment experiences and needs of single women returning from combat by providing insight about participants' perspectives on their experiences. I sought to gather vital information from 13 participants who were willing and able to share their experiences of the study phenomenon.

The research data collected through the phenomenological interview process served primarily to identify the core meaning and essence (significance) of the participants' experiences from which significant statements, or quotes developed into broader themes. Ultimately, these broader themes captured the meaning of participants' collective experiences. For this study, I used features of social construction of target populations and policy design to support the primary theoretical foundation (Ingram & Schneider, 2005; Ingram, Schneider, & deLeon, 2007; Schneider & Ingram, 1993, 2005; Schneider, Ingram, & deLeon, 2014; Schneider & Sidney, 2009). Social theory, social constructionism, social construction of reality, and social construction of gender assisted in further exploring essential policy changes needed to support the personal well-being of single women who will engage in future operational deployments in combat zones.

Literature Search Strategy

Research for relevant literature started in April 2013 and continued through June 2017. The primary literature review focused on the years 2005 to 2017 to provide a historical review of women in the U.S. military in general and women in combat zones in particular. The review of the literature also highlights the struggles of military personnel with readjustment issues following deployments in Iraq and Afghanistan. As researchers have noted, the readjustment period can be overwhelming to many SMs, especially those who are single and without adequate support systems and networks (Institute of Medicine, 2013). I also reviewed literature supporting the selected research method.

Primary sources for the literature review included books, journal articles, military and government publications, and websites. Each provided invaluable information

regarding the contribution of women in support of the military combat mission. The literature search strategy also included searches using Social Work Abstracts, PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, CINAHL, and the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America database. A search of multiple databases for peer-reviewed articles included government documents, ProQuest, Academic Search Premier, EBSCO, PUBMED, ABI/Inform Global, and Internet search engines such as Google Scholar, which was used to search for keywords and terms related to the population and topic under investigation. Keywords and terms included *combat zone*, *female veterans*, *lived experience*, *readjustment*, *social construction*, and *social construction of target populations, or groups*.

Other sources used in the literature review included research from various wars in which women were involved officially or unofficially, specifically the Revolutionary War, both World Wars, Korean War, Vietnam War, the First Gulf War, and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Research articles were also identified from reference lists and student dissertations previously cited and relevant to either the research study, or the participants under investigation. More than 400-hundred sources were included in the review and overall study. The literature review ended when saturation was achieved without discovery of new information. Walden University and the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center (WRNMMC) Libraries served as a resource to perform electronic searches and a document delivery service to obtain electronic journal articles from other university libraries. The literature review focused on single women returning from Iraq and Afghanistan who never married and are nonparenting.

Theoretical Foundations

The theory of social construction of target populations (Schneider & Ingram, 1993, 2005) and policy design (Ingram, Schneider, & deLeon, 2007; Schneider, Ingram, & deLeon, 2014) served as the theoretical foundations to investigate the readjustment experiences and needs of single, never married, and nonparenting women returning from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. Although not specifically used as a primary theory, the social construction of gender served to assist in exploring the research question: How do single women returning from combat perceive their social construction has changed as it relates to their readjustment experiences and needs, compared to males in their unit, or communities, as they transition from the military? To explain fully how the concept of the primary theory support the research, it is important to first discuss the basic concept of social theory, social constructs and social constructions, social construction of reality, and social construction of gender. As a popular theory of the public policy process, the theory of social construction provides a clear lens for examining the interplay of social construction and policy design. The theory focuses on the social construction of target groups and the feed-forward effects of public policy upon those groups, their political participation, and larger consequences for a democratic society (Valcore & Dodge, 2016).

Social Theory

Whether on a large or small scale, individuals engage in social theory on a daily basis through their interactions with others. Oxford University Press (2005) defined social theory as the study of scientific ways of thinking about social life and provided a variety of distinct ways to react to it. For instance, detecting reliable observations in

contrast to prejudices and stereotypes, and untangle attitudes of detachment from attitudes of partisanship with an interest in the issues at stake. Social theory encompasses a number of things: (a) ideas about how societies change and develop, (b) methods of explaining social behavior, (c) power and social structure, class, gender and ethnicity, modernity and civilization, revolutions and utopias, and (d) numerous other concepts and problems in social life. Social theory is a trained reflection on ways of knowing social life that arises from everyday life from a variety of contexts of conversation, discussion, and interactions between ordinary people (Ormerod, 2013; Oxford University Press, 2005). In essence, Oxford and Ormerod promoted the perspective that social theory is a social product with a multitude of everyday contexts of origination.

On the other hand, Coleman (1986) held that social theory grounded in institutional and structural settings makes possible a connection between the individual and society and the conception of how social systems are shaped by human will. In other words, through social theory, the formation of everyday interactions gives rise to a host of social movements, political parties, trade unions, and organized mass actions like strikes and revolutions. From this context, social theory emerges and reflects the disputes and agenda that dominate ordinary communication about social and political issues. As individuals act and participate in the social world, they gain not only what exist now as socially constructed because of previous interactions, but acquire knowledge about the social process of interacting (Coleman, 1986; Ormerod, 2013; Oxford University Press, 2005). In addition, knowledge is acquired that explains how social structures impact behavior built through repeated social interactions (Daspit, Holt, Chrisman, & Long,

2016).

An important notion of social theory is that researchers seek to sort out and clarify debate about goals and problems of social life through well-defined concepts and techniques of analysis (Oxford University Press, 2005). Closely related to social theory is political theory, which tends to be concerned with questions regarding which systems of government best sponsor freedom, justice, and equality in social life, or when is obedience to a ruling power justified or unjustified. In contrast, social theory is interested in how people who ask such questions are first constituted as social groups. In particular, it is concerned with their behaviors, structures, and dynamics of organization (Oxford University Press, 2005). From this perspective, the military ranks among entities that could fall well within this organizational construct of social theory.

Social Constructs and Social Constructions

Through social agreement, the world is experienced as individuals interact with others and form opinions through those lenses. The definition of social constructs, according to the International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences (2008), include meanings, notions, or connotations assigned to objects and events in the environment and to people's notions of their relationships to and interactions with these objects. In the domain of social constructionist thought, a social construct is an idea, or notion that appears to be natural and obvious to people who accept it, but may or may not represent reality, so it remains largely an invention or artifice of a given society. The term social construction develops from the process by which individuals, groups, or organizations in interaction with social structure create social reality. Under the theory of social

construction, society places individuals into several groups and favors one over the other. According to the groups' favor they receive either benefits or burdens (Ingram, Schneider, & deLeon, 2007; Schneider, Ingram, & deLeon, 2014).

Beliefs about society is defined by what is normal and abnormal. A host of different perspectives and research approaches are available to explore social construction and its results. Social scientists used the term social construction to emphasize how identity, roles, statuses, knowledge, and institutions come into existence and maintain relationships with other members of society in a socio-historical context. Postmodern theorists observed that the construction of social reality begins by deconstructing what is often taken as reality. For example, postmodern researchers deconstruct knowledge to demonstrate a general theory, or an ultimate truth is misguided (International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, 2008). Societies construct the lens through which their members interpret the world and identities are both storied and relational, making ourselves up along the way in relation to each other (Freedman, 2014; Freedman & Combs 1996; Hedtke, 2014). The realities so often taken for granted are those that society have surrounded us with since birth, all of which predict the beliefs, practices, words, and experiences that make-up our lives.

Humans participate in creating social reality in the world in which they live and in turn become influenced by it as well. In other words, social constructions and realities form through interactions and experiences with others. One person's understanding of something often helps shape another person's understanding, yet these jointly constructed interactions and experiences makes each person's reality unique, even when referring to

the same thing. The term social construction or social constructionism has been adopted and intertwined in several disciplines and sub-disciplines ranging from sociology, social psychology, history, anthropology, sociolinguistics, literary theory, and in different approaches within each of these (Brickell, C., 2006; Budgeon, 2014). In recognition of how diverse social constructionism is, Brickell (2006) outlined four forms of social constructionism that have proven particularly relevant for the sociological study of both gender and sexuality: historicism, ethnomethodology, symbolic interactionism, and materialist feminism.

For the purpose of this study, the primary focus was on symbolic interactionism, as it shares the phenomenological assumption that the world has meaning only insofar as it becomes meaningful to its inhabitants, and the contention that the social world develops as its participants interact with each other (Craib, 1984, 2014; Wallace & Wolf, 2005). Symbolic interactionism explains how social relationships inform the construction and deployment of meaning and the accomplishment of self in everyday life. It also addresses the manner in which society is created and maintained through face-to-face repeated meaningful interactions among individuals. Interaction becomes symbolic when individuals interpret and define objects and their own, or another's actions and act on the basis of assigned meanings. It is a cyclical and fluid process in which participants continually adapt or change their acts to fit the ongoing acts of one another (Blumer, 1969; Carter & Fuller, 2016; Chamberlain-Salaun, Mills, & Usher, 2013; Denzin, 1992; Ormerod, 2013; Tapp & Lavoie, 2017). Drawing on the concept of social constructionism, the stories that circulate in society constitute our lives and through these

stories whole cultures are influenced (Freedman, 2014; Freedman & Combs, 1996; Hanson, 2015; Hedtke, 2014; Suddeath, Kerwin, & Dugger, 2017). Symbolic interactionism gives rise to a useful theory of sexual scripts much in alignment with the current study under investigation. For instance, as an organized sub-group of the military, the role of women in the military is linked to how they are often viewed in mainstream society. In addition, society's particular view of women influences the type of roles and positions they may assume whether in the civilian workforce among the general population, or within the ranks of the Armed Forces.

Social Construction of Reality

A common phrase often heard is that a person's perception is his or her reality. The essence of this concept comes from our understanding of what is real and from living in a social world. In general, it is fair to say, each person's reality is different and subjective, which is critical to how symbols are interpreted based on the interpretation of the circumstances surrounding any given situation. Because each person perceives reality differently their reactions differ, yet their existence in everyday life is highly dependent on interacting and communicating with others. In addition to our perceptions and interpretations, our social interactions with others help shape our reality and what is real depends on what is socially acceptable. Hence, the term social construction of reality comes into play. Credit for forging in the theory of social construction goes to Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, the authors of Social Construction of Reality (1966). The authors emphasized that an individual cannot exist in everyday life without continually interacting and communicating with others.

Berger and Luckmann (1966) argued that everyday life presents itself as a reality interpreted by men and subjectively meaningful to them as a coherent world, often taken for granted as reality by ordinary members of society in the subjectively meaningful conduct of their lives. It is a world that originates in their thoughts and actions, and maintained as real by these. In other words, in the course of everyday life, people are capable of seeing, thinking, and experiencing the world from multiple viewpoints of reality. Some forms of reality existed prior to our arrival on the scene. For instance, many of the everyday items used from clothes to cars existed within the vocabulary of our society and a common reality about these items is shared. Berger and Luckmann (1966), regarded social realities as what are determined as real and meaningful, created through reciprocal, fluid, and flexible interactions on a constant basis. A major issue is convincing ourselves what reality is and the tendency to reject other people's views of reality, yet that reality is a construction of society.

The basic argument Berger and Luckmann made in the book, *Social Construction of Reality* (1966), stems from its title, which suggest reality is socially constructed and our basic understanding of what is real comes from living in a social world that plays a major role in defining that construct of reality. Simply put, social reality is no more than a human construction. Our human construction of reality begins the moment we awaken and start to orient ourselves with the environment that surrounds us. For example, we begin to identify with what is real and objective. This is not only true for individuals, but institutions also engage in this sense making of reality. Institutions like the military are symbolic wherein its member's lives revolve around it. The military is an

institutionalized structure and culture with a set of symbolic endeavors that is acceptable for those who join. The military provides the explanations for why things happen the way they do, why people must act the way they do, and why, until recently at least on paper, its female members could not participate in combat operations, or assume combat roles.

Social Construction of Gender

Upon our arrival on life's world stage, the social and behavior expectations of both sexes have already been established as what is appropriate for each gender. Lorber (1994) noted that gender construction starts with assignment to a sex category, which becomes a gender status through naming, dress, and the use of other gender markers. Once a child's gender is evident, others treat those in one gender differently from those in the other, and children respond to the different treatment by feeling different and behaving differently. As soon as they can talk, children start to refer to themselves as members of their gender. Generally, distinguished from sex which is biological, notions of gender represent attempts by society, through the socialization process, to construct either masculine or feminine identities and corresponding gender roles based on physical appearance and genitalia (International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences, 2008). Each newborn receives his or her gender assignment at birth, either male or female, based solely on genitalia.

Winslow (n.d.) observed, gender as a socially constructed entity representing ways of talking, describing, or perceiving men and women. On the other hand, Budgeon (2014) argued that as gender entered the vocabulary of the western feminism movement a significant strategy for challenging and transforming unequal social relations was

inaugurated. As a critical tool, gender has been deployed to great effect in dismantling perceived essential differences between men and women; differences conventionally used to explain and legitimate observed disparities in women's access to social resources and rewards. Similarly, the use of the glass ceiling metaphor describes the invisible forces at work that restrict women from obtaining positions of power (Berrey, 2014; Stainback, Kleiner, & Skaggs, 2016). This exclusion to power is precarious in understanding the creation of gendered organizations and the perpetuation of inequality within regimes (Acker 2006), and the broader maintenance of gender as a social structure (Martin 2004; Risman 2004).

Social construction of gender is not without its critics, the most significant criticism focuses on the exclusion of power and privilege in shaping gender (Martin 2004). Based on gender, society determines the characteristics that each should have and supports the notion that men should have more power than women, so society's gender coding system is learned from birth (University of California, 2017). While these notions may be instilled at birth, today's young women and men are especially much freer to set their goals and aspirations far beyond the traditional paths and scripts they were once steered towards. In gender role change, many fathers are stay-at-home dads taking care of their children, girls and boys wear unisex clothing, and they get the same education, and work at the same jobs. Risman (2004) defined gender as a social structure and placed it on the same analytic plane as politics and economics.

Social Construction of Target Populations and Policy Design

Several approaches received attention in exploring the readjustment experiences

and needs of single women returning from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, the theory of social construction of target populations (Schneider & Ingram, 1993, 1997) and policy design (Ingram, Schneider, & deLeon, 2007; Schneider, Ingram, & deLeon, 2014) seemed the most appropriate in providing the theoretical foundations to evaluate the findings of the population under study. In specifying the generalizable constructs of their theory, Schneider and Ingram (1993, 1997) sought to illuminate how policy design shapes the social construction of a policy's targeted population, the role of power in this relationship, and how policy design "feeds forward" to shape future politics and democracy (p. 98). The treatment of target populations through policy design has enduring effects on the political orientation and participation patterns of target populations.

Social construction and policy design are among the leading theories used to understand the policy process and incorporates target populations to understand the development and implications of policy design. The theory of social construction of target populations and policy design focuses on the socially constructed values applied to the knowledge of target populations and the consequent impact these values have on people and democracy. A vital component of the theories is addressing the classic questions of who gets what, when, and how while trying to understand why some groups get benefits and others get burdens. The theories are founded upon assumptions that can be divided into three categories: (a) the model of the individual, (b) power, and (c) the political environment (Pierce et al., 2014).

Together, the assumptions belonging to these three categories interact to inform

two core propositions within the theories. The first of these propositions relates to target populations, or the recipients of policy benefits or burdens. Policy design structures opportunities and send varying messages to differently constructed target groups about how government behaves and how they are likely to be treated by government. The allocation of benefits and burdens to target groups in public policy depends upon their extent of political power and their positive or negative social construction on the deserving and undeserving axis (Ingram et al., 2007).

The second core proposition of the theory according to Ingram et al. (2007) is its emphases on the policy treatment of target groups based on their social construction and power, which is not relevant at a given point in time. Rather, the way target populations are treated through policies has a "feed-forward" effect. The feed-forward effect works by policy designs of the past and in the present shaping institutions and the broader culture through both the instrumental (resource) effects of policy and the rhetorical, or symbolic (interpretive) effects (Ingram et al., 2007). In turn, this shaping leads to variable opportunity structures as well as targeted messaging from government that all interact to continually shape the social construction of the target population (Ingram et al., 2007). The net result is a powerful influence on the behavior and understanding of self by target populations.

Public policy decisions are made by the political elite who devise policies with the expectation of popular acceptance and achieving the best results. The tendency to divide people into categories where some members are far more deserving than others is a recurring theme in certain policy arenas. For instance, those that involve race, ethnicity,

gender, poverty, and other forms of disadvantages. Ingram, Schneider, and deLeon (2014) argued there are various target groups that such policies are either design to benefit or burden. The groups' designated classification ranges from those who are: advantage, contenders, dependents, or deviants. Ingram and her colleagues (2014) provided a detailed description of each group.

The *advantaged* have high levels of political power and resources. They enjoy positive social construction as deserving people important in the political and social hierarchy. Because they are broadly constructed, they are most likely to receive benefits in public policy and treated with respect. *Contenders* have substantial political resources, but are negatively regarded by many in the population as relatively selfish, untrustworthy, and morally suspect. *Dependents* are positively constructed as deserving in terms of sympathy and pity. The lack of political power sharply curtails their receipt of benefits. The *deviants* lack both political power and positive social constructions and tend to receive a disproportionate share of burdens and sanctions. This target population makeup a permanent underclass in the U.S., and blamed for many of the ills of society that might be attributed to the broader social and economic system (Nicholson-Crotty & Meier, 2005; Valcore & Dodge, 2016). The theory of social construction of target populations and policy design calculates the treatment of certain targets on the basis of two distinct parameters.

First, the power they yield (economic or political) and whether they have a popular image. In time, the values of both parameters can often change. Whatever the current situation is, the more powerful or stronger they are and the better their image the

more openly they are likely to be provided benefits. Image is especially important, if the target group is shrouded by a negative public image, it is highly risky for politicians to construct a policy that openly benefits the group, especially when the expectation is they should be burdened by the policy rather than benefit. The theory focuses on the way attitudes towards a target population of a policy influence the type of policy generated, or how the policy affects the way policy makers view the target population (Nowlin, 2011).

Secondly, at the onset, social construction and policy design supports the notion that target populations receive benefits or burdens based on the strength of their political power and social construction as positive or negative (Schneider & Ingram, 1993). This view is useful in understanding policies that involve women's rights and inequality. For decades, society has long held the view that the military is masculine and placed little value on the equality of women particularly during combat operations. As the military moves towards a more postmodern institution perhaps it will recognize the benefits of fully integrating women into all aspects of its mission including combat operations. This study provided an opportunity to explore the theory of social construction of women as a target population with power and a positive image in the development and implication of future military policy designs. Each element is essential to this study as explained in the narratives. According to Rho, Lim, and Hong (2016) as well as Schneider and Ingram (1997) there are nine elements essential in the development of public policy, which include: problem definition and goals pursued, benefits and burdens to be distributed, target populations, rules, tools, implementation structure, social construction, rationales, and underlying assumption.

Problem Definition and Goals Pursued

Since men have always fought the nation's wars, studies of the stressors of combat have focused on men and families (IoM, 2013; Kulka et al., 1988; Schlenger et al., 2015; Yehuda et al., 2015) whether married or single. Therefore, the problem defined in this study and the goals pursued to resolve them focused on conducting a study that solely examined the readjustment experiences and needs of single U.S. military women returning from combat, particularly Iraq and Afghanistan. In a research context, the goal of this study was to explore this phenomenon to identify the existing gaps, if any, in programs and services that require policy changes to meet the needs of this understudied subpopulation of the military.

Benefits and Burdens Distributed

Despite changes made within the military over the past decade regarding the role of women in the military, still, they remain a minority (Kamarck, 2016) who are frequently under-recognized for their military service and contributions in support of combat operations. The transition from a combat zone can seem more complex for women as they process what they experienced while deployed, and return home to deal with societal assumptions that women were not exposed to direct combat (Disabled American Veterans, 2015). To assist women in their transition, a collaborative effort between the DOD and the Veterans Administration (VA) would provide women the same level of access to the full array of benefits as their male counterparts following deployment. Their combined efforts should seek to expand existing services and resources that provide timely and seamless services to assist all women, but single

women veterans in particular, as most studies focus on men and families (IoM, 2013; Kulka et al., 1988; Schlenger et al., 2015; Yehuda et al., 2015). Specifically, the efforts of the DOD and VA should be towards assisting women in gaining employment, achieving educational goals, avoiding homelessness, and minimizing alcohol and substance abuse especially among the target population under investigation.

Target Populations

Having a keen awareness of the players in the policy arena who receive benefits or burdens is essential. The need for this awareness is particularly true in the aftermath of the most recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan where women served in various roles that placed them directly in harm's way. Equally important, during the post-deployment phase, understanding the scope of their deployment is imperative in meeting their readjustment needs as they may differ from those of their male counterparts.

Rules

New policy changes, in January 2013, rescinded the DOD 1994 Risk Rule (Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 2012), which excluded women from serving in direct ground combat positions and raised a host of issues for review. In particular, according to Kamarck (2016), the policy required the Army to review approximately 237,000 positions closed to women, 53,000 in combat units and 184,000 specialty positions. The author also noted, the Army had to develop an implementation plan to fully integrate women into combat units and positions under gender-neutral policies. These new gender-neutral occupational performance standards would allow all SMs, regardless of gender, to serve in any Military Occupational Specialty (MOS), or

Area of Concentration (AOC) for which they are qualified to increase military effectiveness based on performance standards without differential evaluation because of gender (Amara & Krengel, 2016). To establish gender neutral requirements for entry into physically demanding jobs, subject matter experts and others involved in the process should have adequate experience sufficient to represent the overall military population.

Tools

As the DOD fully integrate women into the military by opening the remaining occupations once closed to them, critical changes in policies regarding the role of women in the Armed Forces may likely lead to their increased future presence in combat operations on the battlefield. Although the controversy of whether women should be in combat has faded, the growing potential that they will likely experience increased levels of combat duty in future military operations requires a carefully thought out plan in assembling various tools and strategies to address the distinctive readjustment issues and barriers they may face upon their return home.

Implementation Structure

The incremental and phased implementation approach by military leaders who understand and enforce gender-neutral standards should ensure a successful integration of women across the breadth and depth of the military formation. When done properly, the integration of women into all MOSs and AOCs will improve combat readiness and, from a work force perspective, strengthen the Armed Forces combat capabilities.

Social Constructions

In the past, based on deeply held and commonly shared cultural assumptions, the

primary mind-set among military leaders and policy makers defining the roles of men and women in the military had been a view in which it takes men to win the nation's wars. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan gave way to a major issue that put women in the midst of combat. For those who engaged the enemy, they performed at the same level as their male counterparts and aided in the success of the military mission. As the embedded media reported on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan they highlighted how the nature of women's involvement in military operations and activities had changed in comparison to prior war eras (White, 2005).

These types of reports from the media during the decade long wars begin to change the views, hearts, and minds of many Americans, military leaders, and policy makers. This change of heart came especially from those who held on to the assumptions that assigning women to combat roles would adversely affect military readiness, cohesion, and effectiveness. Only when they stop accepting, believing in, or taking for granted these constructions, the constructions begin to change (Schneider & Sidney, 2009). From a social construction perspective, the reality of this previous mind-set refers to an underlying understanding of the social world that places meaning making at the center and stems from how people interpret the world around them. In addition, their shared understandings give rise to rules, norms, identities, concepts, and institutions.

Rationales

The topic of whether women should serve in combat positions, or receive assignments into combat units is an emotionally charged topic. Old policies such as the Combat Exclusion Policy (1994) kept women out of combat based on strongly held views

that men were better suited for war and defending the nation. Another rational for its use was the Cold War linear battlefield verses the war fighting operational environments in Iraq and Afghanistan, a 21st century asymmetric battlefield.

Underlying Assumption

Just as the battlefield has changed, so too had the nature of combat for the U.S. military. The old rules governing the role and use of women in the Armed Forces do not fit this new battlefield reality. During the Iraqi and Afghanistan wars, women demonstrated their ability to execute their duties under combat conditions as well as their male counterparts. In addition, approximately 166 women died in combat and another 1,033 were wounded (Defense Manpower Data Center, 2017; Kamarck, 2016), yet there was no outcry by the American public. The American public seemed to have accepted female casualties as part of the price of waging war. This clearly demonstrated the old sensitivities to women in combat had outlived their usefulness and a shift in public opinion towards women serving in combat positions, or assignments to combat units.

Not prior to January 1, 2013, under the former Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, had there been a significant change to the assignment policy for women in the military since January 1994, when Les Aspin served as Secretary of Defense, 19-years earlier. In future operations, as the Army reorganizes into a modular more agile expeditionary force, support soldiers who are mostly women, will receive assignments to collocate with the combat forces they support. Therefore, whether by design or default the reorganization of the Army set the stage for the current debate on whether women receive assignments to combat units, or remain excluded from such units. Each element in the development of

public policy are essential and in the context of this study, public opinion to expand the role of women in the military continues to grow. Despite the risk, the American public supports women in combat. In the development of new policies, that include women in combat, it is important to capture the experiences of single women who served in combat and solicit their input regarding their specific readjustment experiences and needs following deployment.

Background

The Disabled American Veterans (2014), a congressionally chartered non-profit organization, noted that women make up roughly 20 percent of the Armed Forces' new recruits. Women account for approximately 14.5% of the 1.4 million Active Duty service members (SMs) and 18% of the 850,000 Reservists. Among the troops who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, more than 280,000 were women (Myre, 2013). For decades, the studies of SMs returning from war focused on men and families (IoM, 2013; Kulka et al., 1988; Schlenger et al., 2015; Yehuda et al., 2015). Subsequently, the deployment of women creates some unique and very different effects that remain historically unaddressed. Since the American Revolutionary War (1775-1783) women have participated in the defense of the United States. In particular, they provided their support to the troops as cooks, nurses, laundresses, tailors, and messengers. Still, others volunteered as scouts, spies, or couriers (Biesecker, 2002; Sherrow, 2007).

Disguised as men, women enlisted during the Revolutionary War, the War of 1812, and the Civil War. They were often able to keep their identities and gender a secret until they were injured, or subsequently died from their injuries (Matsakis, 2007). While

women may not have served in clearly defined direct ground combat positions in Iraq and Afghanistan, many served in combat support positions that placed them at risk to exposure of high levels of combat and danger (Cesur, Sabia, & Tekin, 2013; Dutra et al., 2011; Katz, Cojucar, Davenport, Clarke, & Williams, 2012) just like their male counterparts. However, participation in combat operations can lead to different outcomes for women than for men (Trego et al., 2010). The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan mark the first time in U.S. history large numbers of women deployed into a combat zone and actually engaged the enemy. Because of this, military leaders and policy makers cannot say with any degree of certainty what the long-term readjustment experiences and needs will be for women returning from these wars, especially since the concept of being a female combat veteran is relatively new.

Since the Afghanistan and Iraqi wars, 2001 and 2003 respectively, the fastest growing segment of military veterans are women (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2012; Disabled American Veterans, 2014; Leslie & Koblinsky, 2017; Women Veterans Report, 2017), yet they are still more likely to face issues of discrimination and belonging than their male counterparts (Duhart, 2012; Thomas et al., 2017). They are at a disproportionately higher risk for Military Sexual Trauma (MST) and harassment (Koo & Maguen, 2014); and approximately 20-40% of female Veterans report experiencing MST during their time in service (Barth et al., 2015; Der-Martirosian, Cordasco, & Washington, 2013; Kelly, Skelton, Patel, & Bradley, 2011; Williamson, Holliday, Holder, North, & Suris, 2017). Also, according to Kline et al. (2013), in garrison and deployed environments issues of social support and unit cohesion are uniquely

problematic for military women.

Service members of this era will be among the first to see women in combat roles traditionally held by men and may see an increase in female veterans with combat exposure. In addition, because the traditional wartime frontline no longer exists as in previous wars, Iraq and Afghanistan-era veterans may have more frequent and more severe combat exposure relative to veterans of other eras. Until recently, a review of the available literature, revealed relatively little information on the gender differences of OEF and OIF veterans (Godfrey et al., 2015; Maguen et al., 2012; Maguen, Ren, Bosch, Marmar, & Seal, 2010). Consequently, based on my research, the paucity of research on single, never married, and non-parenting women returning from combat make it difficult to predict their individual or common readjustment experiences. Therefore, research following single women after deployment in combat may offer insight into their specific experiences and needs. Reports from the IoM (2010) highlighted the fact that many SMs returning from deployment in combat zones seem to adjust quite well to their former lives with a great deal of success. However, in contrast, other veterans have trouble during the reunification process, especially reconnecting, adjusting, or transitioning to family life, their jobs, and living in the communities they left behind (Dutra et al., 2011).

A number of reasons can account for a SM's inability to bounce back from the negative experiences of combat and the difficulty in readjusting as they return home. For example, over the past decade SMs faced increased barriers accessing the VA health care system (Ouimette et al., 2011). Other service members often raised concerns about the stigma associated with seeking help regarding behavioral health issues, especially the

belief that their unit leadership might treat them differently and perceive them as weak rather than addressing concerns about the barriers associated with obtaining the appropriate care (Bloeser, et al., 2014; Gould, et al., 2010; Hom, Stanley, Schneider, & Joiner, 2017).

Other factors that affect SMs seeking help ranged from transportation, reporting concerns about difficulties scheduling an appointment, getting time off work for treatment, worries about losing security clearances (Bunnell et al., 2017; Elbogen et al., 2013; Kim, Thomas, Wilk, Castro, & Hoge, 2010); being too embarrassed to seek help, or the belief that psychological problems tend to work themselves out without help (Blais & Renshaw, 2013; Hoge et al., 2014; Kim, Britt, Klocko, Riviere, & Adler, 2011; Porcari et al., 2017). In other studies, the belief regarding the stigma of receiving psychiatric services were emphasized (Crawford et al., 2015; Currier, Stefurak, Carroll, & Shatto, 2017; Dillon et al., 2017; Di Leone et al., 2013; Elbogen, et al., 2013; Gallegos, Streltzov, & Stecker, 2016; Schreiber, McEnany, 2015). For example, service members who sought treatment believed they would be seen as weak and were more likely to be endorsed by veterans who used treatment than by their counterparts who did not. Katz, Cojucar, Davenport, Pedram, and Lindl (2010) found many of the same difficulties SMs faced during the post deployment phase as cited by the previous authors, but also added that many SMs have a difficult time articulating, or identifying what their problem areas are and the increased pressure from others to be normal.

While a significant amount of research has been conducted to evaluate the impact of military related stressors in the predominantly male veteran population, based on my

research, less attention has focused on military trauma in women despite an increase in the use of VA services by women veterans. Researchers found that OEF and OIF women veterans still experience challenges in accessing health care coupled with reintegration concerns, which may pose barriers to receiving health care (Goldstein, Dinh, Donalson, Hebenstreit, & Maguen, 2017; Washington, Bean-Mayberry, Riopelle, & Yano, 2011). This is problematic because much of the existing research indicates differing impacts of military stressors based on gender. For instance, female service members had higher severity of depressive symptoms, but not posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms compared to male service members during the post-deployment phase (Luxton, Skopp, & Maguen, 2010; Maguen, Luxton, Skopp, Madden, 2012). Other researchers found that female veterans have been shown to be at higher risk for depression than their male counterparts (Street, Gradus, Giasson, Vogt, & Resick, 2013). Still, several others noted following deployment in order to gain acceptance women may be under enormous pressure to fit in with men and perform at a higher standard often associated with being tough. The same authors emphasized that many remain silent about deployment stressors and the challenges of readjusting to their former lives until these issues negatively affect how they routinely function on a daily basis (Katz, Bloor, Cojucar, & Draper, 2007).

Because of an increase in the number of women joining the military and their possible expanding roles in future combat operations, it is prudent to understand the impact military stressors have on female veterans. In addition, it is critical to assess whether the current programs, resources, and services are appropriate in supporting their readjustment experiences and needs after deployment in a combat environment. The

return home can be difficult and frustrating as many SMs deal with the apprehensions, uncertainties, discomforts, and loss of excitement often associated with war fighting. Because of this, the adrenaline-fueled high of wartime combat operations and the reality of returning to life at home to a regular day job can be overwhelming for many. While there are a vast number of reports, studies, and articles following wartime exposure that highlights the negative readjustment experiences of SMs in general, based on my research, literature specific to the readjustment experiences and needs of single women exposed to wartime stressors in combat is nonexistent.

Historical Overview of American Women in the United States Military

Decades of historical and recent literature validate the fact that women served successfully, officially and unofficially, in protecting the nation from foreign and domestic enemies. Evidence of this is especially highlighted in the decade in which the U.S. engaged in combat operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan from 2003-2013. Viewing the problem of gender integration into the military from this perspective, researchers argue when equally trained and qualified, women performed their assigned task to standard just as their male counterparts. In the years when there seemed to be a shortage of men to send into combat women were added to the ranks as a combat multiplier, achieving a measurable and predictable increase in combat power. The sections that follow propose, as members of the profession of arms, when given the chance women demonstrated a willingness to sacrifice their lives to serve and defend the nation.

The Integration of Women into the Military

Generations of women have served in the Army since 1775, yet the idea of women in combat and the extent of their participation remain a controversial issue. Sherrow (2007) explained, the Second Continental Congress hired the first official women employees in 1775, when they created a hospital department for the Army. Because the hospital could hire civilian nurses that role became an accepted function for women in the military. In light of this, whether in an official or unofficial role, women served with the same honor and selfless service as their male counterparts and sacrificed their lives for the defense of the nation before they could cast their first vote (Matsakis, 2007). However, documented accounts of their contributions in combat remained scarce based on my research.

The integration of women into the Armed Forces has a long history of controversy and setbacks, yet when there were too few men to support the mission the military added women to its roster. Matsakis (2007) noted, with the establishment of the Army Nurse Corps in 1901 and the Navy Nurse Corps in 1908 women in the military started to receive formal recognition. Similarly, Murdoch et al. (2006) emphasized that the military filled its ranks and increased its numbers by filling the gaps in the workforce with women whenever there was a shortage of qualified males. However, despite their accomplishments, women did not enjoy the benefits their male counterparts received such as promotions, equal pay, or pensions. Once the conflict ended, just as quickly as they were mobilized the military demobilized them. Still, over time, with the integration of nurses into the Armed Forces it became easier for other women to enter the military and

gain full acceptance.

During wartime shortages of males, the actual need for women to fill the gap proved to be invaluable. Prior to entering the First World War women had already participated in military conflicts for well over a Century. In 1915, military officials denied having any recorded evidence that women had ever been a member of the Regular or Volunteer Army. Despite a strong denial, the Army did admit that a few women might have concealed their gender to serve in the military, but they served as civilian employees and not in the service of the U.S. military (Treadwell, 1954). Historically, women integrating into the military faced numerous obstacles, yet in today's Armed Forces they are serving with distinction in jobs women before them have never held.

The First World War (WW I)

Theoretically, the integration of women into the military begin when the U.S. entered the First World War (WW I) in 1917. At the onset of the war, the military soon discovered there was a shortage of men to send into combat. In response to this imbalance, the government mobilized a significant proportion of women to fill the gaps at home in support of the war. According to the Office of Policy and Planning (2007), approximately 35,000 American women served in the military during the First World War. More than 21,000 belonged to the Army Nurse Corps working in camp and station hospitals at home and abroad close to the front lines. Because of the nature of their work and proximity to the combat zone, nurses consistently found themselves exposed to artillery rounds and mustard gas while taking care of Soldiers and civilians (Women in the Army, World War I, 1917-1918, n.d.). The excerpts from Women in the Army

demonstrates the sacrifices made by women, but especially nurses who placed themselves in harm's way serving in the line of fire to care for their patients. Sherrow (2007) emphasized, military nurses served near war zones and some died from enemy fire. Three American nurses who served at a field hospital in France received the Distinguished Service Cross, the nations' second highest military honor.

In addition to serving as nurses, women served in other capacities to support the war efforts. For instance, they served as secretaries and clerks under the Quartermaster Corps as contractors. Hundreds of other women recruited by the Army Signal Corps trained as telephone operators, known as the "Hello Girls" (Women in the Army, n.d., World War I, 1917-1918,) working overseas. Just as the women before them, when their service was no longer required the Army discharged them and claimed they had never officially been in the military. In 1979, approximately 61 years later, Congress recognized their services and granted them military status. As the war ended, despite their ultimate sacrifice, bravery, and exceptional performance, Congress closed all legal avenues that allowed women to serve in the military without its consent.

World War II (WWII)

Unwittingly, the First World War served as a precursor for large numbers of women to contribute to America's war efforts. Their successful contributions also opened the door for the need and acceptance of women in the military during World War II on an even larger scale. Following the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor in December 1941, the U.S. became fully engaged in the war and women gained their greatest opportunity to serve in the military. In May 1942, several months after the war-started, women fully

supported the war efforts through the creation of the Women's Auxiliary Army Corps (WAAC), which allowed women to serve in noncombatant roles and allowing men to serve on the front lines (Psychology and The War: Notes, 1942). At the time, the Army Nurse Corps (ANC) was the only women's organization allowed to serve exclusively with the Army. In contrast, Fisher (1995) explained the WAAC was not part of the Army, but the Army ran it. Consequently, WAAC members had no binding contract and could quit at any time.

Political and military leaders willingly accepted the idea of establishing an auxiliary for women for the sole purpose of easing the workforce shortage. However, they drew the line at giving women military status and the benefits of veterans. According to Treadwell (1954), the WAAC's mission statement was the most basic and vital of the Corps' history, the auxiliary was established to make available to the national defense the knowledge, skill, and special training of the women of the nation. In concert, the personnel branch sent the Chief of Staff, General George C. Marshall, a memorandum stating, "the problem in the United States is not primarily one of utilizing women in the military service for the purpose of releasing manpower, but is one of utilizing women to increase the efficiency of the Army" (Treadwell, 1954, p. 19). Because the WAAC proved it was an invaluable organization, in 1943, it gained full (opposed to auxiliary) military status in the Army and its name changed to the Women's Army Corps (WAC). Following the name change, women obtained the same salaries, benefits, and titles the men received (Sherrow, 2007).

While women served under various restrictions in support of the war, they served

courageously and honorably throughout it. Women played a significant and key role in filling the work force shortages and assisted America in achieving success during WW II. The shortage of labor also resulted in an expansion in the roles women served in beyond those of noncombatants. At the time, more than 400,000 women were in noncombatant roles (Pierce, 2006). Like their male counterparts, by the end of the war, exposure to combat and serious risk to enemy fire was quite common and the stresses of war increased as their location in combat zones changed (Baechtold & De Sawal, 2009; Dienstfrey, 1988; Mattocks, Haskell, Krebs, Justice, Yano, & Brandt, 2012; Strong, 2013). Approximately 88 military nurses were prisoners of war and more than 432 lost their lives during WW II (Women's Research and Education Institute, n.d., "Did you know…?" bullet, #6).

Unlike the end of the First World War, in which the role of women serving in the military seemed trivialized, following WW II women in the armed services received numerous medals, citations, and commendations for courage and dedication to duty, including posthumous awards for those killed by enemy fire (Sherrow 2007). However, very much like the outcome of WW I, at the end of WW II, with the crisis over, Congress ordered a general demobilization of women, yet nurses were the exception (Murdoch et al., 2006). Still, Bellafaire (2016) declared if America is to maintain its power and position as a world leader, whether at peace or war, it would require the permanent services of trained women volunteers, this meant fewer men had to be drafted.

The perception of women serving in the military becoming permanent members came with the approval of the Women's Armed Services Integration Act, signed into law

by President Truman in 1948. Although the Act granted women a permanent place within the military, it placed stiff restrictions on them. They could not make-up more than 2% of the total military force, command men, serve in combat roles, exceed the allowable number of mid-level officers, attain flag rank, and required automatic discharges for pregnant women, and women with minor children (Murdoch et al., 2006). The act also denied women spousal benefits unless their husbands relied on them for more than half of their support (Sherrow, 2007). While the Women's Armed Services Integration Act placed numerous restrictions on women, it also allowed them to share in the responsibility of securing the nation's freedom.

The Korean War

As women gained a permanent home in the military with the passage of the Women's Armed Services Integration Act, in 1950, when hostilities in Korea commenced just 22,000 women were in uniform (Murdoch et al., 2006). On June 25, 1950, approximately 134,000 North Korean troops crossed the 38th parallel and invaded South Korea. The only American military woman stationed in Korea was a U.S. Army Nurse, Captain Viola B. McConnell (Monahan & Neidel-Greenlee, 2010). Nurses from every branch of the Armed Forces responded to the need for nurses in the Korean theater of operations. However, several tragedies occurred that stalled their arrival. For example, General Douglas McArthur, Commander of the United Nations Forces, named Army Major Genevieve Smith as the Chief Nurse for Korea (Monahan & Neidel-Greenlee, 2010), but Smith died in a plane crash en-route to her assignment (Bellafaire, 2016, "In the mud of Korea," para. 1).

Similarly, Navy nurses on their way to Korea also experienced setbacks. Fifteen nurses were on board the USS Benevolence when it sank off the coast of California. Fourteen survived the ordeal and were eventually rescued by an Army tugboat (Bellafaire, 2016, "In the Mud of Korea," para. 1). As the Korean War culminated, more than 500 U.S. Army Nurses supported the war efforts. In total, 19 women died during the Korean War, all by non-hostile fire. Seventeen of those women were military nurses (Monahan & Neidel-Greenlee, 2010). The military deployed fewer women (nurses) to support the Korean War than it had in previous wars, yet their numbers were needed to provide first aid and comfort to the wounded.

The Vietnam War

Nurses became the symbol for all women who served in Vietnam and perhaps recognized as the first who served in, or near a combat zone. On the other hand, for decades, women who served in Vietnam remained unrecognized for both their contributions and sacrifices. According to Holm (1992) as the war in Vietnam loomed, the DOD resisted the expansion of women's roles in the military and authorized the enlistment of almost 300,000 men with low attitude test scores first (Murdoch et al., 2006). Nevertheless, albeit mostly nurses, women were sent to Vietnam. The findings from previous literature are clear that American women served in the Vietnam War; conversely, what remains unclear is the number that served. The reported number of women range between 7,500 (Bellafaire, 2016, "Why Can't We Go to Vietnam," para. 1) and 10,000 (Mithers, 1986). Approximately 11 American women died serving in Vietnam, one by enemy fire (Monahan & Neidel-Greenlee, 2010), while thousands of

others suffered physical and emotional trauma. Once they returned home, they never received the respect, or gratitude bestowed to veterans of prior conflicts (Sherrow, 2007).

Just as it had been for their male counterparts, the adjustment back to civilian life following the Vietnam War was often difficult for women. As the Vietnam War culminated and the draft placed on men ended, women's roles and contributions in the U.S. military changed again drastically because of an all-volunteer force. Congress retracted the 2% quota imposed by the Women's Armed Services Integration Act, regarding the proportion of troops that could be women. The limits on their ranks and pay grades were lifted as well (Sherrow, 2007). In addition, areas once closed to women excluding combat-related specialties finally opened up. Prompted by a congressional mandate, military service academies were opened to women in 1976 (Kennedy & Malone, 2009).

Murdoch et al. (2006) highlighted several policy changes following the Vietnam War that affected women, the initial restrictions placed on women were soon set aside, which gave way to the same entrance criteria into the services for both men and women. Just as the entrance criteria changed, the services begin integrating women training and promotion lists with the men, which allowed women an opportunity to train with men and compete against them for promotions. Finally, in 1978, another significant policy change was the elimination of separate female units such as the Women's Army Corps (WACs). Pregnancy, marriage, or dependent children were no longer grounds for a military discharge. Policy changes that adopted an all-volunteer military lead to the active recruitment of more women and provided them access to additional occupational

specialties beyond medical and administrative roles.

The First Persian Gulf War (Desert Storm)

The expansion in the use of women during the First Persian Gulf War marked a watershed in the attitude of policy makers towards the participation of women in combat. Murdoch et al. (2006) wrote, after the Gulf War policy and decision-makers lifted, or repealed most regulations that restricted women from combat assignments. Although the war was brief, during the six-week period between January 16, 1991 and February 28, 1991, the largest single deployment of military women in U.S. history resulted in more than 41,000 women serving in key combat support positions throughout the Persian Gulf. Women accounted for approximately 7% of the Armed Forces deployed (Bellafaire, 2016, "1990s Deployments," para. 1; Holm, 1992).

Unlike previous wars, this single large deployment of women provided the opening women needed to gain access into assignments that had previously been restricted (Roulo, 2013). During the First Gulf War, according to Carney et al. (2003), the majority of deployed women who served in the Army (77%), were single (58%), and without children (75%). Almost a decade later, in another study, Maguen, Luxton, Skopp and Madden (2012) emphasized, with women serving in military service roles that increase their combat exposure and other military-service related risks, it is important to understand whether this increased exposure impacts the risk of developing other issues, particularly issues associated with mental health during the post-deployment period.

In the more recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, women were increasingly exposed to combat even though their service roles were considered noncombatant.

Women deployed to the Persian Gulf served in various positions outside of normal medical and administrative roles. Sherrow (2007) observed, women encountered combat situations, found themselves behind enemy lines, and some even commanded men. Therefore, having a clear understanding of how that exposure affects their risk following deployment is crucial in evaluating how well they readjust to their former lives and determining their long-term needs (Calhoun, et al., 2016; King, Street, Gradus, Vogt, & Resick, 2013; Maguen, Luxton, Skopp, & Madden, 2012). This assessment is also crucial in preparing other generations of women for future conflicts involving combat exposure.

During the First Gulf War, American military women did just about everything on land, at sea, and in the air except engage in the actual fighting. According to Holm (1992), women performed a variety of essential non-combat duties that included refueling M1 tanks on the side of the road, guarding bases, serving on naval replenishment and repair ships, fleet oilers and hospital ships off the shore of Baghdad. While women served as noncombatants in more nontraditional roles, they shared the same dangers as active combatants. Holm (1992) noted that women also piloted and crewed jet planes and helicopters over the battle area, refueled fighters in mid-air, serviced high tech equipment on the ground and loaded laser guided bombs on F-117 Stealth Fighters for raids on targets in Baghdad. The author further stated that, women directed Patriot missiles, drove trucks, and ran prisoner of war facilities. Unlike previous wars where the battle lines were clear, during the First Gulf War the lines were not as clear and often blurred, as noncombat units regularly took on casualties. In addition, Iraqi long-range artillery and

especially surface-to-surface missiles were unisex weapons that did not distinguish between combat and support troops (Bellafaire, 2016, "1990s Deployment," para. 1).

The death tolls in the Persian Gulf from battlefield injuries were the lowest that the U.S. had ever experienced in history. However, after the hostilities ended, fifteen women had died, two were captured and later released, and five were killed in action (Bellafaire, 2016, "1990s Deployment," para. 1). The Marine Corps awarded its Combat Action Ribbon to 23 women, signifying engagement with the enemy (Sherrow, 2007). The First Gulf War provided the American public an opportunity to witness military women entering nontraditional military roles other than direct ground combat. Americans also observed their willingness to sacrifice their lives, proving that they were capable and dedicated to defending the nation while serving alongside their male counterparts. When the war was over, Vice President Dick Cheney stated, "Women made a major contribution to this war effort, we could not have won without them." Commanders in the field echoed similar praise of the women's performance under fire. General H. Norman Schwarzkopf, the Coalition Forces Commander, reported "They were magnificent" (Holm, 1992, p. xiv).

Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF)

Since the First Gulf War, much has changed regarding the involvement and role of women on the modern battlefield in the wars of the 21st century, especially in Iraq and Afghanistan. More than anytime recorded in American history, at the end of the First Gulf War, a significant number of ground combat operational roles opened up to women. Hoge, Clark, and Castro (2007) observed that while women did not serve in direct

combat specialties, as infantry or armor divisions, they served in positions where they traveled outside military bases in support roles such as military police and convoy escorts, they collected human intelligence, and searched Iraqi women for weapons. They served as pilots, medics, mechanics, civil affairs personnel, and other roles that came under direct fire. Holmstedt (2009) asserted that a major experiment began in 2003 on the battlefield in Iraq as a record number of American women headed into combat for the first time. Although military rules banned women from combat, these rules slowly dissolved as the war continued and the front lines faded. Keeping women from the front lines became virtually impossible when the front lines were everywhere.

To put a figure on the major experiment in which Holmstedt spoke about, approximately 280,000 women deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan (Disabled American Veterans, 2014; Myre, 2013). These women were an integral component in each military conflict and performed in assignments that placed them at, or near the front lines. While their expanded combat operational roles and assignments were often labeled as noncombatant, women who entered into expanded roles and assignments were at the same level of risk as combatants. Because of the difficulty in distinguishing between blurred lines of combatants and noncombatants, the Army created a Combat Action Badge that was awarded to hundreds of female soldiers for actively engaging with a hostile enemy. Two women, Sergeant Leigh Ann Hester (2005) and Specialist Monica Lin Brown (2008), received Silver Stars (the third highest military decoration awarded for valor in combat in the face of the enemy) for their service in Iraq and Afghanistan respectively (Iskra, 2011; Mackenzie, 2012). Sergeant Hester was the first female

awarded the Silver Star since World War II and the first cited for close combat action while engaging the enemy (Fainaru, 2005).

Despite the official policies of the U.S. which prevented women from serving on the front lines, or in direct ground combat units, women who served in Iraq and Afghanistan came under fire, patrolled combat zones, served as gunners, were killed or wounded in hostile fire, and held as prisoners of war. To illustrate, in the early phases of the war in Iraq, March 2003, an attack on the 507th Maintenance Company resulted in the capture of two U.S. Army women, Specialist Shoshanna Johnson and Private First-Class Jessica Lynch. While both women suffered multiple wounds, they survived their ordeal in captivity and were later rescued (Johnson, 2003). Private First-Class Lori Ann Piestewa, a Native American and the first woman killed in Operation Iraqi Freedom, died in the same convoy ambush (US Army Official Report on 507th Maintenance Company: An Nasiriyah, Iraq, 2003). Johnson, Piestewa, and Lynch were part of a maintenance battalion designated as strike troops. Their role was to provide combat service support, yet during the ambush on their convoy they were all armed and fought alongside their male comrades until their weapons jammed.

As of November 2016, data compiled by Kamarck (2016) revealed that 50 U.S. military women died during Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), accounting for 2.1% of the total deaths. In addition, 116 U.S. military women died during Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), which accounts for 2.5% of the total deaths. During that same period, in modern combat operations, approximately 9,000 women received Army Combat Action Badges for actively engaging or being engaged by the enemy. According to the Defense

Manpower Data Center (2017), 383 U.S. women sustained wounds during OEF and 627 wounded in OIF. In America's wars of the 21st century, women have taken on new roles and assignments with greater risk to their safety. Military women continue to carry out their mission bravely and effectively with the same pride, courage, and determination as their male counterparts.

Participation of Women in Military Operations Other Than War

The primary purpose for military operations other than war is to promote peacekeeping, containment, or the enforcement of economic sanctions (Secretary of the Air Force, 2000). In support of military operations other than war, women have been put to the test and performed well in U.S. military operations in Grenada, Panama, Honduras, Bosnia, Croatia, Somalia, Rwanda, and Haiti just to name a few. The military's mission may be that of war fighting; however, in a changing global environment U.S. national security interest around the world often requires participation in operations that are also essential to safety and security as those of war.

Women in Combat

The debate of whether women should be in combat seemed to have lost its momentum because of the reality of what actually occurred on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan. Despite policies preventing women from fully integrating into all areas of the military, such as offensive combat missions, the main message of their capabilities to do so is one of courage and self-sacrifice. The ground wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, fought without front lines, required gender blind and gender-neutral policies to support the military's mission. Holmstedt (2007) argued that to find their way into combat,

women did what they had done for years in the workplace, they applied themselves, did their jobs well, and the public noticed. Assigning or collocating women to direct ground combat units purely based on gender remains a highly controversial issue. However, the U.S. military recognized that women could fight in the nation's wars as members of forward support companies and female engagement teams. Women also received combat pay, known as hostile fire pay or imminent danger pay, to acknowledge the threats they regularly faced in the combat zones of Iraq and Afghanistan. Approximately78% of the deaths of U.S. female service members in Iraq served under hostile conditions, yet another sign of how American women in uniform regularly put their lives at risk (Mackenzie 2012).

The historical policy to exclude women from combat did not take into consideration the asymmetrical battlefield in which soldiers engaged the enemy in a 360-degree perimeter. Experience proves that all SMs participating on an asymmetrical battlefield are essentially engaging in combat. Both male and female SMs faced rocket, mortar, and roadside bomb attacks, as well as ambushes. Lafferty, Alford, Davis, and O'Connor (2008) theorized that in Afghanistan and Iraq there were no safe zones, merely areas of greater and lesser degrees of risk. Even the so-called Green Zones were under recurring mortar and rocket attack. Women served everywhere that men served on the battlefield acting in combat support roles that unwittingly pulled them into the vortex of combat. The former U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Mike Mullen, fully recognized the danger and risk women faced during their deployment in Iraq and Afghanistan and compared it to the same level of danger and risk faced by their male counterparts

(Mackenzie, 2012, Naphan & Elliott, 2015).

Conversely, in 2005, during an interview with *The Washington Times* regarding the war in Iraq and transformations within the Army, President Bush emphasized that "There's no change of policy as far as I'm concerned, no women in combat" (Scarborough & Curl, 2005, p. A01). Technically, the President was correct; the policy did not change. However, in reality, the nation's policy did not survive contact with the enemy, as the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan engulfed both men and women into combat, and the often blurred and constantly shifting battle lines of the conflicts drew women unavoidably into combat roles. Wise and Baron (2006) declared that the insurgency war in Iraq had no front lines and the debate regarding women in combat was irrelevant because in such a war zone, anyone can be killed or injured at any moment. For this reason, White (2005) argued that the expanding roles of women in combat lead the Army to create a Combat Action Badge to honor any eligible service member, and especially to honor women who had been exposed to perilous combat conditions.

The role of women in combat changed drastically since the approval of the Women's Armed Services Integration Act of 1948. Although women faced the same danger in combat zones as their male counterparts, they did so as members of combat support and combat service support units and not as members of an infantry or armored unit. Alvarez (2009) stated, "Women can lead some male troops into combat as officers, but they cannot serve with them in battle" (para. 9). Still, many military women came under direct fire, suffered battle wounds resulting in the loss of life, limb, eyesight, and hearing. Equally important, some engaged in direct ground combat operations that

required them to either kill the enemy or die alongside their male counterparts.

Countless of women who served in the Iraq and Afghanistan wars faced some of the same traumatic life and death situations as their male counterparts. On January 24, 2013, a congressional mandate prohibited women from serving in combat even though a significant number of them had already fought the nation's wars and protected the homeland. The experience of war can potentially change both males and females, whether directly or indirectly. War can also change the way society perceive women in combat. After the Iraqi and Afghanistan wars it is important to observe, on a large scale, the readjustment experiences and needs of single women following exposure to combat, the effects of combat, and its psychological scars left on them.

Readjustment after Iraq and Afghanistan

The face of military deployments has changed, specifically the number of women who deployed in support of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. Therefore, it is important to keep in mind the potential benefits or constraints of the readjustment experiences and needs of single women following deployment in combat. Since the earliest record of warfare, the returning warrior has struggled to rejoin the society left behind (Lafferty, Alford, Davis, & O'Connor, 2008; Phelps, 2015). After serving in a war zone, the transition to civilian life has never been easy and brings new and unanticipated complications for the combat veteran. Unlike previous wars, the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan set the stage for creating unique circumstances that resulted in deploying the largest number of women into a combat zone than any other time in history. Also, unlike previous wars, the readjustment experiences and needs for this generation of war-time

veterans is unique with several distinctions that affect the reintegration process. For instance, veterans of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan confronted the uncertainty and lengthy the tours of duty, multiple deployments, high levels of danger resulting in different types of casualties (especially those resulting from improvised explosive devices), and complete disengagement from civilian culture (Lafferty et al., 2008; Phelps, 2015).

Following deployment, many women returned from the combat zones of Iraq and Afghanistan able to reengage, or transition back to their former lives and become self-sustaining. On the other hand, for some female veterans the readjustment or transition has been quite difficult depending on their experiences, their unique stressors during deployment, and the availability of social support and social networks upon their return. To emphasize this point, The National Center on Family Homelessness (2011) found that, notwithstanding their many accomplishments during periods of active duty, the transition to civilian life for many women veterans is complicated and difficult. Veterans in general, regardless of gender, may have trouble resuming normal activities following deployment. Even under optimum conditions service members must adjust to life at home as well as manage the common reactions that occur for most troops following time in the war zone (DeCoster & Lewis, 2013; Interian, Kline, Callahan, & Losonczy, 2012; Slone, Pomerantz, & Friedman, 2009). For some, returning to normal patterns of daily activities take time and work.

Researchers at the Institute of Medicine (2010, 2013) observed that the experiences of those deployed to Iraq or Afghanistan were similar to those of military

personnel who deployed in previous conflicts; nevertheless, these same researchers noted a number of distinctive and important differences. Several differences noted included the composition of those that served, how they deployed, and how they fought within those conflicts. These differences should not go ignored, as each have important consequences. Several areas of concern were the types and severity of challenges SMs faced, the readjustment problems many of the men and women who supported OEF and OIF will most likely experience, and the type of support they will need upon their return home. Another critical area of concern is combat-related violence against women in particular because of their occupational roles as military police, convoy drivers, medics, and nurses.

Perhaps one of the most difficult types of stress faced by women during their military deployment involved the threat of sexual trauma, especially the trauma of rape by male colleagues with whom they served (Mattocks et al., 2012). Other stressors of the combat environment included, but was not limited to, elevated rates of mental disorders (Naifeh et al., 2016; Thomas et al., 2016) with and without comorbidities, including depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), suicide ideation, and alcohol abuse (Boyd, Bradshaw, & Robinson, 2013; Bryan, Bryan, & Clemans, 2015; Lam et al., 2017; Larson, Mohr, Adams, Wooten, & Williams, 2014; Lehavot et al., 2017; Maguen, Luxton, Skopp, & Madden, 2012; Ray-Sannerud, Bryan, Perry, & Bryan, 2015). Disciplinary and punitive actions increased because of misconduct and criminal behavior which led to military discharges and in some cases incarceration (Booker, Seamone, & Rogall, 2012; Finlay et al., 2016; IoM, 2013; MacManus et al., 2013; Seamone et al., 2014; Sreenivasan et al., 2013).

In the early years of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, personal relationships suffered because of lengthy deployments, (12-18 months), causing an increase in the rates of infidelity, divorce among military couples, and separation from significant others (Creech, Swift, Zlotnick, Taft, & Street, 2016; Wang et al., 2015). Service members enrolled in academic programs experienced disruptions in their education, which resulted in the loss of course work, credits, and even scholarships (Borsari et al., 2017; Jones, K., 2014; Jones, K. C., 2013; Kanel, 2015). Also troubling among war-time veterans of this era are the growing risk of homelessness, especially among women veterans (Fargo et al., 2012; Disabled American Veterans, 2014; Koblinsky, Schroeder, & Leslie, 2017; Metraux, Cusack, Byrne, Hunt-Johnson, & True, 2017; Veterans' Health Administration, 2012, 2013). Transgressive and moral injury acts are prevalent among veterans who reportedly killed an enemy combatant, or witnessed a death firsthand (Frankfurt & Frazier, 2016; Fry, 2016). Although most SMs are able to weave themselves back into the fabric of their former lives following deployment, some veterans still experience difficulties and concerns, both physical and emotional, during reintegration to pre-deployment life (Elliot, 2015; Rivers et al., 2017; Rivers, Gordon, Speraw, & Reese, 2013).

Based on the literature review, the transition or readjustment from combat operations in Afghanistan and Iraq is challenging and sometimes more difficult for some veterans than being in the war-zone. This new era of women involved in combat-related deployments raised important concerns. If public policy makers are to prevent a public health crisis of great magnitude, that may possibly grow over time, they will have to act

responsibly to appropriately evaluate and meet the needs of this new generation of war time veterans. Exploring this phenomenon of the readjustment experiences and needs of single women, never married, and non-parenting returning from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan may provide lessons learned that could possibly shed light on how to provide adequate programs, resources, and services needed to support future female combat veterans returning home throughout the post-deployment transition cycle.

Veterans without social support and social networks, or with disrupted social networks can find themselves isolated and at high risk for other factors that may further complicate their ability to readjust to life following deployment. Strong social networks can often make the difference between making a smoother readjustment back to one's former life, or facing reintegration barriers upon returning home. Researchers found that veteran participation in a community support group with people who have had similar experiences could be extremely beneficial and supportive in their readjustment to former life and daily activities (Ahern et al., 2015; Crocker, Powell-Cope, Brown, & Besterman-Dahan, 2014; Manderscheid 2007). As women return from Iraq and Afghanistan, they can often face many challenges and may benefit from a number of resources as they readjust to life beyond the combat zone. Slone and Friedman (2008) found that the military requires intensive training and preparation before going into battle, but offers little, if any, preparation for returning combat veterans. Surviving wartime memories and readjusting at home can be a complex transition. The success of community reintegration is dependent on bridging the gaps of alienation that service members often feel exist between them and their communities' expectations of a normal reentry.

The lack of empirical studies on the readjustment experiences and needs of single women to date could possibly make any findings from this study of value for several reasons. First, the findings may support evidence-based policy changes on reintegration during the post deployment cycle. Secondly, the findings may support research that guides future deployment experiences and the impact on the readjustment of single women returning from combat. Thirdly, research findings from this study may highlight and explore broader themes that warrant special consideration including, but not limited to, factors that enhance or constrain the availability of social support and social networks, or other readjustment needs of single women returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

Obtaining information from the perspective of those who experienced the phenomenon could provide an accurate picture of the relevant readjustment experiences and needs of single women essential in identifying the best resources possible to ensure early and effective support systems are in place for future single women who may deploy into combat. Understanding the readjustment experiences and needs of this current subpopulation of the military who supported the Iraqi and Afghanistan wars may require years of research. Finally, the findings resulting from this study may aid in understanding the impact exposure in the combat zone had on women, especially since readjustment is a lifelong process versus a onetime event. Therefore, through broad collaboration single women in particular and the community in general may achieve maximal benefit.

Literature Regarding the Selected Research Method

In social science, a researcher uses either qualitative methods such as interviews, or quantitative methods such as the use of statistics, or a mixture of both. Oxford

University Press (2005) urged researchers to evaluate the most appropriate theories and methodologies to produce and analyze the evidence. Oxford further warned, research that is only data driven lacks a sense of order. Massive amounts of data collection can become chaotic, impossible to decipher, evaluate, or determine a meaningful purpose, thus rendering such data collection useless and pointless. On the other hand, research consisting only of theories lacks reference to the real world and empty of content, which makes it incapable of being validated, or tested in any way.

The research design chosen for this study is qualitative, specifically transcendental (descriptive) phenomenology. The focus of this methodology was on understanding the unique lived experiences of the participants under investigation by exploring the meaning of the phenomenon from their firsthand accounts. From this descriptive data, further interpretation and analysis enables me to uncover a description of the essence of the phenomenon; the universal meaning for individuals. To derive the essence, the researcher puts to one side their own views of the phenomenon, referred to as bracketing, in order to deepen their understanding (Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012). Moustakas (1994) promoted the idea that following the descriptive phenomenological approach allows for a more disciplined and systematic process that requires setting aside prejudgments of the phenomenon under investigation, known as the *epoché* process, discussed later in Chapter 3.

Setting aside my own prejudgments of the phenomenon allowed me to take the study as far as possible, free of preconceptions, beliefs, and knowledge of the phenomenon from prior experience and professional studies. In other words, I was

completely open, receptive, and naïve in listening to research participants describe their experiences and insights into the meaning of the phenomena under study. Another important and distinct use of the transcendental phenomenology method was the emphasis on intuition, imagination, and universal structures in obtaining a picture of the dynamics that underlay the experience. Using the transcendental phenomenology method also allowed research participants an opportunity to share their perceptions, feelings, thoughts, and sensual awareness of consciousness regarding their readjustment experiences and needs as single women returning from combat operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Various disciplines are responsible for providing literature to the body of knowledge regarding phenomenology as a method. Although phenomenology is popular in the discipline of nursing and health care, this methodology has deep roots in philosophic, sociological, and psychological disciplines (Speziale and Carpenter, 2007). Researchers can trace the use of phenomenology back to the Greek philosophers Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle. However, Fochtman (2008) wrote, understanding a phenomenon during this early period remained a struggle because even if observing and recording a person's actions, behaviors, and physical changes seemed easy, understanding their meaning proved more difficult to determine. While there is no systematic process to conducting a phenomenology inquiry, a review of the relevant literature revealed the goal of phenomenological research is not to describe a grand theory, or develop a model, but to describe accurately a person's lived experience in relation to what is being studied and considered appropriate in examining the qualities of human experience (Balls, 2009;

Doody & Doody, 2015). Van Manen (1997) further argued, “The lived experience is the starting and ending point of phenomenological research” (p. 36). In other words, phenomenology does not provide solutions to a problem that requires solving; nor is it used for generalization. As a qualitative research method, phenomenology is used to discover the meaning of a phenomenon and identify its essence (importance) as experienced from the first-person perspective.

Understanding the meaning and importance of the individual human experience is the focus of phenomenology (van Manen, 1997; 2007; 2017a; 2017b), especially when so little, or an absolute lack of information about the experience is known. When the meaning of a phenomenon is truly understood it is easier to know how a person lived through the event in similar terms as they originally experienced it and then, according to Poliforni and Welch (1999), “describe it as faithfully as possible” (p. 239). Each person’s experience is unique as no two people can experience something in the same manner, as obtaining and describing data about the phenomena from several people allows for a better understanding of the human experience. According to the Walden Research Center for Quality Research (2017), several useful benefits result from acquiring new information about a phenomenon (Benefits of Using Phenomenology, Section 2):

1. The context of an experience is best understood when the human dynamic involved in the phenomenon are addressed by answering the question of how those with knowledge of the topic of interest perceived the event.
2. When researchers focus directly on the participants’ experiences regarding their perceptions of a phenomenon this allows for a better overall

understanding of human perceptions in general.

3. A major benefit of phenomenology is gaining insight into understanding peoples' reactions and why they respond the way in which they do towards a particular event based solely on their perceptions.
4. A retrospective look at past experiences and how people reacted provides a template for predicting and planning the impact of the change a similar phenomenon brings in future situations that are also similar in nature.
5. After researchers capture the essence of the participants' experiences of the phenomenon, they can then begin to examine how they may be able to transfer the responses to others with similar backgrounds under similar circumstances.

The fifth benefit of conducting phenomenological research may yield the greatest opportunity in understanding what the readjustment experiences and needs are for single women returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

The foundation of this research relies on the premise that not enough is known, or understood about the meaning of the readjustment experiences and needs of single women returning from a combat zone. Therefore, the findings from this study may help other single women who support future deployments. More importantly, as the once closed ground combat units and remaining military occupations and specialties become available to women, especially combat arms, the voices of single women returning from combat can be a tremendous rich resource of data, not yet fully explored. Identifying subjective phenomena unique to the domains of reintegration and administrative practices and procedures for this population is important to the ever-expanding body of knowledge

regarding the readjustment experiences and needs of single women returning from combat.

In conclusion, the growth in the number of women in the military reshaped how the U.S. military deployed its personnel, whether to engage the enemy or to maintain peace. As women entered the Armed Forces in record numbers, especially following the events of 9/11, congressional and military leaders faced many challenges to comply with antiquated policies that did not allow women in direct ground combat units. Although perhaps not impossible, the literature supports the notion that it would have been difficult to achieve success in many of the wars in which the U.S. faced in both the 20th and 21st centuries without the involvement and participation of women in the military. Throughout the history of the U.S. military, women served with distinction from the Revolutionary War to the streets of Baghdad (Iraq) and Kābul (Afghanistan). An exploration of the literature revealed that service members' memories of their experience of being in a combat zone, reintegrating, and readjusting to their former lives before deployment can be a complex transition.

Conducting this study was the first step in exploring the phenomena of the readjustment experiences and needs of single women returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. The literature relative to the topic was important because it served as a foundation on how other researchers such as those at the IoM (2010, 2013) addressed this population, including lessons learned, gaps in the existing literature, strategies used, and how data from other sources helped to guide this and future research on this phenomenon. The absence of empirical studies available on the subject under

investigation makes the findings of this study essential in possibly influencing policy that focuses on assisting single women. Constructing policies that optimize education and coping strategies on readjustment after exposure to combat is an essential component of military administration.

In addition, communities with established outreach programs with beneficial connections between single female veterans and organizations that provide needed resources can result in a positive ripple effect with long-term gains. Through community outreach programs single women veterans may experience positive support networks that are responsive and sensitive to their needs. A partnership between single women veterans and community organizers and agencies that support military veterans may provide resources to enhance their skills and knowledge for employment opportunities, raise their awareness about social, vocational, and recreational activities, identify issues of concern to female veterans in the community, and share ideas on how these issues might be addressed at the local, state, and federal level.

In support of a smooth transition back to civilian life, perhaps the findings of this study may promote research on female veterans' issues that improve their quality of life as they make the transition back to civilian life once their tour of duty in the military ends. This study could also serve as a starting point to raise questions that stimulate further research towards documenting the stories of countless of other single women who participated in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, which are vital to the readjustment experiences of this subpopulation of the military following their war time exposure. From a social change perspective, understanding the meaning of the readjustment experiences

and needs of single women could be a preamble to planning and addressing future concerns of sending single women into combat, especially now that they are authorized to serve in ground combat units.

Summary

Historically, women have participated in every U.S. conflict dating back to the Revolutionary War, but the literature review uncovered many gaps relevant to understanding the full readjustment experiences and needs of single women returning from the Iraqi and Afghanistan wars. Whether married or single, traditionally past studies focused on the readjustment experiences and needs of men and families. This study served as a conduit for single women veterans to share their experiences from their perspective. Its purpose is to gather vital information from single women who deployed in support of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan regarding their readjustment experiences and needs and how future single women may benefit from their experiences.

From the start, coverage of the Iraqi and Afghanistan wars was widespread and highlighted the extensive knowledge of the difficulties many veterans faced as they readjusted to their former lives following deployment. However, based on my research, insufficient data existed that solely focused on the readjustment experiences and needs of single women returning from the contingencies in Iraq and Afghanistan. The literature review provided an opportunity to specifically examine, analyze, and synthesize the literature relevant to the readjustment experiences and needs of single women who deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. Physically and psychologically, deployments are demanding on both male and female combat veterans (Trego et al., 2010). Although the

post-deployment concerns of female veterans are no worse than they are for men, the deployment of women onto an asymmetric battlefield created some unique and very different effects that remain unaddressed.

Social construction of target populations along with policy design serve as the theoretical foundations for this study and the perspective used to evaluate the findings. Various approaches to explore the readjustment experiences and needs of single women returning from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan were considered, yet the theory of social construction and policy design (Schneider & Ingram, 1993, 1997; Ingram, Schneider, & deLeon, 2007; Schneider, Ingram, & deLeon, 2014) provided the best option for evaluating the findings of this target population returning from combat. The theory focuses on the way attitudes towards a target population of a policy can influence the type of policy generated, or how policy can affect the way policymakers view the target population (Nowlin, 2011). This point cannot be over-emphasized, especially since the traditional role of women changed so dramatically during the Iraqi and Afghanistan wars. Their performance lead policy makers, both military and civilian, to reevaluate and rescind the 1994 policy that barred women from being assigned to ground combat units or collocating with these types of units.

Although women had served in every conflict since the Revolutionary War, the change in women's roles and their performance in Iraq and Afghanistan set the stage for breaking down societies long held belief that the military is one of masculinity and moving towards a more postmodern institution. While it took centuries for the military to recognize the benefits of fully integrating women in all areas including combat, perhaps

now the time has come to explore the theory of social construction and its incorporation of target populations and the power women in the military yield in the development and implementation of future military policy designs. In Chapter 3 the role of the researcher is described, the research method, design, and the process for analyzing the data, issues of trustworthiness, and the summary. Found in Chapter 4 are the results of the pilot study, the setting in which the data was collected, the data collection and data analysis process, how the demographics information was used, evidence of trustworthiness, results of the findings, and the summary. Chapter 5 provided an introduction, interpretation of the findings, limitations, recommendations for future research opportunities, implications for social change, and the conclusion.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

Much is known and written about men and their sacrifices in defense of the nation whether in the air, at sea, or on the battlefield both at home and abroad. Although women were excluded from ground combat roles, they have participated in combat environments from as early as the American Revolutionary War to the most recent counterinsurgency campaigns fought in Iraq and Afghanistan (Biesecker, 2002; Sherrow, 2007). The term *combat veteran* is associated with the status of being a male for those who have participated in military combat operations. However, based on my research, in the post 9/11 era honoring women as America's newest combat veterans is a phenomenon that has often gone unnoticed. This new phenomenon and the roles women have served in while supporting the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan has created an opportunity to rethink how the term *combat veteran* is viewed as it applies to both genders. As women face new opportunities to lead men into combat, the social construction of single women as a target population in future combat operations and the roles they may play, based on new gender-neutral policies, in the wake of integrating into combat positions once closed to women is another area worthy of exploring.

Rethinking the perceptions of women in future combat roles becomes more significant in consideration of the most recent DOD policy changes. Such changes require the full integration of women, across all branches of the Armed Forces and into all MOS for enlisted personnel and AOC for officers, provided they meet the same physical and professional standards as their male counterparts (Secretary of the Army,

2016). As the U.S. military moves closer to establishing gender-neutral policies designed to fully integrate women into the Armed Forces and assume combat roles in future wars, an important conceptual issue under investigation in this study was the readjustment experiences and needs of single women, never married, and nonparenting retuning from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan, or their transition home after serving in the military.

The number of peer-reviewed studies examining the impact deployments have had on those deployed in support of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan has continued to grow (Vogt et al., 2018). However, despite this growth, knowledge gaps persist between female SMs with families who deployed (married or single parents) and single, never married, and nonparenting female SMs who also deployed. This gap in the knowledge makes this subpopulation of the military an underserved and understudied population. According to the IoM (2013), there is little research on issues related to single SMs causing community leaders to raise concerns that single SMs may have fewer, or less supportive social networks than those of their married counterparts and those who are single parents. The IoM researchers further argued that in the absence of strong support networks and social activities behavioral health issues may surface among this young single population of SMs returning from deployment (IoM, 2013). In the larger context, proactively engaging this population following deployment and using the information obtained may better serve future generations of single SMs returning from combat operations.

While single female SMs as defined in this study do not have immediate family members, children, or a spouse to come home to, their needs for an adequate support

system and support network are no less important. Following the most recent combat operations, researchers and advocates must consider the long-term implications of single women who have shouldered a heavy burden and faced a greater risk than women who have previously served in the U.S. military. Many veterans who supported the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan can recall his or her own war in their mind, and each is custodian of a unique story and memory (Kelly, 2018). The goal of this study is to give single women a voice. This group is often marginalized, as their stories are not a formal history of war (IoM, 2013). Yet, their perspectives provide a firsthand account of individual feelings and personal recollections of their own experiences. This research has the potential to yield new knowledge to fill the gap regarding the readjustment experiences and needs of single, never married, and non-parenting women returning from combat.

This chapter includes the research method and design, the appropriateness of the method and design, the rationale for the study, and the methodology. It also includes a discussion of the study participants; the pilot study; the sampling, data collection, and data analysis procedures; the instrumentation; and validity and reliability. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the ethical considerations of the research and a summary of the chapter's main points. Study results will be presented and discussed in Chapter 4.

Research Design and Rational

I used a qualitative phenomenological research method to investigate the readjustment experiences and needs of single women returning from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. Qualitative research is time consuming and labor intensive, and the data collected contain a great deal of detail (Leung, 2015; Trochim, 2006). Yet, the findings

obtained are not generalizable beyond the sampled participants (Leung, 2015; Trochim, 2006). According to van Manen, (1997; 2017b), the tendency to generalize prevents researchers from focusing on the uniqueness of the human experience from the rich descriptive details of the participants' viewpoint as it relates to all possibilities of the phenomena. Therefore, using the qualitative phenomenological approach for this study provides the best opportunity to gain a thorough description of the participants' experiences of the phenomena from their original firsthand account.

This qualitative transcendental (descriptive) phenomenological study supported the readjustment experiences of 13 study participants returning from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. Lived experiences involve the immediate consciousness of life's events prior to reflection and without interpretation and are influenced by those things that are internal or external to them (Lambert & Donovan, 2016; Penner & McClement, 2008). Rather than offer an explanation or insight about causes, the phenomenological approach provides clarification on what a phenomenon means based on each participant's lived experience (Polit and Beck, 2007, 2017). Because there is no concern for generalizing the data collected to the larger population, the experiences of single women returning from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan may serve as a foundation in which policy makers and military leaders can build an understanding of what it is like for this subpopulation of the military returning from combat. The data collected may assist policy makers in developing policy guidance that closes the gap in understanding the experiences and needs of single women to ensure the right resources and support systems are available and adequate to meet their unique needs.

For this research project, I used Moustakas' (1994) modified van Kaam method of data analysis to answer the research question: How do single women returning from combat perceive that their social construction has changed, as it relates to their readjustment experiences and needs, compared to males in their unit, or communities as they transition from the military? Past large-scale readjustment studies following war time exposure focused on men (Kulka et al.,1988; Schlenger et al., 2015; Yehuda et al., 2015), while more recent studies following combat exposure from Iraq and Afghanistan have focused on SMs and their families (IoM, 2013). However, the same IoM study identified single SMs as an underserved population. Still, no studies have solely focused on the readjustment experiences and needs of single women exposed to combat returning from the Iraqi and Afghanistan wars, based on my review of the literature.

Using Moustakas' (1994) modified van Kaam approach was ideal because it has systematic steps in the data analysis procedure and guidelines for assembling the textual and structural descriptions of the research participants' experiences (Creswell, 2007, 2017; Moustakas, 1994). The data analysis procedures emphasized by Moustakas (1994) allowed for an exploration of the topic and the population under study because so little was known about either topic. Considering the paucity of research, based on my review of the literature, examining this population, and the need to develop a fundamental understanding of their experiences is essential in benefiting single women who may deploy in future combat operations. Building an understanding of both the population and topic under investigation was best achieved by listening and recording each participants' account of the experience during the interview process.

Each participates' interview was recorded to fully capture their experience of the phenomenon under investigation. van Manen (1997) argued that lived experiences are the start and end of phenomenological research and according to Polit and Beck (2007, 2017) phenomenology is an approach to thinking about what the life experiences of people are like and what they mean. The aim then of using phenomenology in conducting this study was to transform the research participants lived experiences into a textual expression reflective of something meaningful that captured the underlying essence of their experiences.

Appropriateness of the Research Design

As a result of performing the literature, two main phenomenological frameworks emerged for conducting this study: descriptive and interpretive phenomenology (Chan, Fung, Chien, 2013; Foster, O'Halloran, Rose, & Worrall, 2016; Lopez & Willis, 2004). While each provides insight into the participants' experiences, the paths to achieving this insight are quite different. Both descriptive and interpretive frameworks require listening to the participants describe their experiences. When using the interpretive method researchers rely on their prior knowledge and insights of the inquiry under study to interpret and uncover meanings with the goal of producing a vivid textual representation of the phenomenon described by the participants (Kleiman, 2004). In contrast, the descriptive method does not allow researchers to make interpretations. Through the use of epoché, (Moustakas, 1994) any prior knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation was withheld. I took the participants' experience exactly as described and analyzed each description to create meaningful statements essential to the construct of the

phenomenon and produced a written description of it (Penner & McClement, 2008), which is further explained in Chapter 4.

As stated in Chapter 1, studies regarding the readjustment experiences and needs of veterans following war zone exposure focused on men returning from deployment, whether married or single. During 12 years of continuous war in Iraq and Afghanistan, approximately 280,000 women deployed (Myre, 2013). Many were directly exposed to combat, yet studies examining the readjustment experiences and needs of single, never married, and non-parenting U.S. military women remain nonexistent based on my research. Because of this, the qualitative transcendental phenomenological research design method was the most appropriate for conducting this study. This method also allowed for the exploration of the phenomena just as the participants experienced it. The goal of the phenomenological design is to find the meaning of the experiences of those who lived it and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it. Moustakas (1994) emphasized that participants' description of their experiences forms the basis of a reflective structural analysis. Therefore, this reflective structural analysis provided an opportunity to gain the underlying meaning and essence of the participants' original descriptions from the firsthand account of their experiences.

Rational for the Study

The ability of military leaders and policy makers to assess and provide the right resources and adequate support to single women returning from combat is contingent upon establishing a clear understanding of their experiences and needs. This gap in our knowledge is problematic and warrants further study for future generations of single

women who may deploy into combat zones. Given the intricacies of power and gender in the military, the research question to answer during the interview process was: How do single women returning from combat perceive their social construction has changed as it relates to their readjustment experiences and needs, compared to males in their unit, or communities as they transition from the military? Using interview prompts assisted in gaining a rich and substantive description of the participants' experiences. Interview prompts came from the general topics below and are found in Appendix B, the interview protocol. Although participants were not asked all of the questions below, several were asked based on the participants' initial response(s) to a previous question.

Social Interactions:

- As a single woman, how would you describe what your social interactions have been like with others, especially men, since your return from Iraq or Afghanistan including your thoughts, feelings, and perceptions?
- What contexts or situations influenced or affected your social interactions?
- What has your readjustment been like in the sense of your everyday social activities?

Readjustment Experiences and Needs:

- Who, if anyone, has influenced or affected your readjustment and describe what he or she did.
- What value can be derived from your readjustment experiences that may help others returning from future combat zones?
- What do you wish others knew or could understand about your life and

readjustment goals following deployment?

- What would you like to say to health care professionals, your family and friends, military leaders, and policy makers regarding the readjustment experiences and needs of single women returning from a combat zone?

Life Before and After Deployment Stressors:

- How would you describe your life prior to deployment?
- If at all, how do you feel your life is different because of your deployment?
- What are some of the specific stressors regarding your readjustment?
- What have you done to address these stressors?

Support System:

- What was your traditional support system like prior to your deployment?
- Describe how your support system has changed, if at all, since you returned from deployment.
- Since your deployment, how would you describe your relationship with close friends, immediate and extended family?
- What resources have you sought? Which of those were the most helpful? Which were the least helpful?

Additional Information:

- Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your readjustment experiences?

Despite the military drawdown in its active duty force end-strength, women continue to join the military at an unprecedented rate constituting approximately 20% of

new recruits (Disabled American Veterans, 2014; Henderson, 2015). The integration of women into combat jobs once off limits to them makes it essential that military leaders and policy makers realize the critical roles women may continue to play in future combat operations. The potential to be involved on the frontline signifies a need to understand and address the readjustment experiences and needs of women who served in the Iraqi and Afghanistan wars, with a specific focus on the underserved population of single, never married, and non-parenting female veterans. A meaningful concrete relationship implicit in the original description of an experience in the context of a particular situation is the primary target of phenomenological knowledge (Moustakas, 1994). Understanding the readjustment experiences and needs of America's newest combat veterans using the phenomenological design provided an opportunity to understand the phenomenon under investigation directly from the participants' point of view.

Role of the Researcher

What inspired me to conduct this research study was my interest in gaining insight into each participants' understanding and meaning of the phenomenon of serving in a combat zone and their readjustment experiences and needs upon their return home. Therefore, my primary role as a researcher is to describe accurately the participants experiences in relationship to the topic under investigation, the readjustment experiences and needs of single women returning from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. Moustakas (1994) explained that the human scientist determines the underlying structures of an experience by interpreting the original descriptions given of the situation in which the experience occurs. The participant is the instrument through which his or her life

experiences are lived. Using in-depth interviews, participant data was collected and organized for further analysis and interpretation. The intent was to capture the perceptions of single women regarding the research question: How do single women returning from combat perceive their social construction has changed, as it relates to their readjustment experience and needs, compared to males in their unit, or communities as they transition from the military?

Numerous pitfalls exist in carrying out a qualitative phenomenological study. Throughout the data collection process, it was important to avoid being bias when asking interview prompts. According to Walden University Research Center for Quality Research (2017), researchers can avoid bias in several ways. Avoiding bias requires following the rules of ethics when collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the data. To avoid researcher bias I never lead participants towards the perspective I wanted them to share because of personal knowledge and beliefs of the research topic under investigation. In the data collection phase, I used what Moustakas (1994) described as epoché, which required setting aside my personal biases and prejudgments to allow the participants' experience of the phenomenon to unfold. Participants were never pressured to respond to questions they did not want to answer or uncomfortable answering, and their stories were not shared with other participants in the study.

If phenomenological researchers are to capture the essence and meaning of the participants' experiences, they must consider other important roles involved in the data collection process of a qualitative study. Specifically, as the researcher, I recorded and transcribed each participants' interview without purposefully omitting or altering the

data. I maintained a journal during the interview to record reflections, ideas, and thoughts about possible connections between the data and the participants observed nonverbal expressions. To highlight the essence of the participants' experience, I presented the results of the findings in the form of a comprehensive narrative related to the outcome of the phenomenon as experienced by the participants. The narrative focused on the results, but related back to the original purpose of the research: How do single women returning from combat perceive their social construction has changed, as it relates to their readjustment experience and needs, compared to males in their unit, or communities as they transition from the military?

O'Connor and Gibson (2003) and Akinyoade (2013) emphasized, the narrative should provide the context for how the process was carried out. Specifically, the narrative indicated what went right or wrong, the strengths and limitations of the study, what should be done differently and how it can be improved. In essence, it narrative should summarize why the research question and the method used to answer it was important, what the findings were, and the implications of the findings, recommendations, strategies used during the study, and, if any, areas of future possible research interest that were identified. I was also mindful of the ethical obligations involved in the use of human subjects in this research study (Walden University Research Center for Quality Research, 2017), especially regarding the respect of persons by obtaining signed informed consent forms from each participant. The informed consent contained the purpose and procedures for carrying out the study, the time commitment required to conduct the interviews and the follow-up method to ensure credibility, validity, and reliability of the research

through the process of member checking. It also contained the risk and benefits of the study, how anonymity and confidentiality of the participants' name and data would be safeguarded and protected.

Although there were no known anticipated psychological harm or mental distress associated with this study, I was prepared to stop the interview should a participant become upset reliving her experiences. Once the interview was stopped, participants would be offered emotional support and contact information to speak to a licensed professional Military and Family Life Counselor if they wanted to pursue a psychosocial follow-up (Appendix E). Participants were not pressured to respond to questions they did not want to answer or uncomfortable answering. Participants were informed that the study was voluntary; therefore, they were free to stop the interview and exit the study at any time without penalty, or loss, if any, of benefits.

In my final role as researcher, I analyzed and interpreted the descriptions of the participants' experience. Each description was coded and categorized into meaningful statements from which themes were developed that were essential to answering the research question: How do single women returning from combat perceive that their social construction has changed, as it relates to their readjustment experience and needs compared, to males in their unit, or communities as they transition from the military? Because so little was known about this topic and the participants under study, the transcendental phenomenological method was used to understand the essential meanings of the participants' experience in relationship to the topic under investigation.

Methodology

Sampling Strategy

Purposive sampling provided the appropriate means to arrive at a description of the readjustment experiences and needs of single women returning from combat in support of the Iraqi and Afghanistan wars. For inclusion into the study, the ideal participant met the criteria as stated in the recruitment flyer and had knowledge of being a single female who deployed to a combat zone in Iraq or Afghanistan. Participants were willing and able to share their experiences in the form of interviews in enough detail that allowed a thorough analysis of the phenomenon under investigation as it related to answering the research question: How do single women returning from combat perceive their social construction has changed, as it relates to their readjustment experiences and needs, compared to the men in their unit, or communities as they transition from the military?

Ideally, the goal was to interview participants from each branch of the Armed Forces. Although this was not possible it did not prevent the research study from being conducted. Each participant was able to speak, read, and, write English, and willing to sign the informed consent form. Capturing a description of what participants from all branches of the Armed Forces experienced based on war zone location, mission, and role, collecting data from women representing all branches of each service may possibly have offered a variety of best practices that could be shared between the sister services. In addition, collecting data from multiple sources, known as triangulation, provides breadth and depth to the study by ensuring a complete and thorough picture of the findings

(Speziale & Carpenter, 2007). The use of triangulation is further explored in Chapter 4.

The phenomenological process provided an opportunity to gain insight into the participant's experiences through data collection and observation. For this study, data collection and observation occurred using face-to-face interviews. Individual interviews are useful when the researcher wants to explore in-depth the experiences or views of individuals (Petty, Thomson, Stew, 2012). The nature of conducting face-to-face interviews allows for an immediate clarification or expansion of the participant's thoughts, and access to nonverbal cues such as gestures and facial expressions (Speziale & Carpenter, 2007). Recorded, open-ended, semistructured interviews facilitated the collection of data from each participant. Field notes, accompanied each recorded interview to note nonverbal responses observed during the data collection process.

Field notes based on observations made during the interview process served to highlight the environment in which the interview occurred. Another reason for using field notes was to capture the demeanor of the participant's experiences conveyed through facial expressions, blushing, gestures, tears, sounds, silences, or other vocal responses that became part of the final comprehensive data analysis. The dynamics of the interview during the analysis process allowed the participants' descriptions of the experience to come to life (Kleiman, 2004). Persistent observation of the participant was required throughout the interview process to enable the identification of those characteristics and elements that are most relevant to the study to be captured (Simon & Goes, 2013). The use of field notes allowed me to document contextual information observed about each participant during the interview process.

Interviews occurred in an environment free of distractions that provided the participants as much anonymity and confidentiality as possible, which allowed them to feel free to share openly their experiences of the topic under investigation. The location of the interviews took place in a relatively quiet location, the meeting room of a public library. The location also provided the best opportunity to record the participants' interview uninterrupted. Those participating in the study were given the opportunity to describe their experiences fully through words, pictures, journals, and other modes of expressions suitable to the participant. Interview prompts in the form of questions initiated the interview process. Asking interview prompts clarified the meaning of responses and encouraged in-depth rich descriptions of the participant's experiences of the phenomenon (Kleiman, 2004; Penner & McClement, 2008; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Recording the participants' interviews allowed the greatest opportunity to transcribe each interview verbatim and accurately. Once interviews were transcribed the data analysis process began. The analysis process involved dividing the content into meaningful statements and categories from which key and essential themes developed that answered the research question.

Demographic information for this study was collected for the purpose of screening participants for inclusion into the study. Screening data included, but was not limited to, the number of years the participant had served in the military, or spent in the military prior to their transition from military service, branch of service, occupation or specialty, whether they followed the enlisted or officer career path, length of deployment(s), number of deployments, age at the time they joined the military, age

when they deployed and current age. With the aid of a data collection sheet, collecting the demographic data prior to the initial interview was optimum (Appendix C).

Participant Selection Logic

For this study, a transcendental phenomenological research method was chosen to examine the readjustment experiences and needs of single women returning from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. Thirteen participants met the research criteria to participate in the study. Although recruitment was open to participants from all branches of the Armed Forces, only single female service members from the U.S. Army participated in the study. They were enlisted and officer personnel who had never been married and non-parenting. Participants had also deployed in support of the Iraqi or Afghanistan War between 2003 – 2013. They were either still serving on active duty (AD), or had already transitioned from the military. Seeking volunteers for the study was sought by posting the recruitment flyer on the website of women veterans' organizations that provided support to female veterans. I sent the website points of contact an email seeking permission to use their site to post recruitment fliers in search of study participants. In addition, I sought permission to use the sites' name when the findings were published. The website owner was provided a copy of the recruitment flyer and the abstract. Other modes of recruitment included the use of Linked-In and Face Book account.

I did not recruit study participants or begin data collection until I obtained the Institutional Review Board's (IRB) approval to conduct the study. Walden University's IRB granted approval to allow the study to move forward and assigned the following IRB number: 12-27-17-0118636, which expired on December 26, 2018. While I waited on

IRB approval, I conducted online searches of women veterans' organizations and sought permission to post recruitment flyers on their websites. This virtual venue was ideal because single active duty women, those transitioning from the military on a daily basis, and retired female veterans in search of information and resources to assist them in their readjustment phase may have accessed any one of the websites and would potentially see the flyer and volunteer to be in the study. As an alternate plan for recruiting participants, I explored the use of Facebook and Linked-In accounts. I exhausted all means to identify the appropriate research participants who met the criteria of the study through a combination of professional and personal contacts, notifications, and recruitment flyers.

Other essential criteria taken into consideration when locating, screening, and selecting participants for the study included an emphasis on ensuring each research participant not only had experienced the phenomenon, but were also intensely interested in understanding its nature and meaning. Subjects were willing to participate in the interview process and follow-up session to validate the accuracy and credibility of the research findings. Participants were also willing to allow the interview to be tape-recorded. Finally, they were willing to grant me permission to publish the findings of the data in a dissertation and other publications as the final fulfillment in meeting the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Instrumentation

As discussed earlier in this chapter, when conducting qualitative studies using the phenomenological research design method, a central role as researcher is to generate and interpret the data collected from research participants. In this data collection process, I

served as the primary instrument or medium through which data was collected (Lofland, Snow, Anderson, & Lofland, 2006; Speziale & Carpenter, 2007). Data collection occurred through various means including, but not limited to, face-to-face interviews, observation, and taking field notes. Much like face-to-face interviews, the value of observation in this research study was essential. Often, studies like this are predominantly interview driven while observation data is not used to its full potential (Baškarada, 2013; Chawla, 2006; Morgan, Pullon, Macdonald, McKinlay, & Gray, 2017; Morgan, Pullon, & McKinlay, 2015: Morse, 2003; Savage, 2000). The data collection method and technique were key and essential in identifying and maximizing the collection of relevant information. Through the use of observational studies, the participants' daily lived realities become illuminated, while the empirical dimensions of space and place are explored (Kitto, Nordquist, Peller, Grant, & Reeves, 2013).

As a researcher, serving as the instrument through which data is collected, I took fieldnotes. The quality of such notes was contingent upon my personal skills. Fieldnotes are different from interview and documentary data, where verbatim quotes extracted directly from sources are often sufficient to provide evidence of the concepts the author wishes to convey (Phillippi & Lauderdale, 2018). Fieldnotes contain the researcher's experience of a particular moment such as the atmosphere of a room, not easily captured in recordings (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Jarzabkowski, Bednarek, & Le, 2014; Xu & Storr, 2012). Field notes require intense focus on the participants' verbal and non-verbal cues throughout the data collection process. The interview protocol consisted of one question: How do single women returning from combat perceive their social

construction has changed, as it relates to their readjustment experience and needs, compared to males in their unit, or communities as they transition from the military? Several interview prompts supported the collection of data related to the phenomenon under study (Appendix B), combined with the collection of demographic data for each participant (Appendix C).

Pilot Study

Prior to conducting the IRB-approved study, I sought IRB approval to initiate a pilot study to test my research process, procedures, and interview questions. The purpose for conducting the pilot study was to seek feedback in an effort to eliminate redundant questions and clarify confusing or awkward questions. In addition, the pilot study facilitated in determining whether the findings were properly aligned to answer the research question and the purpose for conducting the study. Therefore, data collected did not undergo data analysis, or the coding process for final interpretation. The pilot study involved one participant who met the criteria for being in the study. The participant used in the pilot study was not involved in the final study. However, the setting and conditions were replicated to mirror the final study. The interview protocol in Appendix B and the demographic information in Appendix C was used to gather data for the pilot study.

Informed Consent Form and Confidentiality

An informed consent was provided to each participant volunteering to be in the study. Interviews began immediately as each participant signed and returned the consent form. Participation in the research study was voluntary. At no time during the participant selection process was a participant coerced to volunteer. To gain

the trust of each participant, the consent form explained the purpose for conducting the study and the participants' right to withdraw at any time (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). As important as it was to obtain the participants' informed consent, so too was protecting and maintaining the participants' confidentiality and anonymity throughout the data collection process. While there were various ways to achieve this, one way I used to maintain confidentiality was to provide each participant with a unique identifier, or pseudonym to assist in keeping their anonymity (Neuman, 2005; Salkind 2006). For this study, other measures to maintain confidentiality included securing the data in a controlled environment within a locked file with access limited only to me. In addition, participant files stored on my personal computer were password protected.

Data Analysis Plan

Textual qualitative data can be extensive and challenging to analyze. However, through the process of data analysis a search for meaning of what has been collected can be reduced to meaningful statements that highlights the essence of the phenomena as experienced by the participants and shared with others (Simon, 2011). In a descriptive phenomenological study, the participants' descriptions of the phenomenon are analyzed and divided into meaningful statements. By gathering the meanings essential to the construct of the phenomenon under study, I was able to write a description of the structure regarding the phenomenon of interest as it related to the research question: How do single women returning from combat perceive their social construction has changed, as it relates to their readjustment experiences and needs, compared to males in their unit, or communities as they transition from the military?

Essential to capturing the participants' experience of the phenomenon was to ensure that my own personal beliefs and knowledge of the topic under investigation were set aside. To achieve this, I employed what Moustakas (1994) referred to as *epoché.* This required engaged discipline and a systematic effort to set aside, as far as humanly possible, all preconceived experiences and knowledge about the phenomenon to allow a clear understanding of the experiences of the participants in the study to emerge (Bradbury-Jones, Taylor, & Herber, 2014; Dowling, 2004, 2007; Gearing, 2004; Hemme, Morais, Bowers, & Todd, 2017; Kleiman, 2004; Lingis, 2017; Moustakas, 1994; van Manen, 2017a; 2017b; Starks, 2007; Wall, Glenn, Mitchinson, & Poole, 2004; Willis, Sullivan-Bolyai, Knafl, & Cohen, 2016). To achieve perfect *epoché* is rare, yet Moustakas emphasized the goal is to reduce the textual (what) and structural (how) meanings of the experience to a brief description that typifies the experiences of the participants in the study.

Epoché is important so that the participants' perceptions of the phenomena remain intact (Walden University Research Center for Quality Research, 2017). It also provides an opportunity to document and compare preconceptions to things observed and heard in the study. For example, the assumption single women returning from Iraq and Afghanistan have more difficulties readjusting from exposure to combat after deployment than married women or women with children. *Epoché* was ongoing and employed throughout the course of the study (Penner & McClement, 2008). Prior to conducting interviews, to allow participants to express their experiences without undue influence, I set aside my own personal experiences as a former single female veteran who had served

in the military for 20-years. This allowed me to approach each interview with an open mind, and remain neutral to allow participants to share and express their own experiences (Appendix A).

Data analysis involve organizing, examining, and dwelling with the data in such a way that allow patterns to emerge from which categories of themes can be identified and relationships discovered. Data analysis also provide opportunities to develop explanations, make interpretations and comparisons, mount critiques, or generate theories (Hatch, 2002; Creswell, 2007, 2017). Through data analysis, various procedures occur that ultimately ends when the data analyzed is reduced into themes through the process of coding or categorizing the data for final presentation in the form of figures, tables, or a textual written report of the meanings and essences of the experience representing the group interviewed as a whole (Creswell, 2007, 2017; Moustakas, 1994).

To analyze data, Creswell (2017) used a qualitative data analysis spiral as a visual model to analyze qualitative data. In comparison, Moustakas (1994) provided a modified outline of van Kaam's method of analysis of phenomenological data, which I used for this study and discussed in Chapter 4. Both Creswell (2007, 2017) and Moustakas' (1994) modified method of analysis are similar in the sense that they each offer a means to understand, analyze, interpret, and present the meaning and essence of one's experience. Creswell's (2007, 2017) visual model of qualitative analysis spiral starts at the bottom with data collected in the form of text (interviews) or images (photographs, videotapes).

From the bottom, the process moves upward in analytic circles, rather than a fixed

linear approach, to the exit point where a written narrative is presented with the findings of the participants' experiences and context of those experiences. The first loop in the spiral begins with data management where data is organized into file folders, or computer files that are converted into text units (words, a sentence, or a story) for analysis. The qualitative analysis process is continued by reading the transcripts collected during the interviews several times. Each time the transcript is read the data becomes more familiar and begins to make sense as it is broken down into smaller parts. Written memos, consisting of key concepts, short phrases, or ideas, in the margins of the transcribed interview is helpful in the initial process of exploring the participants' original recorded interviews. Memos help capture thoughts, make comparisons and connections between the participants' accounts of the phenomenon, and crystallize questions and directions to pursue in the initial process (Kodish & Gittelsohn, 2011). For similar reasons, the field notes taken while observing participants during the interview process were used to reflect on the larger thoughts presented in the data to form initial categories of themes.

Moving upward from the reading and memo-taking phase, capturing the essence of the phenomenon in the context in which it emerges from the developing themes is described. From the description of the themes, the researcher interprets or makes sense of the data. To aid in interpreting, or making sense of the data, the researcher uses a preliminary coding framework. The data is organized and sorted into codes, or categories used to identify themes that highlight significant statements grouped into meaningful units for interpretation. Coding or classifying data is the heart of the qualitative data analysis process. Data analysis interpretation can take many forms such as hunches,

insights, intuition, or within a social science construct. Through interpretation, attempts to make sense of the data takes place. For instance, developing themes for the information represented by segments of data used to describe the essence of the participants' experience of the phenomenon occurs within the context of the setting, place, or event.

From initial data management to presenting and interpreting the findings, the spiral analysis highlights the nonlinear, iterative nature of qualitative data analysis (Creswell, 2007, 2017; Kodish & Gittelsohn, 2011). In addition, it highlights an organized approach in data analysis that can help ensure credible findings. The final exit point of the qualitative analysis spiral is accounting for and presenting the findings resulting from the analysis in the form of written text, or a visual representation using tables, figures or charts. Either form provides an opportunity to present an interpretation of the participants' experience of the phenomenon by developing a textual (what happened), or structural (how the phenomenon happened) description of the phenomenon.

Organizing a large amount of raw qualitative data can be an overwhelming task involving dozens of interview transcripts and field notes translated into the participants' story line and read by others. An ideal account of the study under investigation contained a rich and tightly woven encounter of the phenomenon that closely represented the participants' reality. Only those who experienced the phenomenon provided a legitimate account of this reality. Achieving reality depended on having a sufficient number of participants selected from those who met the inclusion criteria.

Computer Software Used in the Data Analysis Process

The data collected throughout the process was stored electronically. The use of NVivo, a qualitative data analysis (QDA) computer assisted software program, assisted with the analysis and presentation of the large quantity of textual data collected from each participant. Other benefits of using QDA software is its ability to store, organize, index, sort and code data, and separate it into smaller manageable segments that can be labeled (American University, 2016). The use of computer-assisted software made it possible for this iterative process to continue throughout the data analysis phase, which allowed themes regarding the phenomenon to emerge. While software programs are useful in the data analysis process, the researcher is still the most invaluable tool for analysis (Cheng, 2014; Kelle, 1997; Weitzman, 2000; Wiedemann, 2013). Although QDA software is invaluable in coding, archiving, and retrieving qualitative data in the analysis process, software cannot read the text, interpret it, and ultimately decide what it means. In short, the emergent of qualitative data analysis software provides a tool useful in handling, coding, and grouping vast volumes of data more effectively and efficiently.

Coding Framework

Involved in the nature of qualitative research is the process of coding, the primary technique used in data analysis. For this qualitative study, the focal point of the coding framework was based on the theories of social construction of target populations and policy design related to the readjustment experiences and needs of single women returning from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. Coding provides a way to determine what is contained in a segment of text, which can later be grouped into themes (Gläser &

Laudel, 2013), simply stated, the codes are applied to the text. Employing coding techniques in qualitative methods assist in organizing and analyzing large amounts of data collected during qualitative research (Alsalih, 2014; Hahn, 2008). Miles and Huberman (1994) referred to coding as tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study (Gläser & Laudel, 2013).

Coding progresses in a stepwise manner from unsorted data to the development of more refined explicit concepts and categories (Saldana, 2009, 2015). These concepts and categories were used later to develop themes essential to the theory and answering the research question: How do single women returning from combat perceive their social construction has changed, as it relates to their readjustment experience and needs, compared to males in their unit, or communities as they transition from the military? Using data collected during each participants' interview, the recorded interview was transcribed into text which was then coded and placed in a preliminary coding framework, using a table to organize and present the data.

To analyze the data, I used Moustakas' modified version of van Kaam's method of analysis. Initial data analysis using level one coding (Alsalih, 2014; Hahn, 2008; Saldana, 2009, 2015) is focused on large quantities of qualitative data that can be labeled to determine distinct concepts, categories, or a single idea. In level one coding, describing a phenomenon can range from a concise label, a single word to a full sentence, an entire page of text, or a stream of moving images (Saldana, 2009, 2015). Prior to transitioning to second level coding, the initial codes are combined to create themes for the core

phenomenon under investigation.

During second level coding, codes identified in level one are reexamined to further focus the data (Alsalih, 2014; Hahn, 2008; Saldana, 2009, 2015). In other words, second level coding provides a more direct approach to looking at the data to ensure all essential aspects of the text were identified. In this stage of the coding process, portions of the code may be the same, contain longer passages of text, or reconfigured from the codes previously established during first level coding (Alsalih, 2014; Hahn, 2008; Saldana, 2009, 2015). The data is reviewed again to create categories around the core phenomenon. In second level coding the concepts and categories that emerge are used to confirm whether they accurately represent the interview responses and explore how they are related (Biddix, 2009).

In examining the latter element, there were various types of concepts and categories to consider in identifying the core phenomenon. For instance, actions, activities, processes, perceptions, differences, casual conditions, situational factors that caused or influenced the core phenomenon, intervening conditions, the social and political context, and associated effects or consequences (Biddix, 2009; Creswell, 2007, 2017; Löfgren, 2013). In second level coding, as the data was analyzed, the original number of first cycle codes were collapsed into a smaller number. Often times, the rationale to collapse the codes is because larger segments of text may possibly be better suited to just one key code rather than several smaller ones (Lewins & Silver, 2007; Saldana, 2009, 2015). Through coding I was able to determine the meaning of the data and from first and second level codes themes were developed.

Initially, half the interviews were read in conjunction with the theory, the research question, and interview prompts to record topics that come up frequently. The initial reading of the data was done with a focus on emerging concepts and categories from which themes developed, while observing for key topics critical to answering the research question. Afterwards, I developed a preliminary coding framework with the goal of capturing more themes. From the initial codes previously developed, the remaining interviews were read and analyzed. At this point, the intent was to continue refining the existing list of codes, capture new codes, and take note of those that remained constant across all interviews. The interview protocol found in Appendix B contains the research question along with the interview prompts.

The coding process in the phenomenlogical research design uses the analysis of significant statements from which meaning units are generated and the development of the essence of the phenomenon under investigation begins to emerge (Moustakas, 1994). Table 1 depicts the preliminary coding framework associated with the theory and nine elements of policy design. Also present are the research question and interview prompts related to the study of the readjustment experiences and needs of single women returing from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. In short, the general steps in qualitative data analysis includes: transcribing and reviewing the collected data, organizing and clarifying it, coding, memoing, finding themes, patterns and relationships, and presenting in final form a written report which captures the essence of the participants' experiences.

Table 1

Preliminary Codeing Framework

Theory	Parent Codes	Child Codes	Interview Prompts
Social Construction	Reality (SC-R)	Power Distribution	1, 3, 5, 6, 8, 10, 11
	Social Theory (ST)	Emotion	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9
	Target Populations (SC-TP)	Advantaged	1, 2, 4, 8
	Policy Design (SC-PD)	Contenders	1, 2, 8
	Problem Definition and Goals Pursued	Dependents	1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 9
	Benefits and Burdens to be Distributed	Deviants	8
	Target Populations	Benefits	1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 10
	Rules	Burdens	1, 2, 9
	Tools	Powerful	1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 9
	Implementation Structure	Politically Weak	1, 2
	Social Constructions	Negative	1, 7, 8, 9
	Rationales	Positive	1, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9
	Underlying Assumption	Negative	1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 9

Issues of Trustworthiness

Validity

A general lack of consensus exist regarding what constitutes validity and reliability in social science research. However, validity and reliability are a means of demonstrating and communicating the rigor of the qualitative research processes and the

trustworthiness of research findings (Brinkley, 2016; Hamblya, Khana, McDermottc, Borb, Haywood, 2017; Roberts, Priest, & Traynor, 2006). Various researchers provided a variety of perspectives regarding the importance of validity in qualitative research, yet lacking from these varying perspectives are a universal definition, or term to describe it, and procedures for establishing validity (Angen 2000; Creswell, 2007, 2017; LeCompte & Goetz, 1982; Lewis, 2015; Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001). For example, Angen (2000) saw validation as a judgment of the trustworthiness or goodness of a piece of research within the context of interpretive inquiry based on ethical and substantive validation.

From a naturalist perspective developing trustworthiness to validate qualitative research involved credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and authenticity (Cope, 2014; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Houghton, Casey, Shaw, Murphy, 2013; Kaivo-oja, 2017). Still, from a postmodern perspective, Whittemore, Chase, and Mandle (2001) synthesized perspectives of validity included credibility, authenticity, criticality, and integrity. In the traditional sense, the concepts of validity and reliability are considered the cornerstones of scientific inquiry. However, more recent researchers avoided these concepts because they have undergone a number of transformations and revisions in the era of qualitative inquiry in favor of other expressions (Heikkinen, Jong, & Vanderlinde, 2016). As a novice researcher, it was difficult to narrow down which of these varying perspectives was best suited for this particular study.

Because of the different views, terms, and procedures used to establish and obtain

validity in qualitative research, Kodish and Gittelsohn (2011) emphasized methodological rigor during data collection can help make analysis easier and findings more credible. In qualitative research, validity is a way to determine whether the research findings are accurate and refers to the trustworthiness of the data interpretation (Johnson, 1997; Korstjens & Moser, 2018; LeCompte & Goetz, 1982; Leonard, Fitzgerald, & Riordan, 2015; Leonard & Roberts, 2014). Research validity ensures the findings provide valuable information obtained from the appropriate implementation of the research method (Yüksel & & Yıldırım, 2015). In addition, another aspect of validity involved the associated internal and external threats.

Internal and external threats when identified early in the process can be minimized should they arise later. According to Baškarada (2014) and Benkharafa (2013) internal and external threats can affect the validity and outcome of a study. Internal validity involves experimental procedures, treatments, or experiences of the participants that threaten the researchers' ability to draw a correct inference to the data about the participants in the study (Creswell, 2009, 2013). Identifying the internal threats to this study were imperative, one such threat was mortality. For example, for many possible reasons, a participant may choose to drop out of the study. Therefore, the outcome would be unknown for that participant and any data collected would be set aside. To counter this particular threat, in terms of outcome, I recruited a large enough sample to account for dropouts, or compare those who dropped out with those who continued.

External validity stems from incorrect inferences the researcher draws from the sample data to other participants, other settings, and past or future situations (Creswell,

2009, 2013; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In other words, generalizing beyond the group in the study to others not under study, to settings not studied, or to past or future situations. Another potential difficulty in achieving validity in qualitative research is researcher bias, whether from selective collection and recording of data, or from interpretation based on personal perspectives (Johnson, 1997). Smith and Noble (2014) also warned against researchers' bias because it can affect the outcome of the research study. To avoid researcher bias I suspended my prior experiences, judgments, and beliefs related to the topic under investigation through the process of *epoché* (Appendix A). *Epoché* helps maintain an accurate account of the study by relying on firsthand accounts of the phenomenon from the participants. In this phenomenological study, I suspended my personal experiences and opinions using Moustakas (1994) concept of *epoché* to ensure the research remained reliable and valid. In addition to *epoché*, to check for accuracy of the findings, various researchers identified at least eight strategies for qualitative data validation (American University, 2016; Creswell, 2007, 2017; Johnson, 1997; Kodish & Gittelsohn, 2011; Simon & Goes, 2013).

Strategies used to ensure the accuracy of the findings included a variety of procedures ranging from: (a) spending prolonged periods in the field with participants to gain their trust, (b) learning the culture and checking for misinformation from distortions introduced by the researcher, (c) triangulation, which involves obtaining information from multiple and different sources for data corroboration, (d) conducting peer reviews to obtain an external check of the research process, (e) searching for negative cases to reflect critically on what the researcher brings to the research project such as prior

experiences and prejudices, (f) member checking to obtain the participants' views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations during the data analysis phase, (g) providing a thick description of the characteristics of a program that can be transferred to other settings, and (h) an external audit by an outside consultant that examines both the process and product for accuracy. For this study, two qualitative data validation strategies were employed, triangulation and member checking. However, the use of member checking in this sense was used to ensure the participants' transcribed interviews accurately captured their words, perceptions, and feelings.

Reliability

My primary goal in determining validity and reliability was the reduction of errors while maintaining the rigor of the research process throughout the study. Reliability in qualitative research is the trustworthiness of the procedures and data generated (Stiles, 1993). American University (2016) noted, reliability is an examination of the stability, or consistency of responses obtained during data collection. To increase the consistency and reliability of a study, document all procedures, set up a detailed protocol, check transcripts for obvious mistakes, check for drifts in definitions of codes, or their application during the coding process (Creswell, 2009, 2013; Yin, 2003). Keeping detailed notes on decisions made throughout the process adds to the study's auditability and, therefore reliability (Brinkley, 2016; Roberts, Priest, & Traynor, 2006).

In qualitative research, reliability can often be misleading if discussed with reliability as a criterion, the consequence is that the study is no good (Stenbacka, 2001; Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013). On the other hand, validity and reliability should

cause qualitative researchers concern when designing a study, especially since they are viewed as producing findings that are trustworthy and defensible in analyzing its results, and judging the quality of the study (Golafshani, 2003; Olson, McAllister, Grinnell, Walters, & Appunn, 2016). Building on the suggestions of scholars who advanced our knowledge of research methodologies, the quality of a study in each paradigm should be judged by its own paradigm's terms (Abdul, H.-B., Raj, G., Chakraborty, S. 2016; Healy & Perry, 2000). For example, while the terms validity and reliability are essential criterion for quality in quantitative paradigms, the terms credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability are the essential criteria for qualitative paradigms and the dependability of the research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Venkatesh, Brown, & Bala, 2013).

Qualitative content analysis is another approach to handling data and ensuring reliability. More precisely, to describe the data, specific codes are created from the statements provided in the interview transcripts and new codes are created that can be confirmed by revisiting previously coded data periodically to check for stability over time (Roberts, Priest, & Traynor, 2006). Another approach to achieving reliability is the use of DQA computer assisted software. Data analysis software such as NVivo can enhance reliability (Hilal & Alabri, 2013) by applying the rules built into the database. While there are many perspectives on validation, to ensure validity and reliability, and multiple standards of evaluation, research should not mislead those who use it, but rather be helpful.

Ethical Considerations

Upon successful completion of the oral defense and final approval of the proposal by the Office of Student Research Administration, I submitted the Standard Research Ethics Review Application to the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Ethical Standards in Research for review and approval to conduct the study. Prior to IRB approval, I did not contact or recruit participants for the research study. However, I established a closed and secure Facebook account for the sole purpose of allowing those who met the criteria of the study to contact me directly. The closed and secure Facebook account further provided a venue that offered anonymity to the study participants.

In addition, I attended a Women's Veterans Summit to discuss the research study and handout business cards. At no time during the Summit did I use this forum as an opportunity to recruit participants. However, I requested permission from organizations attending the Summit to use their website to post flyers to recruit participants for the project and use the name of the website when publishing the results of the study. In further compliance of ethical considerations, I completed the National Institute of Health (NIH) training entitled "Protecting Human Research Participants," and renewed my certification (#2325815) on 15 February 2017.

Participants who met the research study criteria and volunteered to participate were asked to sign an informed consent. As stated in the consent form, participants were informed that the results of the research would be published, but their identity and names would remain confidential and unknown to outside parties. I granted participants every opportunity to ask, and have answered, questions about anything they did not fully

understand prior to participating in the study. Following the initial interview, I validated the thoroughness of the data transcribed and interpreted for accuracy and credibility by using a process called member checking. This process required participants to verify accuracy and thoroughness of their transcribed recorded interview, and solicited their views on the credibility of the findings and interpretations of the data collected and analyzed. In an effort to maintain contact with the participant and conduct the follow-up assessment, I obtained the participants' name, phone number, and email address.

Prior to initiating each interview, I reminded participants that their participation was strictly voluntary. The informed consent was reviewed again with each participant to ensure they fully understand their rights and the process involved in carrying out the study. Participants were reminded they could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss, if any, of benefits. Those remaining in the study were informed they would be notified when the results of the study were published, or discussed in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. No information about the participants' identity is included in the final study that would reveal the participants' identity to others. Along with military leaders and policy makers, participants will receive a copy of the research study findings via email. In general, the findings will be used to educate and inform military leaders and policy makers of the readjustment experiences and needs of future generations of single female service members returning from military combat operations. The sole intent is to ensure adequate resources are available and coping strategies are identified and provided to allow for a smoother readjustment to their former lives.

Throughout the process, every precaution was taken to ensure personal identifiable information (PII) was protected, coded, and presented as anonymous data. To maintain each participant's privacy and confidentiality, I did not use personal information for any purpose outside of this research project. All research-related records have an assigned label, or code with an assigned research participant number, but does not include the participants' name or social security number. A locked filed cabinet is used to safeguard the link between the participant number and hardcopy research records, with access limited only to me. Information stored on my personal computer are in files that are password protected. I am the only person able to match the research participant number with personal identifying information and was solely responsible for transcribing each interview. Data collected from participants will remain on file for a period of 5-years, as required by Walden University. Once the filing period has reached its life cycle, I will destroy all participants' records. Hardcopy files will be shredded and computer files deleted.

Summary

Chapter 3 provided a brief introduction and contained information regarding the research method and appropriateness of the phenomenological research design selected for the study. It contained the rationale for the study, methodology with a discussion on the role of the researcher, sampling strategy, locating and selecting participants, and informed consent and confidentiality. In addition, it captured the overall research design relevant to the research method. Through the phenomenological interview process, qualitative research provided an opportunity to obtain a rich description of the

phenomenon under investigation based on the participants point of view.

Phenomenology as a research design involves a small sample to gather textual data (Creswell, 2008; Leedy & Ormrod, 2010; Moustakas, 1994). For this study, 13 participants were chosen. Also, included in this chapter is a section on instrumentation, the plan used to conduct the pilot study, data analysis, the aid of computer-assisted software, the coding framework, validity and reliability. This chapter concluded with ethical considerations and a summary of the main points. The results of the methodology of the study described within this chapter will be further discussed and analyzed in Chapter 4. Data collection and analysis resulting from the in-depth interviews of single women returning from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan are also contained in Chapter 4. A brief introduction, interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations for future research opportunities, implications for social change, and the conclusion are discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

Historically, partly explained by the inequalities of gender, there has been a lack of parity between women and men whether in the boardroom, on the playing fields, or on the battlefields, yet women have left an indelible mark in U.S. history in many of these areas. It is in this vein the American reformer and women's rights activist, Susan B. Anthony, stated, "A woman must learn not to depend on the protection of men, but must be taught to protect herself, and there I take my stand" (Callender, 2013, para 1). As outlined in Chapters 1 and 3, the purpose of this qualitative study was to explore, discuss, and understand the readjustment experiences of single women returning from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan.

For this research project, I used Moustakas' (1994) modified van Kaam method of data analysis to answer the research question: How do single women returning from combat perceive their social construction has changed, as it relates to their readjustment experiences and needs, compared to males in their unit, or communities as they transition from the military? More than 400-hundred sources were included in the summary review and overall study, yet knowledge gaps persist between female SMs with families who deployed (married or single parents) and single, never married, and nonparenting female SMs who also deployed. The paucity of research examining the population under study and the need to understand their experiences could potentially inform other research projects and expand the development of veteran programs essential in benefiting future generations of single women deploying in support of combat operations.

Purposive sampling aided in selecting participants who met the criteria of the study. Data collection from 13 participants occurred through in-depth, semistructured interviews to understand the readjustment experiences of single women returning from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan and capture the essence of the phenomenon under investigation. Semistructured interviews involve a few predetermined areas of interest with possible prompts to help guide the conversation (Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012). This chapter contains an overview of the major themes that emerged from the findings to convey each participant's lived experiences, perceptions, resiliency and courage. I also explain the data analysis approach used to identify each theme. Other areas of focus included a description of the research question, the data collection process, data analysis method, the resulting themes, evidence of trustworthiness, and the findings of the study.

Research Question

I sought to answer one central research question: How do single women returning from combat perceive their social construction has changed, as it relates to their readjustment experiences and needs, compared to males in their unit, or communities as they transition from the military? I used several interview prompts, as researchers have noted, to assist in guiding the participants' through the conversation during the interview, to clarify their responses, and provide a rich and substantive description of their experiences (Albertson, Moreno, Garrison, Evans, & Ahrens, 2018; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Interview prompts in the form of questions were used to initiate the interview process. In addition, the prompts were taken from various general topics including social interactions, readjustment experiences and needs, life stressors before and after

deployment, and support systems before and after deployment. Interview prompts are not only a set of questions, but also serve as a procedural guide for directing a new qualitative researcher through the interview process (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). To gain a greater understanding of what participants expressed during the interview, follow-up questions along the lines of the original question, or interview prompt are asked to seek clarity regarding the participants' feelings, thoughts, and meanings. In addition, reflective questions are asked while taking every precaution to avoid asking leading or suggestive questions.

Pilot Study

On January 14, 2018, I conducted a pilot study as a trial run to guide the planning and execution of the much larger study under investigation. The focus of the pilot study included, but was not limited to recruitment strategies, sample availability, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis. Pilot studies are a version of the main study, yet in miniature form to test whether the components of the main study can all work together (Abbott, 2014; Eldridge et al., 2016). The pilot study was used to streamline and validate semistructured interviews used to conduct research into the readjustment experiences of single women returning from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. The outcome of the study may provide guidance for others who conduct qualitative studies on this topic in future research studies.

In performing the pilot study, every effort was taken to replicate all aspects of the study as much as possible to meet the intent of the main study beginning with the participant chosen, the setting, and the interview method (Dikko, M., 2016). The same

criteria were used for the selection of the pilot participant as that used in the main study. The target participants for this study were single women returning from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. Once chosen, the pilot participant was assigned a unique identifier (PP) and referred to as the pilot participant. When using semistructured interviews as the primary means of conducting the research study, especially face-to-face interviews, the setting must be chosen that provides the most comfort to the participant (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012; Kim, 2011). However, it must also provide as few distractions as possible and allow the interview to be recorded with ease. Furgerson and Jacob (2012) also suggested setting aside uninterrupted time that is estimated to be adequate to conduct the interview. For this reason, participants were interviewed in a library setting in a quiet environment.

Before the interview began, a mutual connection was established with the participant to facilitate a calm relaxed environment. It was important to establish trust and rapport to allow the participant to speak open and honestly. Proper introductions were made followed by explaining the nature and significance of the study, without disclosing the actual research question. The pre-interview discussion put the participant at ease and assured her that confidentiality of her information and identity would be protected and safeguarded throughout the process. In addition, the participant was informed that all information obtained would only be used for the purpose of the research. Prior to turning on the recording device, the participant granted permission to allow the interview to be recorded. Once the actual interview commenced, the central interview question was identified and interview prompts were followed sequentially and arranged based on the

logical connections between them.

Each question was phrased exactly as they appeared in the IRB (Institution Review Board) application, which was strictly adhered to. Within each interview, prompts were used to elicit more information to extend the participant's answer and allow for a richer substantive response. Using interviews to collect data also meant conducting a follow-up interview with each participant, which is less time consuming than the original. The follow-up session occurred via email and allowed participants to reflect on the original recorded conversation as transcribed verbatim, filling in missing data, adding new information, and providing reassurance to the participants their information was accurately described (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). The pilot participant was given 7-days to review her transcribed transcript reply back to me with her feedback.

The pilot participant interviewed provided an opportunity to refine, rephrase, and clarify the interview prompts. Attention also focused on the time taken to conduct the interview. Interviews should not exceed 90-minutes so that due consideration is given to the other commitments of the interviewee who may have to free up time to participate in the interview (Fraser, Fahlman, Arscott, & Guillot, 2018; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Each interview session averaged about 30 to 90-minutes from start to finish, thus establishing the instrument (the researcher) satisfied the recommended time frame for an interview. The selection of an appropriate data collection instrument is essential in conducting research; however, more important is to ensure the instrument chosen performs the desired job properly, which is to collect the right data. Jacob and Furgerson (2012) opined, using the correct instruments were even more paramount in qualitative

research, where unlike quantitative data, because it is neither exact nor statistical in nature and requires ensuring instruments capture required concepts.

The pilot study did have a limitation, though reflective of the participants targeted in the main study, the pilot participant was chosen based on convenience of access and willingness to participate in the pilot. Morse (2015) suggested the researcher may use a convenience sample, interviewing everyone who volunteers, or use a quota sample to interview a certain number of people with particular positions of interest. As patterns and conjectures emerge, the sampling approach changes from a convenience sample to theoretical sampling. That is, rather than interviewing those who are available, or who volunteer, the researcher seeks information from those most likely to know the information required to verify or to move understanding forward. In addition, as a mini version of the main study, the pilot study was able to determine whether, as a research construct, it satisfied the requirements for validity, credibility, and trustworthiness within the rigor of qualitative research. It is essential to ensure the main study can stand up to scrutiny; therefore, ultimately the purpose of conducting the pilot study was to determine whether it adequately obtained data on the topic and population under investigation I set out to measure.

Demographics

I obtained demographic information on each of the research participants to determine whether they met the inclusion criteria of the study. Demographic variables used in selecting participants included career path, rank, grade, MOS, AOC, branch of service, deployment status, which contingency they supported, if multiple deployments,

how many? Other demographic variables included the length of their deployment(s) and age at the time of their first deployment. The final sample was comprised of 13 single female veterans with a median age of 27½ years. Participants were among both the junior and senior enlisted and officer ranks of the military. Nine of the 13 participants (69.2%) deployed to Iraq and four (30.8%) deployed to Afghanistan. Six participants (46.2%) deployed once (three to Iraq and three to Afghanistan), six (46.2%) deployed twice (five to Iraq and Afghanistan and one to Afghanistan twice), and one (0.7%) participant deployed three times (once to Iraq and twice to Afghanistan). Participants served in a variety of combat support and combat service support occupations and concentrations: perioperative nurse, medical surge nurse, public health nurse, medical service corps officer, transportation corps officer, signal corps officer, Iraqi acquisition officer, unit supply specialist, cryptologist, military intelligence analyst, human intelligence analyst, and automation logistics specialist. Table 2 highlights additional information on the military characteristics and qualitative data frequency of the participants.

Table 2

Participants Military Characteristics and Qualitative Data Frequency

Qualitative Data Frequency (f)	N	Percent
Participant Age Range		
18-25	0	0
26-35	7	53.8
36-45	2	15.4
46-55	4	30.8
Median Age		
27½ years old		
Mode		
24 years old		
Military Characteristics		
Branch of Service		
Army	13	100
Military Status		
Active Duty	7	53.8
Retired	3	23.1
Honorably Discharged	2	15.4
Reservist	1	0.7
Career Path		
Commissioned	7	53.8
Enlisted	6	46.2
Rank		
E-1-E-4: (Private–Specialist)	1	0.7
E-5-E-8: (Sergeant–Master Sergeant)	5	38.4
LT-CPT: (Lieutenant–Captain)	2	15.4
MAJ-COL: (Major–Colonel)	5	38.4
Deployment Location		
Iraq	9	69.2
Afghanistan	4	30.8
Five deployed to both locations		
Two deployed to the same location twice		
One deployed to one location twice and the other location once		
Number of Deployments		
Once	6	46.2
Twice	6	46.2
Three or more times	1	0.7
Length of Deployment		
<6-months	2	15.4
6-months-1-yr	5	38.5
1-yr-18-months	5	38.5
>18-months	1	0.7
Total Number of Deployments Among Participants		
21		

Data Collection

Initial recruitment of participants occurred via flyers posted on the websites of organizations that supported the needs of female veterans. For example, Veterans Forever Soldiers and Project PLASE (People Lacking Ample Shelter and Employment). Other modes of recruitment included the use of Linked-In and Face Book accounts. Because contact information for participants was not readily available, a purposive sample was drawn using "snowball sampling" (Baltar & Brunet, 2012; Iacono, Symonds, & Brown, 2016; Woodley & Lockard, 2016) and calls for voluntary participation. Recruitment flyers contained my contact information along with instructions for participating in the study. Those who met the criteria of the study and wanted to participate in the research project were asked to send me an email with the words "I consent to participate in the research study" in the subject line.

Once the potential participant's email was received indicating their consent to be in the study, they were contacted by phone and the procedures were explained regarding privacy, how confidentiality would be maintained throughout the process, the data collection process, how the data is analyzed, used, and stored. To maintain confidentiality throughout the data collection and data analysis process, each participant was assigned a unique research participant number. For instance, participant one was assigned P1, participant number two was referenced as P2, and so on up to the final participant, number thirteen, who was identified as P13. Before discussing a date and time to conduct interviews, participants were educated on the purpose of the study, informed consent, voluntary nature of the study and withdrawal procedures. Because of the potential to

become upset when recalling experiences associated with serving in a combat zone, participants were informed of the immediate availability of emotional support and a resource to pursue a psychosocial follow-up. Participants were provided the contact information for Military OneSource, a 24/7 resource that provides counseling to those in need. Participants were not pressured to respond to questions they did not want to answer, or uncomfortable answering.

Participant recruitment was open to all branches of the Armed Forces, yet study participants were current or former military service members serving in the active and Reserve components of the U.S. Army. This group included both junior and senior officers (53.8%) and enlisted (46.2%) personnel. Participants, present and past military status, ranged from those on active duty (53.8%), retired (23.1%), honorably discharged (15.4%), after serving their estimated term of service (ETS), and a Reservist (0.7%). Each participant who met the criteria of the study was scheduled an interview.

The first two participants who met the sampling criteria agreed to participate in the study and contacted others they knew who met the research study criteria. This initiative resulted in 5 others participating in the study. An electronic call for potential participants were sent out through one of the participant's Linked-In account of female veterans. The call included a synopsis highlighting the purpose and significance of the study, which then resulted in others who met the criteria agreeing to participate in the study as well. Successive participants were selected throughout the data collection process until saturation was achieved without discovery of new information (Hancock, Amankwaa, Revell, & Mueller, 2016; Saunders et al., 2018). These procedures broaden

the scope, range, and depth of information collected to carry out the study.

Data collection occurred over a 4-month period, which started on February 12, 2018, and ended on June 17, 2018. Public libraries were chosen as the interview setting. Prior to starting each interview, participants granted permission to have their interview recorded, which ranged from 30 to 90 minutes. Recorded interviews were later safeguarded by downloading them from the recording device, the same day they were recorded, onto my personal computer and then password protected. In addition, they were backed-up on an external hard drive which was also password protected. Once data collection via audio recordings were complete the task of transcribing interviews for data analysis took place over a 6-week period, from June 18, 2018, through July 27, 2018.

Conducting the interviews, transcribing them, and analyzing the text required a considerable amount of time and effort. Transcriptions took place primarily in the evenings for approximately 2-3 hours and at least 4-hours on the weekends. Transcription can take up to ten times the length of the interview. For instance, a 1-hour interview may take 10-hours for a full transcription (Petty, Thomson, Stew, 2012). Transcribed interviews resulted in 7 to 16 pages of text, depending on the participant interviewed, and produced a total of 135 pages of data among the 13 participants.

Data validation occurred through the process of member checking. Participants were emailed their transcribed recorded interview to validate accuracy, credibility, and thoroughness. This process was initiated to ensure the participant's words, perceptions, feelings and description of their experience was fully captured as expressed during the interview. Each participant was given 7-days to provide feedback and identify

discrepancies for correction. In addition, they were informed if they did not respond in the allotted time, I would assume they were completely satisfied with the transcription. Ten participants did not respond; however, three participants did request to have corrections made.

Data Analysis

Data resulting from this qualitative study was analyzed using Moustakas' (1994) modified van Kaam method of data analysis to answer the central research question: How do single women returning from combat perceive their social construction has changed, as it relates to their readjustment experiences and needs, compared to males in their unit, or communities as they transition from the military? AlYahmady and Alabri (2013) described qualitative data analysis as pursuing the relationship between categories and themes of data while seeking to increase the understanding of the phenomenon. The data analysis process incorporated the use of QDA computer software. NVivo aided in the analysis process by organizing the large quantity of textual data collected from each participants' interview which was later transcribed verbatim. Each transcribed interview was read several times to become familiar with its content, gain an understanding of what participants were experiencing and feeling, what their perceptions were, and their tone. A second reading of the interviews focused on identifying significant paragraphs, phrases, sentences, and words which were extracted from the initial review of each transcription. Transcriptions were read a third time to identify new information which was then compared to previous units of information that could be coded.

Coding

Coding is an iterative analytical process in which the data is organized, sorted, and categorized for analysis. Qualitative data analysis software, such as NVivo, was developed to manage coding procedures and is considered the best in this regard. According to Rodgers (2018), coding connects the qualitative data collection phase with the data analysis phase of a study. Saldaña (2015) explained the codes capture the essential essence of a research story, and when clustered together by a pattern actively facilitate the development of categories and their connections. Gale, Heath, Cameron, Rashid, and Redwood (2013) argued that, open coding is used to code anything that might be relevant from as many different perspectives as possible. Initially, open coding was used to look for distinct concepts in the data to develop first level categories or master headings, as well as second, third, and fourth level codes that are associated and coded to the primary codes. First level coding looks for distinct concepts in the data to form basic categories or units of analysis. Three rounds of coding were performed for this study.

Level One Coding

In level one of the coding process, 13 interview transcripts were imported into NVivo for coding. The first review was a reading through the entire set of interview responses to develop preliminary coding categories. Open coding was conducted using line-by-line and sentence analysis. Primary, first level codes were generated based on research questions and coding the transcripts. Codes were assigned directly from words that comprised each interview question to ensure consistency in coding and to directly

align the answers in the transcripts to the appropriate first level code. For example, one interview question asked participants to describe their initial idea(s) of what they anticipated deployment to be like. The code or label for this question was anticipation of deployment. This process yielded seven primary codes based on the interview questions. These primary, first level categories were considered thematic codes to establish a "framework of thematic ideas" for the subsequent coding and analysis (Gibbs, 2007). A similar process continued throughout level two coding.

Level Two Coding

During the second round of coding, transcripts were read again, and open coding was conducted for a second time. Second level codes were generated from the answers provided in the text by each participant that were associated and coded to the seven first-level primary codes. The coding labels were assigned using NVivo codes or words that participants stated in the interviews; codes or labels were developed directly from a word(s), or phrase(s) from the coded passages of text. Data was coded and grouped according to similarities. For example, one response to the question what value can be derived from your readjustment experiences that may help other single women returning from future combat zones was, "if downtime is offered take it to allow yourself time to readjust." The NVivo code "take downtime" was assigned to the passage of text.

Level Three Coding

A third review of the coding was carried out to ensure NVivo codes were properly assigned. Similar codes were collapsed and merged together. At the conclusion of the coding process, 7 first level, 90 second level, and 45 third level codes were produced,

with no fourth level codes emerging from the data analysis. A total of 142 codes emerged from the data. To ensure coded information was sorted and moved under the right theme and category, a cross comparison of the data analysis continued within and across each category of themes and the information was moved accordingly. The information was synthesized producing seven thematic categories listed below that supported the central research question experienced by the participants, single women returning from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. In the results section of this chapter, the seven emergent themes represented in the list below are further explained with greater specificity supported by responses from the participants' experiences in response to the interview prompts.

1. Anticipation of deployment,
2. Perception of deployment in a combat environment,
3. Readjustment and social activities,
4. People who influenced your readjustment,
5. Value derived from readjustment experiences,
6. Life, readjustment experiences and needs post-deployment, and
7. Social interactions post-deployment.

Table 3 depicts the seven emergent themes, the associated assigned definitions, codes, and the total number of aggregate references provided by the 13 research participants.

As themes emerged from the data analysis, interview prompts were applied to define each theme because of their close association and alignment. In the codes' column, the words or phrases represent each participants' viewpoint of a particular theme, which were extracted from the second review of the interview transcription. Saldaña

Table 3

Emergent Themes, Definition, Codes, and Aggregate References

Themes	Definitions	Codes	Aggregate References
Anticipation of deployment	The initial ideas of how participants thought deployment would be	Not sure what to expect, influenced by movies, influenced by other's experiences, influenced by news, influenced by prior deployment cycles, influenced by training, influenced by books, influenced by pictures, influenced by ROTC, influenced by prior deployment, scary dangerous, warm weather, stressful, challenging	44
Perceptions of Deployment in a Combat Environment	The sights, sounds, conversations, or other experiences that contributed to participants' perceptions of being deployed in a combat environment in Iraq or Afghanistan	Mortar rounds, bombs, improvised explosive devices, (IEDs), indirect fire (IDF), hot, sandy, dusty, announcements of guests, bad smelling cologne, constantly armed, experiences shared by others, few showers, health issues, hearing fireworks, hot drinks, Iraqi_Afghani food, killed soldiers, living in confined quarters, minimal amenities, moments of silence, never being alone, quality of the air after dark, roadways at night, seeing the wire, smell from tree, soldiers sobbing, sound of aircraft, suicide bombers, view of the city, walking across gravel, bright lights	39
Readjustment and Social Activities	Participants' readjustment in relation to their everyday social activities	Connection to those with similar experiences, continued bond with military friends, didn't do much_socialized very little, genuine connections, less tolerant_less passive, little readjustment, looks for exit signs, more cautious, more social, will not sit on toilet seat, purchasing_collecting items, reliving battlefield experiences, restlessness, social activities the same as before deployment, overwhelming readjustment, struggle connecting with people	24
People Who Influenced Readjustment	Individuals who influenced or affected the participants' readjustment post-deployment	Assignment manager, person storing belongings, superiors, no one, counselor, pastor, social service organizations_church, friend, family	18
Value Derived from Readjustment Experiences	The value participants derived from their readjustment experiences that may help other single women returning from future combat zones	Do not redeploy alone, feel proud_joy, find family, find God, find something you love, grow_stay strong, have integrity, identify a destressor_set goal, knowing follow-on duty location_work task upon returning, knowing new duty station prior to redeployment, things go back to normal, friendship, get help to reconnect to society, take downtime, ensure support system in place	25
Life, Readjustment Experiences and Needs Post-Deployment	What participants would like to say to health care professionals, family, friends, military leaders, and policy makers regarding their readjustment experiences	Didn't want to talk, know my experience before judging, lonely process, memories still linger, missed family_friends, need personal time to reintegrate_readjust, released resentment_refocused goals, stories must be told, wanted respect_more than a soldier, establish normal life routine, higher force keeps you sane, provide support, address women's health needs, provide alternative health treatment options, talk to soldiers about sexual harassment_assault_sex, programs that foster bonding, revise reintegration plan_ training programs_discussion, single women's group, support needed for officers, time with families post-combat, round table discussion about needs_include in planning, equal treatment, more inclusive support programs	48
Social Interactions Post-Deployment	Social interactions with others, especially men, since their return including their thoughts, feelings, and perceptions	Connected with military friends_similar experiences, didn't want to be around others, doesn't want to be treated as a female, felt overlooked, used, little relationships outside of military, resentment, frustration, cautious of people_potential enemy, focus on families_men, assume women don't serve, misconceptions, no big difference, treated well, respected	24

(2009, 2015) referred to codes as substantive things (particular behaviors, incidents or structures), values (those that inform or underpin certain statements such as a belief in evidence-based medicine, or in-patient choice), emotions (sorrow, frustration, love) and more impressionistic, or methodological elements (interviewee found something difficult to explain, interviewee became emotional, interviewer felt uncomfortable). Participant responses, in the codes' column of the table, are representative of what Saldaña (2009, 2015) referred to in his explanation of the sorts of things represented as necessary outcomes of qualitative data analysis in which themes may emerge based on the codes.

The transcripts were perused one more time and the illuminative quotations were highlighted and coded using the categories that had been identified earlier in the process. A number of words, phrases, or sentences were chosen to be used in subsequent writings in the results section of this chapter. The emergent themes were contemplated again and where they were found to be connected with one another they were further condensed, culminating in seven decisive themes, as noted in Table 3. These were: Anticipation of deployment, perceptions of deployment in a combat environment, readjustment and social activities, people who influenced your readjustment, value derived from readjustment experiences, life, readjustment experiences and needs post-deployment, and social interactions post-deployment.

The transcripts were perused one more time and the illuminative quotations were highlighted and coded using the categories that had been identified earlier in the process. A number of words, phrases, or sentences were chosen to be used in subsequent writings in the results section of this chapter. The emergent themes were contemplated again and

where they were found to be connected with one another they were further condensed, culminating in seven decisive themes, as noted in Table 3. These were: Anticipation of deployment, perceptions of deployment in a combat environment, readjustment and social activities, people who influenced your readjustment, value derived from readjustment experiences, life, readjustment experiences and needs post-deployment, and social interactions post-deployment.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Rigor and trustworthiness are essential in research, especially qualitative inquiries because they are neither exact nor statistical in nature like those of quantitative research studies. However, the way in which qualitative research is evaluated is a contentious issue (Hope & Waterman, 2003; Rolfe, 2006; Sandelowski & Barroso, 2002). Different models address how to build trustworthiness in qualitative research. In seminal work conducted in the 1980s, Lincoln and Guba (1985) purposed four components relevant to qualitative research: (a) truth–value (credibility); (b) applicability (transferability); (c) consistency (dependability); and (d) neutrality (confirmability). The authors further noted that the value of a research study is strengthened by its trustworthiness and defines the four components as:

- *Credibility:* confidence in the 'truth' of the findings.
- *Transferability:* the findings have applicability in other contexts.
- *Dependability:* the findings are consistent and could be repeated.
- *Confirmability*: a degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest.

The same quality criteria remain true today, thirty-three years later. Korstjens & Moser (2018) maintained that the quality criteria for all qualitative research are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. For the purpose of this research project, to provide evidence of trustworthiness, several strategies were employed based on Lincoln and Guba's (1985) model of trustworthiness.

Credibility

Establishing credibility is crucial from the participant's perspective. Polit and Beck (2014) suggested credibility of the study, or the confidence in the truth of the study and the findings, is the most important criterion. The accurate and truthful depiction of the participant's lived experience was achieved in this study through member checking, which served as the primary method used to obtain credibility. Member checking is viewed as a technique for establishing validity (Amankwaa, 2016). An often-stated purpose for using member checks is the correction of bias or misinterpretations made by researchers and ensuring accuracy and authenticity in representing participants' experiences (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott, & Davidson, 2002; Kornbluh 2015). For this study, member checking was used as a means to allow study participants to verify the accuracy of their transcriptions. Research guides and texts discussing quality, validity, and credibility in qualitative research often recommend member checks, which involve sending respondents their transcript for review, as one of the recommended procedures to confirm or enhance credibility in qualitative research (Kornbluh 2015; Lo, 2014).

Prior to member checking, participant interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcription was then forwarded to each participant via email and were

asked to verify the transcript for its accuracy to ensure thoroughness of their words, perceptions, feelings, and tone. In such instances, member checking is assumed to enhance reflexivity by making researchers aware of how their own preconceptions or biases may have influenced their writing of an account (Thomas, 2017). Having participants confirm the accuracy of their transcript enhanced the credibility of this study. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) member checking is the most crucial technique for establishing credibility. Tuckett (2005) justified member checking by asserting that participants needed to recognize something of themselves and their world in the theorizing for any claim to credibility to be made. Once participants' transcripts were validated, they were safeguarded by storing them on my personal computer files and external hard drive. The computer files and hard drive were password protected for subsequent use in the data analysis process.

Transferability

In this qualitative study the findings are context specific and for that reason does not aim to generalize the findings beyond the current study. The nature of transferability, the extent to which findings are useful to person's in other settings, is different from other aspects of research in that readers actually determine how applicable the findings are to their own situations (Polit & Beck, 2014). Connelly (2016) concluded that qualitative researchers focus on the informants and their story without saying this is everyone's story. Ultimately, the responsibility for determining transferability is with those who might apply the findings to their own setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Sandelowski, 1986). Transferability of the results were enhanced by recruiting research participants

from multiple grades and ranks among officers and enlisted personnel, participants are from the active and Reserve components of the U.S. Army.

In addition, some participants are still on active duty, some are retired, and others honorably discharged. To further achieve transferability and to enhance a deep understanding of the phenomenon under investigation, purposive sampling was used to ensure the data provided a range of perspectives (Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012). Another strategy to achieve transferability included rich substantive responses from participants based on interview prompts that solicited detailed answers. Researchers support the study's transferability with a rich, detailed description of the context, location, and people studied, and by being transparent about analysis and trustworthiness (Connelly, 2016). Multiple participant responses were written to describe the phenomena under investigation as a thick textual description of their experiences which provided the foundation for the themes derived as a result of the data analysis process.

Dependability

To achieve dependability, I maintained an audit trail to document the activities that occurred throughout the study. Dependability refers to the stability of the data over time and over the conditions of the study (Polit & Beck, 2014). The audit contained reflective thoughts during the research process, the sample population, who to interview, when to conduct the interview, observations made during the interview, data collection process, data management, and the research findings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested that audits are a well-known technique to establish dependability. Keeping an audit trail was used as a means of being transparent in

describing the research steps taken throughout the research study. The audit trail provides procedures in enough details to allow other researchers to repeat the study and make judgements about the research path as well as assess the procedural decisions made regarding this study.

Confirmability

Triangulation was employed to establish confirmability for this study. Triangulation refers to the use of multiple methods or data sources in qualitative research to develop a comprehensive understanding of phenomena (Amankwaa, 2016; Patton, 1999). However, it is important to note according to Ballie (2015) triangulation is not relevant for all studies. He argued that phenomenological studies are often based only on interviews to elicit understanding about the lived experiences conducted with a specific group of participants by a single researcher. By contrast, Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, and Neville (2014) viewed triangulation as a qualitative research strategy to test validity through the convergence of information from different sources. Denzin (1978) and Patton (1999) identified four types of triangulation: (a) method triangulation, (b) investigator triangulation, (c) theory triangulation, and (d) data source triangulation. There are multiple approaches to the use of triangulation to enhance the qualitative process.

Data source triangulation involves the collection of data from different types of people including individuals, groups, families, and communities to gain multiple perspectives and validation of data. Most qualitative researchers studying human phenomena collect data through interviews with individuals or groups. As a researcher,

the selection of the type of interview depends on the purpose of the study and the resources available (Carter, Bryant-Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe, & Neville 2014). Fontana and Frey (2000) described the individual in-depth interview as one of the most powerful tools for gaining an understanding of human beings and thoroughly exploring the topic of interest. Such interviews, ranging from the structured and controlled to the unstructured and fluid, can elicit rich information about personal experiences and perspectives (Russell, Gregory, Ploeg, DiCenso, & Guyatt, 2005). For this qualitative research study, data source triangulation was used based on research participants' individual in-depth interviews, which served as the data source.

From the raw material obtained from each research participant during the interview process preliminary codes and emergent codes materialized during the data analysis process. Saturation of the thematic content enhanced the extent to which the findings were the product of the inquiry. Korstjens and Moser (2018) explained that data triangulation secured by using various data sets can emerge throughout the analysis process to enhance and deepen one's understanding of the complexity of the lived experience. The results of this research study came from the rich synthesis of textural and structural descriptions provided by the participants rather than my own bias, motivation, or personal interest.

Results

The research question explored in this study is: How do single women returning from combat perceive their social construction has changed, as it relates to their readjustment experiences and needs, compared to males in their unit, or communities as

they transition from the military? Seven themes emerged from the data analysis of significant statements provided by the 13 participants during the interview process. Each theme captured the essence of the readjustment experiences of single military women returning from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan during the war years from 2003 – 2013. Phenomenological research involves in-depth interviews to allow the essence of the phenomenon to be fully explored. The participants responses to the interview prompts for this study infer meaning to the central research question from the verbatim accounts of their readjustment experiences.

The data analysis resulted in seven emergent themes that address the central question in offering an understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. The following themes emerged from the data analysis: (a) anticipation of deployment, (b) perceptions of deployment in a combat environment, (c) readjustment and social activities, (d) people who influenced readjustment, (e) value derived from readjustment experiences, (f) life, readjustment experiences and needs post-deployment, and (g) social interactions post-deployment. Because the participant's interviews were transcribed verbatim, there are no grammatical edits to their responses for accuracy. In addition, to ensure confidentiality and privacy, participant names were replaced with a unique identifier from P1 (Participant 1) through P13 (Participant 13).

Theme 1: Anticipation of Deployment

If not but for the sheer nature of their chosen profession, combat veterans faced life and death situations in Iraq and Afghanistan that are vastly different than those typically encountered in the civilian workforce. A veteran is an individual who has served

in the military but is currently discharged, and a combat veteran is a veteran who has served on active duty in a theater of combat operations (Department of Veterans Affairs, 2015). Combat theaters are known to be unpredictable with chaos erupting at any moment leading to serious injury or death. These consequences are particularly true when service members are unprepared.

Nash (2006) outlined stressors that are not as immediately apparent, especially for those who have never served in a war zone, and include extreme and fluctuating weather and element conditions, dehydration and hunger, sleep deprivation, various sensory irritants, receiving uncertain and ambiguous information, changing rules of engagement and roles, relational conflicts, financial obligations to take care of, and intense negative emotional experiences. The theme on the anticipation of deployment focus on the pre-deployment period and what participants anticipated deployment would be like. While their responses varied slightly, all participants appeared to be anxious and received little information on how to prepare for deployment. Many participants had similar views to those expressed by Nash (2006) and when asked about the anticipation of being deployed.

P1 remarked:

> Scary, dangerous, living in huts, sleepless nights, long work hours, and stressful. These thoughts were evoked as a result of a combination of watching too much news and old films to see how war was depicted and the stories of others as they shared them over the years of how the area had evolved over there from what it was like in the beginning. I then took that information and created my own

images in my head as to what it might be like over there.

P7 stated, “I assumed it was going to be horrible. I didn’t have any good experiences as far as me getting prepared for the deployment, the preparation was not good” (p. 3, para 1).

Another participant shared her experience as follows:

> Before the very first one nobody had any idea of what to expect, nobody in my unit had deployed at that point. It was during the very initial stages of the invasion so there were a lot of unknowns. We had no idea what to expect, my mindset obviously was there was fear and uncertainty and things like that, this was in 03. We would hear about people dying in convoys and the actual war part of it right before we got there so we didn’t know what to expect from that either, a lot of uncertainty. It’s hard to describe what you expected because everything was just strange, there was no precedence. (P12)

P11 recalled:

> I honestly really didn’t know what to expect from the deployment because the only thing that we kept getting was that people were getting killed, the bombs and everything was coming in. Just thinking back, all I can say, in my mind I had a lot of fear because of the unknown and there was nobody that I could actually go to and ask about it because nobody knew anything about it.

Given these individual responses each are examples that express the complexity of reactions to the news and anticipation of deploying to a war zone.

Theme 2: Perceptions of Deployment in a Combat Zone

Theme two pertains to the period in which participants were in the deployment area of operation, Iraq and Afghanistan, under a combat exclusion policy, which specifically barred them from serving in direct combat positions. However, the policy did not keep pace with what was actually happening on the ground nor did it protect women from exposure to combat situations, especially in the Iraqi and Afghanistan wars with no clear front lines. Women who deployed in support of the wars served in a variety of support positions that involved going outside the wire and working side-by-side with their male counterparts. They also came under direct fire inside and outside the wire.

Many of their roles put them at risk for exposure to combat experiences. A distinction between combat and non-combat roles has little meaning when there are no clear front lines. Deployment in support of the Iraqi and Afghanistan wars involved exposure to a range of potentially stressful or traumatic experiences. Stressors specific to being in a war zone included difficulties related to being separated from loved ones, and interpersonal stressors associated with living and working in close proximity with other troops. Consequently, though women did not serve in direct combat positions, other researchers noted that approximately three quarters of women deployed to Iraq had been exposed to one or more combat stressor (Dutra et al., 2011). Especially in the early days of the wars, what follows are excerpts from several participants who experienced stressors similar to those found by Dutra et al. (2011). Many recalled the images, sounds, and smells they experienced in the combat zone.

The only thing I remember that makes me still stop today is the sound of aircraft,

> because I knew when they landed, they were bringing in patients. It was always safe to say, "they were never coming to say hello. They were always coming to bring someone or take someone away." The sound of the aircraft meant I was about to go to work, so the only sounds that bothered me or made me nervous was the sound of aircraft. Although I never lost a Soldier on my watch, it became very real for me that we were in a combat zone when I saw grown men in the hallway just sobbing over losing somebody because that wasn't something that I had ever really seen before. I'm not just talking one or two, I'm talking about an entire unit sobbing. (P3)

P6 noted:

> When you're outside on convoys there's very little around and we traveled mostly at night. When we did travel at night and saw people this was kind of a warning sign that something bad was about to happen, so we had to be vigilant.

Another junior Soldier recalled her experience and explained it as follows:

> Everything was how I seen it, but it was definitely a warzone. Everything you did had to be…soon as you got off the helicopter it was like…boom, boom, boom no lollygagging, no waiting for the next stop. Go, go, go, it's blazing, blaring hot…sand, no trees, no food…it's a desert, it's a warzone. It was still very obvious within the first 3 days they had already started bombing us…it was just one specific time I can recall…I just sat and counted... there were 13 bombs dropped and fragmented, 2 people had purple hearts…I seen suicide bombers,

> little boys just walk up and they're gone...it was very much so unreal...like you cannot imagine that a place like this really exists. (P9)

Another participant stated:

> We didn't have to burn human waste or anything like that…that was nice. We had port-a-pottys and stuff was all contracted and there was smells from that in the heat all the time but not like some situations I heard about early on in other deployments. (P10)

P12 recalled:

> The dirt, dirt everywhere and always being dirty. I spent lots of time in places where you didn't get regular showers. You got showers every few days or once a week or something like that, so always being dirty. Never being alone, always surrounded by people that was always tough for me. I wouldn't say I'm a loner, but constantly being around people is definitely draining for me. Also, the smell of really overpowering bad smelling rose watered cologne that the local nationals would wear most of the time, which was very gross. There's another thing, that's hard to describe, it's taken me a couple of times over the years to get used to, if I'm in a very hot environment. There's a particular quality of the air after dark, after 8 o'clock when the sun goes down and it's still like 90 degrees out it has a certain smell and feel to it that is very reminiscent to that time and place that's very hard to describe.

P13 reported:

> In Iraq we were under a missile attack quite often in the compound, on one

> occasion, unfortunately one hit the gym my unit was working out in at the time, and although no one was killed there were several injuries.

Among all participants combat exposure was extremely common while deployed in support of the Iraqi and Afghanistan wars. Such exposure involved a wide range of stressful or traumatic experiences specific to being in a war zone and those associated with living and working in close proximity with other troops.

Theme 3: Readjustment and Social Activities

For some, immediately after deployment, readjusting or transforming to life after combat can be difficult and affects various aspects of a Service Member's (SMs) life, including the physical, emotional, cognitive, social, and spiritual parts of the veteran's life. Initially, many SMs may find it difficult to understand the hurdles they face during the readjustment phase when they return from combat. They often question why they function as they do, or prefer to alienate themselves from others within their communities as they transition back to civilian life, and seem reluctant to reintegrate back into their units once they return home. It is important to note however, not all SMs have trouble readjusting to life after serving in a combat zone. What follows are the responses of several participants who described how their readjustment and social activities changed since their exposure in a combat zone.

> I had to really learn how to defend myself not only against the enemy on the other side, but those among me you know. I am aware of being guarded about letting people deal with me, or talk to me, or handle me in such a way that brings on the type of stress, I felt down range. I'm more aware of the stressors and the

triggers, so I can avoid them. (P1)

P2 describe how her experience manifested after she was reassigned to a new location:

> When I PCS'd (permanent change of station) to my next duty station after deploying there was slamming of the doors and that is when I immediately discovered that I may have some issues I need to work out and I may not be completely over the things I experienced on the battlefield yet. In the war zone when you hear incoming rounds during the night or anytime really, you immediately began to duck for cover, but then I would get pissed off because I would look around and realize I was safe inside my apartment and not in the combat zone.

P4 described the difficulties she had readjusting and connecting with others:

> At times, it's a struggle connecting with people and one thing I definitely know that I do more of now is look for escape routes. When I go out with people, if it doesn't seem as though I can exit easily then I am not going. At restaurants I need to ensure I can see the exit, or I can see the activity that's going on. I really don't know why because I am a true punk for life. I guess I just need to see what's coming at me. I'm also cautious of people and want to know what their motives are in wanting to connect with me. I really don't know where that paranoia or anxiety comes from, or why it comes into play. It does keep me from doing some of the things I use to do. I am not as Army strong as people might think. I too can have reintegration issues and need support, not just a little nurturing or a hug. It is important to have our stories told as well. I have sleepless nights and for now I'm

> trying to create a life and story for myself that helps me navigate through life until I'm ready to deal with my demons. My demons aren't just war related, they extend for the 20-years I was in the military, so the 9-months of my deployment is just a very small percentage of where my issues stem from.

P6 appeared to have no issues readjusting on a personal level:

> Generally, I would say we got back to work pretty quickly and we dealt with the issue that our whole unit hadn't deployed. We had these close relationships with the people who had deployed and then we had this other group who hadn't deployed and how we were going to try and join together as a team. On the personal side, I actually feel like I readjusted fairly well. Some people talked about having experiences of PTSD, or something like that. I didn't have any immediate memories of anything like that.

P7 stated how she paid more attention to her surroundings:

> I wouldn't say I'm on edge, but I am a little more cautious not due to PTSD, but given the experiences and given what I saw on both deployments. Each time I returned a little more cautious and very aware of my surroundings.

Another young enlisted veteran reported:

> As far as just interacting with I guess anyone outside the group, those few people I was with was rough for me because I just knew for myself that you're not going to understand. I just wanted to kinda stick close to the few people that were there that did understand. And even like till this day there's some things I've not said to my best friend. Things that she doesn't even know and she'll say why are you

> acting like that, or so as far as my friends, I just wanted to just feel that I was around people, or with somebody that knew. (P9)

Another enlisted veteran spoke about her inability to readjustment for more than a year stating:

> My everyday social activities are not very social for the most part, what I mean by that is that I still do a lot of things by myself. I go to the movies, visit restaurants, or whatever by myself, or just with a couple of very close friends who have had similar experiences. As far as kind of social readjustment over time I didn't even begin to readjust to not being deployed until probably a year or more after my third deployment. Even though I was technically home there was never any time to feel like you've adjusted back to real life, it's surreal. Even now, there are pop culture references for a five-year period that I still don't understand, I'm like what's going on? It was more difficult at first that you'd come back and all of your friends from before are making jokes or references to this thing or that thing that happened in the news or media and you have no idea what they're talking about, so you feel like an outsider all the way around and tend to feel like an outsider for a very long time. (P12)

A senior signal corps officer indicated that her readjustment and social activities remained unchanged:

> My social activities are the same after deployment as they were before my deployment. I do most of my social activities through the church, my sorority, and

> through Eastern Star. When I came back from deployment, I continued with those activities and did the things that I would normally do. (P13)

Theme 4: People Who Influenced Your Readjustment

Whether in a positive or negative manner, research participants discussed how the people in their lives were instrumental in their reintegration and readjustment following their transition from a high-stress and pressure-filled environment to one of less stress and pressure. Theme 4 highlighted who within the participant's circle of influence was instrumental in their reintegration and readjustment experiences and needs. According to Wands (2013), few studies have sought to explore veterans' subjective experiences of reintegration. Among the 13 participants interviewed most stated either a family member or another combat veteran was most significant as a strong influence in providing support. One participant, a senior grade field officer who served downrange as a critical care operating room nurse indicated that she was self-reliant and really did not need the aid of others.

Another Nurse stated:

> The real stressor for me was the person I left my stuff with because it seemed as though she lost her mind and started having some real psychological challenges. In retrospect, her issues could have very well been associated with her deployment, she had deployed early on during the wars and her issues may have been underneath the surface and manifested many years later. Therefore, between my assignment manager and the person storing my belongings they influenced my readjustment, but in a negative way. (P2)

A Medical Service Corps Officer stated:

> My biggest influence was my dad. He was a retired old crusty NCO (Non-Commissioned Officer) that's been around the world a couple of times. Just having that touch point to talk to and let me know that I wasn't crazy was really comforting, so having that ability to call him and dialogue with him really helped me know that it was okay to take my time to readjust. (P5)

A young enlisted Soldier found that a strong relational tie from a veteran peer to be helpful and explained:

> My roommate, she was my roommate during the entire deployment and we had to deal with being mortared together. When we returned from deployment, she made it easier because she adapts very well. Her attitude was, we're home now time to enjoy ourselves and have some fun. There was no let's reminisce on the past, not that we didn't care about what happened, you just didn't want to keep reliving the situation either. (P7)

Theme 5: Value Derived from Readjustment Experiences

How single service members, especially women, readjust to their normal lives and the value derived from that experience following deployment is unique and slightly different for each as noted by their individual responses.

As one enlisted Soldier stated:

> I believe there are support systems out there, and just be mindful and understand that when you get off that plane, from the whole psychological perspective, the single person is looking around the room and there is no one there to receive

> them. For those who do not have families or close friends that's waiting for them just ensure there is someone there to provide support, or someplace they can go to receive support whether it be counseling, or activities to get them going just some of the little things that could be important. Things leaders or those with families might not think about, or that someone might not think is necessary. They make a big difference in the readjustment process when you come home. (P1)

One mid-level officer spoke about the lack of support for single Soldiers as compared to those who were married, or have children and reported:

> So, much of the readjustment and reintegration process is focused on families and married people and that's important, I'm not saying that is not important. However, I don't think we do justice by our single Soldiers and especially by our single women Soldiers. The stereotype is that men get to come back as the war hero and everybody respects them and wants to hear their stories, but when the women come back it's almost as though society is afraid of them. You hear things like, "oh, you're too tough, or you're not part of the normal women crowd anymore." I don't think we have good tools or techniques in place to assist these females, our women warriors, get reconnected to society. Some women find ways around it, some have the church, others have great extended families or deep roots in whatever communities they came from that will help. However, there are a lot of people who don't. If they are an individual deployer they are going back to a location where people didn't have the same shared experience, so they are

> completely alone, nor have we given them any tools to help them reintegrate other than to say, “Hey, go talk to behavioral health, or the chaplain.” (P5)

A senior officer stated:

> I would probably say seek some type of counseling, I think it will help, especially when you don’t have someone to actually talk to or people you can trust to talk to. I think my experience is different in that realm because being an officer the higher up you get the more isolated you are and people expect you to be okay as if you never have a problem and we all know that’s not true, but it’s perceived as officers don’t have those issues and we should be taking care of those who are junior to us. In fact, we also have issues to. I would have someone to talk to on a weekly ongoing basis, have some type of outlet. (P11)

Another senior officer noted:

> Find something that you love and don’t let go of it. I love my community service, so find that thing, it could be family, or whatever. Family was not that accessible to me, but whatever it is that gives you that joy don’t let go of that even while you’re deployed because that’s what’s going to help you come back home and readjust quickly. Married people have spouses or kids and that’s their whole drive, I want to get back home to my child. As a single person, find something that you want to get back home to and then make that your driving force. (P13)

Theme 6: Life, Readjustment Experiences and Needs Post-Deployment:

As a single Service Member (SM), many of the participants found coming home to be more difficult than expected. Several felt out of place and disconnected from the

unit they were assigned to and had even deployed with. They described this as resulting from tension between how married SMs and those with children were welcomed home after deployment.

One senior enlisted SM noted:

> For policymakers, I think honestly there's always room for improvement. A lot of things are always family oriented and people look at the nucleus of a family as a husband, wife, and kids while they neglect there are a lot of single Service Members, yet everything is always presented towards families. They always have welcome home or welcome back family events instead of welcome home troops and making it all inclusive, so single soldiers won't feel like we won't be accepted there or will just show up and still be by ourselves, then we just tend to say, well if I'm going to be by myself, I might as well just stay at home. I think just the verbiage alone is so important to making someone feel like they are a part of the same team, just by changing the verbiage sometimes can be helpful in making someone feel inclusive and supported. (P1)

A senior officer replied:

> I believe we need the same things married people or single parents need. We need to be able to return and have an opportunity to spend time with our families e.g., parents, siblings, etc. Essentially become re-acclimated to the world we left behind too when we deployed. Just because a SM is single does not mean they should be treated less than or unequal to their counterparts who are married, or

> those who are single parents. It felt as though single soldiers were being punished for simply being single, but those who were married were rewarded. (P2)

Another senior officer stated:

> Given the readjustment time and notification to deployment, don't assume that just because someone is single, they have less needs and concerns than married service members, or those who are single parents. Single women have needs too. We often tend to gear our family readiness activities towards the whole family concept. I recall a time when they had an event involving family day activities and they wanted us to bring our families. The single folks were like, "we don't want to come and just stand there and look at everyone else with their family," but we had to go anyway to those type of activities that the unit sponsored. I am not so sure who I would provide that information to, but it would probably go to the unit Commander. I don't really think a specific policy has to be written, yet unit Commanders should be made aware of the impact such events have on single SMs and are we meeting the needs of everyone in the unit. As a single person, my needs are certainly different than those who are married with children and those who are single with children. (P3)

A retired senior enlisted leader looked back on her experience and responded:

> Learn from the post war studies and information provided during the post-deployment briefings. We need to establish more support organizations and groups. During the reintegration phase, consider there's a population in the reintegration phase that's not being addressed. Who do they talk to? What

> systems do you have in place? Can we deal with these serious issues? I would think they might have round table discussions for single females to figure out what it is we need. For me, I think it was different because I'm older, so my age played a factor into my reintegration as well. My needs as a single female are completely different than those of the 20 or 30-year-old, which is the average age, and the mindset is usually different. I just wanted someone to talk to, I wanted to have an adult conversation. I need leadership to understand when I say I need to take care of something, I am a family of one. (P4)

A junior enlisted SM noted the difference in how men were allowed to describe their mental health status while women were vastly ignored. She stated:

> I feel like men coming back are able to have PTSD, they're able to be shaken or suicidal, or sad, they're able to do that but if a woman says she feels anything, they don't even do anything. Why? You didn't even leave the compound, so it's hard to communicate to other people or say how you're feeling because you didn't do anything. But if a man comes…yea I just feel like it's really getting to me, then everybody is running to your aid. So, when I say yea, I'm really feeling like that ...ah you just feeling emotional, you didn't do nothing; you're just being emotional. So that was also hard too because even if I want to say something you gonna shoot me down; you don't believe me. If you do want to say something, you're just being a cry baby; you're being emotional. (P9)

The above excerpts are just examples of how participants felt as single SMs returning from deployment. However, most acknowledged that even for their male counterparts, as

a single SM, all redeployment efforts focused on the family unit comprised of those who were married and those with kids.

Theme 7: Social Interactions Post-Deployment:

During their interviews, participants spent a great deal of time talking about their social interactions with their male counterparts during and after their deployment. It is not uncommon for combat veterans to approach social situations differently from how they did in the past prior to their deployment. In addition, some might feel uncomfortable in previously enjoyable interactions.

P4 stated:

> I'm also cautious of people and want to know what their motives are in wanting to connect with me. I really don't know where that paranoia or anxiety comes from, or why it comes into play. It does keep me from doing some of the things I use to do. I use to enjoy big open festivals and fairs. Now, I am a little more selective in doing those types of things. I think I'm really trying to figure out where my place is, especially now that I'm retired.

It is not unusual for veterans to constantly survey their surroundings, as this is an essential part of their basic training. However, combat veterans are known to be hyper vigilant in performing this function. For example, in many social situations particularly those involving large crowds of people and public venues, they conduct threat assessments that take note of key exit points, sit facing the entrance of an establishment, and conduct ongoing mental safety threats.

A sergeant described resentment towards her unit and explained:

I was in a unit that had very few women, so when I returned from my first deployment as a single woman, I felt some resentment towards the unit and some of the people because I felt like I wasn't taken care of. Even though I was old enough to take care of myself still no one looked out for me. I was put into positions that weren't the best for a woman, especially a single woman. During my first deployment, I was put into a platoon where there were only two females, which included myself, just me and a Lieutenant. At first, it was very confusing for me because I didn't really understand how things were supposed to go, and I would think this isn't right. We would go on convoy missions, which were long and tedious. When we were done with our missions and got to the Forward Operating Base (FOB) where we were supposed to setup shop and sleep, we would get there and the males would have a place to sleep and I wouldn't. I would try to find me a place to sleep or a spot for females and I would have to hook-up with different females on the FOB, and I would just have to figure it out on my own because they were more concerned about themselves and what they needed. It was never about what I and the other female, or what we as a team needed. That's what I experienced during my first deployment and it was very frustrating. It was also frustrating being a single person because you are judged for being a single woman down range. Down range you are definitely judged by the men, they assume that just because you are single that you are available and they don't necessarily respect you as much because you are not married. You don't get a chance to focus on your craft as much because you constantly have people

> assuming you're available, they assume you might be talking to someone, they assume you are willing to entertain someone, so you are not looked at as their equal, which is pretty unfortunately. (P7)

The most junior of all the participants in age and rank stated:

> So, definitely once I returned, I almost felt kind of empty, kinda used. Used because you just don't' get the same respect. You can stand next to your male friend and say yea we both did this and they are gonna turn to you and say "Oh really, what happened; I was there too." So, it's kinda like I felt overlooked, empty just used. Ok, well thank you for being out here for being a body…now you're back to doing your normal duties…back to your normal life. Especially with my MOS (military occupational specialty) …they take it as you don't really do much when in reality, we do a heck of a lot. So, it's like you…you can be with a male in your same MOS and it makes us feel like as if they somehow contributed more than you did. So, it was kinda bad realizing what you've done and it takes a lot of self-motivation and be proud of myself than you get credit for. (P9)

A senior field grade officer who had recently retired described her social interaction experience and noted:

> When I came back, I didn't want to be around other people very much. I might spend a little bit of time, but then I just wanted my time to myself. As for guys, I don't know if it played a part in me not wanting to date or just hang out. I think I had time while I was deployed to reflect on who I am, what I want, and life is

> short or at least the deployment made it feel that your life can be taken at any point and time, so you don't want to put up with BS. Those were some of the things that brought things into perspective, but it just took a while for me to actually want to be around other people and that was mainly based off living conditions. This was every day for a year and starts to play upon you and contributed a lot to my isolation whenever I got back. (P11) Once they returned home, the characteristics expressed by the participants in this study, as well as their awareness of their threat assessments, cause them to feel profoundly detached in social settings. Some felt isolated and withdrawn and frequently attempted to regulate their anxiety to avoid potential loss of behavioral and emotional control. This isolation can create further difficulties for veterans in their relationships, as family members cannot understand their desire to isolate and report feeling distanced from them (Sherman, Zanotti, & Jones, 2005).

Summary

Chapter 4 began with a brief introduction and contained a description of the research question, the data collection process, data analysis method, the resulting themes, evidence of trustworthiness, and the results of the study with responses from the research participants. The participant sample was comprised of 13 single female veterans who served in a variety of combat support and combat service support occupations and concentrations. For this research project, Moustakas' (1994) modified van Kaam method of data analysis was used to answer the research question: How do single women returning from combat perceive their social construction has changed, as it relates to their

readjustment experiences and needs, compared to males in their unit, or communities as they transition from the military? Interview prompts in the form of questions initiated the interview process. In addition, reflective questions were asked, while taking every precaution to avoid asking leading or suggestive questions. A pilot study was conducted as a trial run to guide the planning and execution of the much larger study under investigation. Participant recruitment was open to all branches of the Armed Forces, yet study participants were current or former military service members serving in the active and Reserve components of the U.S. Army.

Data collection occurred over a 4-month period, which started on February 12, 2018, and ended on June 17, 2018. Qualitative data analysis was used to determine the relationship between categories and themes of data while seeking to increase the understanding of the phenomenon. The data analysis process incorporated the use of QDA computer software, NVivo, to aide in the analysis process by organizing the large quantity of textual data collected from each participants' interview which was then later transcribed. Data validation occurred through the process of member checking to validate accuracy, credibility, and thoroughness. After member checking was complete, the transcriptions were then read several times to identify new information which was compared to previous units of information that could then be coded. Three rounds of coding were performed for this study

Approximately 142 codes emerged from the data, the information was then synthesized resulting in 7 emergent thematic categories. These emergent themes resulting from the data analysis addressed the central question of the phenomenon under

investigation. Each theme supported the central research question experienced by the 13 study participants, single women returning from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. Evidence of trustworthiness was established using Lincoln and Guba (1985) four components relevant to qualitative research: (a) truth–value (credibility); (b) applicability (transferability); (c) consistency (dependability); and (d) neutrality (confirmability). A brief introduction, interpretation of the findings, limitations of the study, recommendations for future research opportunities, and implications for social change, and the conclusion are discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

This research project drew on oral histories and extensive interviews, the 1994 military policy on the exclusion of women in combat (Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness, 2012), military publications and journals, civilian newspapers and magazines, and literature of women veterans. My particular focus was on the readjustment experiences and needs of single women who deployed in support of the Iraqi and Afghanistan wars, who until recently have remained relatively absent from the scholarship surrounding them (IoM, 2010, 2013). The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the central research question: How do single women returning from combat perceive their social construction has changed, as it relates to their readjustment experiences and needs, compared to males in their unit, or communities as they transition from the military? The phenomenon under study specifically targeted single women to add to researchers' understanding of the factors that may affect these women's readjustment and well-being following future deployments. The data for this study was obtained by interviewing 13 single women who deployed to the combat zone in support of the Iraqi and Afghanistan wars.

Interpretation of Findings

The key findings of this study included seven major themes:

1. Anticipation of Deployment,
2. Perceptions of Deployment in a Combat Environment,
3. Readjustment and Social Activities,

4. People Who Influenced Readjustment,
5. Value Derived from Readjustment Experiences,
6. Life, Readjustment Experiences and Needs Postdeployment, and
7. Social Interactions Post-Deployment.

The findings based on the emergent themes offer a clear and concise message to military leaders, policy makers, health care providers, and others that irrespective of gender the return to normal can often be difficult to manage after time spent in a combat zone. Based on the analysis of the data from the participant interviews, the full integration of women into the military requires a culture change that military leaders and policy makers must be prepared to meet. With single women in particular, to bolster the combat veterans' relational experience while simultaneously diminishing their sense of isolation, identify and enhance existing social support networks on the particular realities of reintegration, deployment, and readjustment experiences and needs postdeployment. Qualitative research that continues to describe the experiences of single female combat veterans and fill the scholarly gap in all aspects of the combat deployment cycle involving this target population of unrecognized combatants enables military leaders, policy makers, and health care providers to learn and understand their unique individual and collective realities (Fargo et al., 2012; Disabled American Veterans, 2014). Listening to the voices of this expanding military cohort may provide an opportunity to design and implement services and programs to improve the quality of their reintegration, readjustment experiences and needs, their transition back to civilian life, and ultimately their quality of life.

Limitations of the Study

This study had several limitations. The small sample size was limited to a purposive sample of 13 single women who had never married and were nonparenting. As a phenomenological study, the findings are not generalizable to all female veterans. Phenomenology does not provide solutions to a problem that requires solving; nor is it used for generalization (Leung, 2015; Trochim, 2006). As a qualitative research method, phenomenology is used to discover the meaning of a phenomenon and identify its essence (importance) as experienced from the first-person perspective.

Furthermore, all participants of this study were either in the active or Reserve component of the Army, yet recruitment was open to all women of the Armed Forces provided they met the inclusion criteria. Another limitation relates to the nature of the self-reflective interviews, which had the potential for recall bias and response distortion. It is possible that women in this study may have overestimated or underestimated the factors associated with their reintegration, readjustment experiences, and social interactions; reintegration can often raise more or different issues as veterans reintegrate into society.

Despite these limitations, this study contained rich details about the first-hand experiences of a small sample of single female combat veterans who deployed in support of the Iraqi (2003–2010) and Afghanistan (2001–2013) wars. In addition, from the findings a contextual understanding of the participants' experiences emerged and revealed ways to better serve this fast-growing veteran population. At times, women who participated in this study spoke of situations in which they had to shoulder a significant

burden as members of the military, yet they conveyed they performed with courage, dignity, and resilience.

Recommendations

Although the presence of women in the U.S. military and in combat operations has increased, there is a lack of literature regarding the readjustment experiences of single, never married, and nonparenting women returning from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan, based on my review of the literature. The findings from the current study, suggest several areas for future research. This study highlighted the challenges single female combat veterans encountered during pre-deployment, the deployment period, reintegration, and their readjustment experiences in support of the Iraqi and Afghanistan wars. Therefore, this military subpopulation, single female veterans, may benefit from a longitudinal research. Conducting longitudinal studies on each phase of the deployment cycle tailored to this population could possibly identify direct and indirect effects of the combat experiences of single, never married, and nonparenting women. This research should include single women from all branches of the military because their missions and the settings in which they perform their duties are vastly different.

Another opportunity for further research is during the deployment period itself, which should address the social processes of the deployment using a representative sample of the study population and developing metrics to track changes and establish links between combat experiences and outcomes. Third, leaders are responsible for establishing the climate of their units and influencing their well-being, especially in combat through unit morale, teamwork, communication, safety, and trust (Ulmer, 2018).

It is important not to underestimate the impact a commanding officer's attitude can have on his or her subordinates. It is therefore essential to conduct research to identify and measure effective and positive leadership traits and behavior based on the responses from the target population under study as they are the experts on their experiences and needs. The information gained in the process should be used to educate and inform unit members in an effort to improve team building and unit cohesion particularly in combat units newly opened to women.

Fourth, develop a questionnaire designed to survey a representative sample of the study population with the goal of capturing their combat experiences and the appropriate support programs and services that meets their reintegration preferences and the transition home after their tour of military service ends. Fifth, hold panel discussions and listen to the expertise of single female veterans who have deployed. Allowing this panel of experts to share their experiences and educate military leaders, policy makers, health care providers, and others from the first-person perspective is essential to creating pathways for enhanced supportive services that meet their individual unique needs. Hearing the stories of their first-hand experiences, in their own words, should provide the most sustaining and effective service delivery. Finally, solicit feedback from junior single enlisted women in particular about how to address the challenges they face and implement some of their recommended solutions, as this segment of the target population often fill because of their lower ranking status they are the least to be listened to and recognized for their input on the topic of their combat experiences.

Implications for Social Change

The Army reflects a larger culture of our society and among this culture are single, never married, and non-parenting women with the drive and ability to be successful in ground combat arms formations. While women in combat may respond differently to their wartime experiences in comparison to their male counterparts, their responses do not make them liabilities. Many of the women interviewed for this study not only felt their experiences in the combat zone were no different than the male Soldiers they served with during the deployment, but they also faced the same harsh conditions as their male colleagues. To help shape the next generation of single female combatants, as their evolving roles in our national defense continues to rise, participants in this study were adamant that their readjustment experiences are framed within the context of how they were able to re-acclimate to their normal lives, which primarily consisted of strong relational ties to other veterans who had shared similar experiences. Therefore, establishing peer-to-peer support programs for veterans and combat veterans would benefit this cohort as they reintegrate back into their units, assist with readjustment challenges related to deployment in a combat zone, transition from military service, and potentially prevent isolation while developing appropriate coping skills to manage their new normal lives.

Conclusions

When the military conflict in Iraq came to an end (2010) and the last of the troops were withdrawn from Afghanistan (2013) a prime opportunity presented itself to learn about the readjustment experiences of single women returning from the combat zones of

both contingencies. According to Myre (2013), approximately 280,000 women were deployed in support of both wars. The death toll among women during these campaigns totaled 166 and another 1,033 women were wounded (Defense Manpower Data Center, 2017; Kamarck, 2016), reshaping the social construction of society's view of women in today's military. Although the Combat Exclusion Policy was well in affect during the wars, the Army circumvented official military policy to put women into ground combat situations. For many, the experience may have been overwhelming, as the aftermath of war is difficult on many levels and the single women interviewed for this study bore a tremendous burden. Nonetheless, both culturally and institutionally, they demonstrated to the American public and military leaders alike that women are an undeniable asset the military cannot do without, even in combat operations.

This study was used to examine the central question: How do single women returning from a combat zone perceive their social construction has changed, as it relates to their readjustment experience and needs, compared to the men in their unit, or communities as they transition from the military? Several interview prompts were asked to gain a rich substantive response to answer the research question and understand the essence of the phenomenon under investigation. Participants did not see themselves deploying as females, they saw themselves as a Soldier deploying. They felt there was a huge misconception that purported the idea that when women deployed into the combat zone with their male counterparts, they really did not experience things the same way men did, this generally came from men who had not deployed. These types of responses definitely had an impact on the participants' social interactions.

During this study data regarding single, never married, and nonparenting women returning from a combat environment was generated and the findings may be used to contribute to the developing body of knowledge as it relates to their readjustment experiences and needs. A study of the experiences of this subpopulation returning from the combat zones of Iraq and Afghanistan is especially timely now that all military specialties and concentrations once closed to women are open for recruitment. The combat operating environment has changed, which is characterized by the inclusion of women into combat units. The mission of the Armed Forces is ever evolving and changing and with this comes new challenges and opportunities. Senior military leaders should understand and develop the most effective ways to use this new resource of manpower and plan the path forward assiduously.

Every military leader and policy-maker is a manager of time, resources, and people. Effective leadership demands the maximum use of each of these elements. Fanning, Milley, and Dailey (2015) stated, "Our Army exits to fight and win the Nation's wars. An incremental and phased approach by leaders and Soldiers who understand and enforce gender-neutral standards will ensure successful integration of women across the breadth and depth of our formations. We are honored to serve with all of you who have taken an oath to support and defend our Constitution and demonstrate the values which make our Nation great" (Full Integration of Women in the Army, para. 3). The goal of conducting this study was to provide leaders an opportunity to understand the readjustment experiences and needs of the single female combat veteran from their first-hand account to maximize the potential of the female Soldier. Army Strong!

References

109 Congressional Records. (2006). Tribute to Anne Brehm of Kansas City, Kansas. Retrieved from http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/CREC-2006-05-17/pdf/CREC-2006-05-17-pt1-PgE854-3.pdf#page=1

Abbott, J. H. (2014). The distinction between randomized clinical trials (RCTs) and preliminary feasibility and pilot studies: What they are and are not. *Journal of Orthopedic and Sports Physical Therapy*, *44*(8), 555-558. doi:10.2519/jospt.2014.0110

Abdul, H.-B., Raj, G., & Chakraborty, S. (2016). Assuring reliability in qualitative studies: A health informatics perspective. *Proceedings of the Pacific Asia Conference on Information Systems, 394,* 1-8. Retrieved from http://aisel.aisnet.org/pacis2016/394

Acker, J. (2006). Inequality regimes: Gender, class, and race in organizations. *Gender &Society*, *20*(4), 441-464. doi:10.1177/0891243206289499

Ahern, J., Worthen, M., Masters, J., Lippman, S. A., Ozer, E. J., & Moos, R. (2015). The challenges of Afghanistan and Iraq veterans' transition from military to civilian life and approaches to reconnection. *PLOS One*, *10*(7), 1-13. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0128599

Akinyoade, D. (2013). *Analysis of qualitative data for beginners*. Unpublished manuscript, Peace and Conflict Studies Unit, Department of Political Science and International Studies, College of Social and Management Sciences, Afe Babalola University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria. Retrieved from

http://www.academia.edu/3463822/Analysis_of_Qualitative_Data_for_Beginners

Albertson, K. M., Moreno, M. A., Garrison, M. M., Evans, Y. N., & Ahrens, K. R. (2018). Impacts of media on sexual behavior and relationships among youth in foster care. *Child & Family Social Work, 23*(1), 88–96. doi:10.1111/cfs.12387

Alsalih, D. A. (2014). *The impact of vaccination schedules on infants' and children's physio-psychological health: A qualitative investigation* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global database. (Order No. 3642238)

Alvarez, L. (2009, August 16). Women at arms: G.I. Jane breaks the combat barrier. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/16/us/16women.html?partner=rss&emc=rss&pagewanted=print

AlYahmady, H. H., & Alabri, S. S. (2013). Using NVivo for data analysis in qualitative research. *International Interdisciplinary Journal of Education, 2*(2), 181-186. Retrieved from http://www.iijoe.org/v2/IIJOE_06_02_02_2013.pdf.

Amankwaa, L. (2016). Creating protocols for trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Journal of Cultural Diversity, 23*(3), 121-127. Retrieved from https://eds-a-ebscohost-com.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/eds/detail/detail?vid=1&sid=be52b805-9347-4e38-9ff5d3823c9c53d1%40sessionmgr4008&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWRzLWxpdmUmc2NvcGU9c2l0ZQ%3d%3d#AN=29694754&db=mnh

Amara, J., & Krengel, M. (2016). Roles and challenges of women in the military. In N.

D. Ainspan, C. Bryan, & W. E. Penk (Eds.), *Handbook of psychosocial interventions for veterans and service members: A guide for the non-military mental health clinician* (pp. 36-44). NY: Oxford University Press. doi:10.1093/med:psych/9780199353996.003.0004

American University. (2016). Qualitative research introduction. Center for Teaching, Research & Learning. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://www.american.edu/ctrl/upload/Qualitative-Research-Introduction.pdf

Angen, M. J. (2000). Evaluating interpretive inquiry: Reviewing the validity debate and opening the dialogue. *Qualitative Health Research, 10*(3), 378-395. doi:10.1177/104973230001000308

Antonellis, P. J., & Berry, G. (2017). Practical steps for the utilization of action research in your organization: A qualitative approach for non-academic research. *International Journal of Human Resource Studies, 7*(2), 41-59. Retrieved from http://scholarworks.merrimack.edu/mgt_facpub/46

Baechtold, M., & De Sawal, D. M. (2009). Meeting the Needs of Women Veterans. *New Directions for Student Services, 126,* 35-43. doi:10.1002/ss.314

Baillie, L. (2015). Promoting and evaluating scientific rigour in qualitative research. *Nursing Standard, 29*(46), 36-42. doi:10.7748/ns.29.46.36.e8830

Balls, P. (2009). Phenomenology in nursing research: Methodology, interviewing, and transcribing. *Nursing Times, 105*(32), 30-33. Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/docview/197561906?accountid=14872

Baltar, F., & Brunet, I. (2012). Social research 2.0: Virtual snowball sampling method using Facebook. *Internet Research, 22*(1), 57-74. doi:10.1108/10662241211199960

Bansal, P., & Corley, K. (2011). The coming of age for qualitative research: Embracing the diversity of qualitative methods. *Academy of Management Journal, 54*(2), 233–237. Retrieved from http://aom.org/uploadedFiles/Publications/AMJ/Apr11_Bansal_Corley.PDF

Barry, B. (2013). Women in combat. *Survival, 55*(2), 19-30. doi:10.1080/00396338.2013.784461

Barth, S. K., Kimerling, R. E., Pavao, J., McCutcheon, S. J., Batten, S. V., Dursa, E., . . . Schneiderman, A. I. (2015). Military sexual trauma among recent veterans: Correlates of sexual assault and sexual harassment. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 50*(1), 77-86. doi:10.1016/j.amepre.2015.06.012

Baškarada, S. (2014). Qualitative case study guidelines. *The Qualitative Report, 19*(40), 1-18. Retrieved from http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol19/iss40/3

Baškarada, S., McKay, T., & McKenna, T. (2013). Technology deployment process model. *Operations Management Research, 6*(3-4), 105-118. doi:10.1007/s12063-013-0082-5

Bellafaire, J. (2016). *America's military women – The journey continues*. Washington, DC: Women in Military Service for America Memorial Foundation, Inc. Retrieved from https://www.womensmemorial.org/americas-military-women

Benkharafa, M. (2013). The present situation of the Arabic language and the Arab world

commitment to Arabization. Theory and Practice in Language Studies, 3(2), 201-208. doi:10.4304/tpls.3.2.201-208

Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge. New York, NY: The Penguin Group.

Berrey, E. (2014). Breaking glass ceilings, ignoring dirty floors: The culture and class bias of corporate diversity management. American Behavioral Scientist, 58(2), 347-70. doi:10.1177/0002764213503333

Biddix, J. P. (2009). Qualitative coding & analysis. Retrieved from https://researchrundowns.com/qual/qualitative-coding-analysis/

Biesecker, B. A. (2002). Remembering World War II: The rhetoric and politics of national commemoration at the turn of the 21st century. Quarterly Journal of Speech, 88(4), 393-409, doi: 10.1080/00335630209384386

Bilmes, L. J. (2013). The financial legacy of Iraq and Afghanistan: How wartime spending decisions will constrain future national security budgets. (Research Working Paper Series No. 13-006). Cambridge, MA: John F. Kennedy School of Government. Retrieved from http://3www.amadorcountynews.org/2014-06/How%20Wartime%20Spending%20Decisions%20Will%20Constrain%20Future%20National%20Security%20Budgets.pdf

Bilmes, L. (2007, January). Soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan: The long-term costs of providing veterans medical care and disability benefits. Paper presented at the meeting of the Allied Social Sciences Association, Chicago, IL.

Blais, R. K., & Renshaw, K. D. (2013). Stigma and demographic correlates of help-seeking intentions in returning service members. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 26*(1), 77–85. doi:10.1002/jts.21772

Bloeser, K., McCarron, K. K., Batorsky, B., Reinhard, M. J., Pollack, S. J., & Amdur, R. (2014). Mental health outreach and screening among returning veterans: Are we asking the right questions? *US Army Medical Department Journal*, 109-117. Retrieved from http://web.b.ebscohost.com.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=3&sid=c92185bc-5605-4af0-90e8-8d0af56c17a7%40sessionmgr102

Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic Interactionism*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: University of California Press, Ltd.

Booker, J. W., Seamone, E. R., & Rogall, L. C. (2012). Beyond "T.B.D.": Understanding VA's evaluation of a former service member's benefit eligibility following involuntary or punitive discharge from the armed forces. *Military Law Review, 214*, 1-328. Retrieved from http://web.a.ebscohost.com.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=3&sid=5f21b542-c626-4c1c-8f7b-66b176065b80%40sessionmgr4010

Borsari, B., Yurasek, A., Miller, M. B., Murphy, J. G., McDevitt-Murphy, M. E., Martens, M. P., . . . Carey, K. B. (2017). Student service members/veterans on campus: Challenges for reintegration. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry, 87*(2), 166-175. doi:10.1037/ort0000199

Boyd, M. A., Bradshaw, W., & Robinson, M. (2013). Mental health issues of women

deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing, 27*(1), 10-22. doi:10.1016/j.apnu.2012.10.005

Bradbury-Jones, C., Taylor, J., & Herber, O. (2014). How theory is used and articulated in qualitative research: Development of a new typology. *Social Science & Medicine, 120*, 135-141. doi:10.1016/j.socscimed.2014.09.014

Braun, L. A., Kennedy, H. P., Sadler, L. S., & Dixon, J. (2015). Research on U.S. Military women: Recruitment and retention challenges and strategies. *Military Medicine, 180*(12), 1247-1255. doi:10.7205/MILMED-D-14-00601

Brickell, C. (2006). The sociological construction of gender and sexuality. *Sociological Review, 54*(1), 87-113. doi:10.1111/j.1467-954X.2006.00603.x

Brinkley, K. E. (2016). *Learning to teach online: An investigation of the impacts of faculty development training on teaching effectiveness and attitudes toward online instruction* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from Trace: Tennessee Research and Creative Exchange: http://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_graddiss/4127

Bryan, C. J., Bryan, A. O., & Clemans, T. A. (2015). The association of military and premilitary sexual trauma with risk for suicide ideation, plans, and attempts. *Psychiatry Research, 227*(2-3), 246–252. doi:10.1016/j.psychres.2015.01.030

Budgeon, S. (2014). The dynamics of gender hegemony: Femininities, masculinities and social change. Sociology, 48(2), 317-334. doi:10.1177/0038038513490358

Bunnell, B. E., Davidson, T. M., Hamblen, J. L., Cook, D. L., Grubaugh, A. L., Lozano, B. E., . . . Ruggier, K. J. (2017). Protocol for the evaluation of a digital storytelling approach to address stigma and improve readiness to seek services

among veterans. Pilot and Feasibility Study, 3(7), 1-11. doi:10.1186/s40814-017-0121-3

Burrelli, D. F. (2012). Women in combat: Issues for congress. (Congressional Research Service Report No. R42075). Washington DC: CRS. Retrieved from http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R42075.pdf

Burylo, R. (2016, February 5). Alabama's first female in combat begins her journey. Montgomery Advertiser. Retrieved from https://www.montgomeryadvertiser.com/story/news/2016/02/03/combat-roles-open-women-alabama-has-its-first/79645644

Cairney, P. (2016a). Policy concepts in 1000 words: The social construction and policy design. Retrieved from https://paulcairney.wordpress.com/2016/12/21/social-construction-and-policy-design/

Cairney, P. (2016b). Policy concepts in 1000 words: The social construction of target populations. Retrieved from https://paulcairney.wordpress.com/2016/01/08/policy-concepts-in-1000-words-the-social-construction-of-target-populations/

Calhoun, P. S., Schry, A. R., Dennis, P. A., Wagner, H. R., Kimbrel, N. A., Bastian, L. A., . . . Straits-Tröster, K. (2016, January 21). The association between military sexual trauma and use of VA and non-VA health care services among female veterans with military service in Iraq or Afghanistan. Journal of Interpersonal Violence. Advance online publication. doi:10.1177/0886260515625909

Callender, S. (2013). Salute to iconic women: Susan B. Anthony. Retrieved from

https://heragenda.com/salute-to-iconic-women-susan-b-anthony/#

Carney, C. P., Sampson, T. R., Voelker, M., Woolson, R., Thorne, P., & Doebbeling, B. N. (2003). Women in the Gulf War: Combat experience, exposures, and subsequent health care use. Military Medicine, 168(8), 654-661. Retrieved from http://web.b.ebscohost.com.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=3&sid=c9ca8e12-a4a4-4101-b5ff-5070bc2af131%40sessionmgr101

Carter, M. J., Fuller, C. (2016). Symbols, meaning, and action: The past, present, and future of symbolic interactionism. Current Sociology, 64(6), 1-31. doi:10.1177/0011392116638396

Carter, N., Bryant-Lukosius, D., DiCenso, A., Blythe, J., & Neville, A. (2014). The use of triangulation in qualitative research. Oncology Nursing Forum, 41(5), 545-547. doi:10.1188/14.ONF.545-547

Center for Military Readiness. (2004). Women in land combat: Selected findings – 1992 presidential commission. Retrieved from http://www.cmrlink.org/content/women-in combat/34414/women_in_land_combat?year=2004

Cesur, R., Sabia, J.J., & Tekin, E. (2013). The psychological costs of war: Military combat and mental health. Journal of Health Economics, 32(1), 51-65. doi:10.1016/j.jhealeco.2012.09.001

Chamberlain-Salaun, J., Mills, J., & Usher K. (2013). Linking symbolic interactionism and Grounded theory methods in a research design: From Corbin and Strauss' assumptions to action. SAGE Open, 3 (3), 1-10. doi:10.1177/2158244013505757

Chan, Z. C. Y., Fung, Y.-L., & Chien, W.-T. (2013). Bracketing in phenomenology: Only

undertaken in the data collection and analysis process? *The Qualitative Report, 18*(30), 1-9. Retrieved from http://nsuworks.nova.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1486&context=tqr

Chawla, D. (2006). Subjectivity and the "native" ethnographer: Researcher eligibility in an ethnographic study of urban Indian women in Hindu arranged marriages. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 5*(4), 1-13. doi:10.1.1.533.774

Cheng, F. K. (2014). Utilising computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software in buddhist canonical analysis. Retrieved from http://atlasti.com/2014/06/13/utilising-computer-assisted-qualitative-data-analysis-software-in-buddhist-canonical-analysis/

Coleman, J. S. (1986). Social theory, social research, and a theory of action. *American Journal of Sociology, 91*(6), 1309-1335. doi:10.1086/228423

Cone, R. W. (2016). Leading gender integration. Military Medicine, 181(1 Suppl), 4-6. doi:10.7205/MILMED-D-15-00335

Connelly, L. M. (2016). Trustworthiness in qualitative research. *MEDSURG Nursing, 25*(6), 435-436. Retrieved from https://ezp.waldenulibrary.org/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/docview/1849700459?accountid=14872

Cope, D. G. (2014). Methods and meanings: Credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative research. *Oncology Nursing Forum, 41*(1), 89-91. Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/docview/1476482511?accountid=1482

Craib, I. (2014). *Modern social theory: From Parsons to Habermas* (2nd ed.). NY: Routledge.

Craib, I. (1984). *Modern social theory*. Brighton: Wheatsheaf.

Crawford, E. F., Elbogen E. B., Wagner, H. R., Kudler, H. Calhoun, P. S., Brancu. M., & Straits-Troster, K. A. (2015). Surveying treatment preferences in US Iraq-Afghanistan veterans with PTSD. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, *28*(2), 118-126. doi:10.1002/jts.21993

Creech, S. K., Swift, R., Zlotnick, C., Taft, C., & Street, A. E. (2016). Combat exposure, mental health, and relationship functioning among women veterans of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars. *Journal of Family Psychology, 30*(1), 43-51. doi:10.1037/fam0000145

Creswell, J. W. (2017). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Creswell, J. (2008). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Merrill Prentice Hall.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Crocker, T., Powell-Cope, G., Brown, L., & Besterman-Dahan, K. (2014). Toward a veteran-centric view on community (re)integration. *Journal of Rehabilitation Research and Development, 51*(3), xi–xviii. doi:10.1682/JRRD.2014.01.00111

Currier, J. M., Stefurak, T., Carroll, T. D., & Shatto, E. H. (2017). Applying trauma-informed care to community-based mental health services for military veterans. *Best Practices in Mental Health, 13*(1), 47-64. Retrieved from http://eds.a.ebscohost.com.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=3&sid=78701764-7d58-45ab-a14e-1161e8a9aac5%40sessionmgr4007&hid=4111

Daspit, J. J., Holt, D. T., Chrisman, J. J., & Long, R. G. (2016). Examining family firm succession from a social exchange perspective: A multiphase, multistakeholder review. *Family Business Review, 29*(1), 44 –64. doi:10.1177/0894486515599688

Dawson, A., & Hjorth, D. (2012). Advancing family business research through Narrative analysis. *Family Business Review*, *25*(3), 339 –355. doi:10.1177/0894486511421487

de Beauvoir, S. (1949). *The second sex.* New York, NY: Random House.

deKleijn, M., Lagro-Janssen, A. L. M., Canelo, I., & Yano, E. M. (2015). Creating a roadmap for delivering gender-sensitive comprehensive care for women veterans. *Medical Care, 53*(4 Suppl1), S156–S164. doi:10.1097/MLR.0000000000000307

DeCoster, V., & Lewis, S. (2013). A photographic activity to express readjustment to life after combat. *Humanities and Social Sciences Review, 2*(1), 31-39. Retrieved from http://universitypublications.net/hssr/0201/pdf/M3K46.pdf

Defense Manpower Data Center & Defense Casualty Analysis System. (2017). Conflict

casualties. Retrieved from https://www.dmdc.osd.mil/dcas/pages/casualties.xhtml

Denzin, N. (1992). *Symbolic Interactionism and Cultural Studies: The Politics of Interpretation*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Denzin, N.K. (1978). *Sociological methods: A sourcebook*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.

Department of Defense Instruction Number 1340.25. (2010, September 28). Combat zone tax exclusion. Washington, DC: Author.

Department of Veterans Affairs. (2015, June 22). Healthcare benefits for combat theater Veterans (VHA Directive 1606). Washington, DC: Author.

Department of Veterans Affairs. (2012). Women veteran task force report: Strategies for serving our women veterans. Washington, D.C.: Author. Retrieved from www.va.gov/opa/bublications/draft_2012_women-vetrans_strategicplan.pdf.

Der-Martirosian, C., Cordasco, K. M., & Washington, D. L. (2013). Health-related quality of life and comorbidity among older women veterans in the United States. *Quality of Life Research, 22*(10), 2749-2756. doi:10.1007/s11136-013-0424-7

Dienstfrey, S. J. (1988). Women veterans' exposure to combat. *Armed Forces & Society, 14*(4), 549-558. doi:10.1177/0095327X8801400404

Dikko, M. (2016). Establishing construct validity and reliability: Pilot testing of a qualitative interview for research in takaful (Islamic insurance). *The Qualitative Report, 21*(3), 521-528. Retrieved from http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol21/iss3/6

Di Leone, B. A., Vogt, D., Gradus, J. L., Street, A. E., Giasson, H. L., & Resick, P. A. (2013). Predictors of mental health care use among male and female veterans

deployed in support of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. *Psychological Services, 10*(2), 145–151. doi:10.1037/a0032088

Dillon, K. H., Crawford, E. F., Kudler, H., Straits-Troster, K. A., Elbogen, E. B., & Calhoun, P. S. (2017). An investigation of treatment engagement among returning veterans with problematic anger. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, 205*(2), 119-126. doi:10.1097/NMD.0000000000000651

Disabled American Veterans. (2015). Statement of Joy J. Ilem DAV deputy national legislative director before the committee on veterans' affairs United States house of representatives. Author. Retrieved from https://www.dav.org/wp-content/uploads/Ilem20150430.pdf

Disabled American Veterans. (2014). *Women veterans: The long journey home*. Retrieved from https://www.dav.org/wp-content/uploads/women-veterans-study.pdf

Dobie, D. J., Kivlahan, D. R., Maynard, C., Bush, K. R., Davis, T. M., & Bradley, K. A. (2004). Posttraumatic stress disorder in female veterans: Association with self-reported health problems and functional impairment. *Archives of Internal Medicine, 164*(4), 394-400. doi:10.1001/archinte.164.4.394

Doody, O., & Doody, C. M. (2015). Conducting a pilot study: Case study of a novice researcher. *British Journal of Nursing, 24*(21), 1074-1078. Retrieved from http://hdl.handle.net/10344/4946

Dowling, M. (2007). From Husserl to van Manen: A review of different phenomenological approaches. *International Journal of Nursing Studies, 44*(1),

131-142. doi.10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2005.11.026

Dowling, M. (2004). Hermeneutics: An exploration. *Nurse Researcher, 11*(4), 30-39. doi:10.7748/nr2004.07.11.4.30.c6213

Downes, L. (2012, July 16) The VA tries to get beyond its culture of no. *The New York Times*. Retrieved from http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/17/opinion/sunday/17sun4.html?_r=1

Duhart, O. (2012). PTSD and women warriors: Causes, controls and a congressional cure. *Cardozo Journal of Law & Gender, 18*, 327–331. Retrieved from http://www.lexisnexis.com.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/lnacui2api/api/version1/getDocCui?lni=554H-4RH0-00CT-X02B&csi=155852&hl=t&hv=t&hnsd=f&hns=t&hgn=t&oc=00240&perma=true

Dutra, L., Grubbs, K., Greene, C., Trego, L. L., McCartin, T. L., & Kloezeman, K. (2011). Women at war: Implications for mental health. *Journal of Trauma & Dissociation, 12*(1), 25-37. doi:10.1080/15299732.2010.496141

Dye, J. L., Eskridge, S. L., Tepe, V., Clouser, M. C., & Galarneau, M. (2016). Characterization and comparison of combat-related injuries in women during OIF and OEF. *Military Medicine, 181*(1), 92-98. doi:10.7205/MILMED-D-15-00406

Edwards, R. D. (2015). Overseas deployment, combat exposure, and well-being in the 2010 national survey of veterans. *Journal of Human Capital, 9*(1), 64-93. Retrieved from http://web.a.ebscohost.com.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=17&sid=4adfc1e7-5ce5-49b1-a876-

1719d9dd2117%40sessionmgr4010&hid=4001

Edwards, R. D. (2014). U.S. war costs: Two parts temporary, one-part permanent. *Journal of Public Economics, 113,* 54-66. doi:10.1016/j.jpubeco.2014.03.008

Edwards, R. D., & MacLean, A. (2014, September). Soldiering on through aging? The subjective and objective health of older U.S. veterans. Paper presented at the meeting of Annual Meeting of the Population Association of America, San Diego, CA. Retrieved from http://qcpages.qc.cuny.edu/~redwards/Papers/edwards-maclean-hrsbiovets-paa.pdf

Elbogen, E. B., Wagner, H. R., Johnson, S. C., Kinneer, P., Kang, H., Vasterling, J. J., . . . Beckham, J. C. (2013). Are Iraq and Afghanistan veterans using mental health services? New data from a national random-sample survey. *Psychiatric Services, 64*(2), 134-141. doi:10.1176/appi.ps.004792011

Eldridge, S.M., Lancaster, G. A., Campbell, M. J., Thabane, L., Hopewell, S., Coleman, C. L., & Bond. C. M. (2016). Defining feasibility and pilot studies in preparation for randomized controlled trials: Development of a conceptual framework. *Public Library of Science One, 11*(3), 1-22. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0150205

Ellis, T. J., & Levy, Y. (2010). A guide for novice researchers: Design and development research methods. Paper presented at the Informing Science & IT Education Conference (InSITE), Fort Lauderdale, FL. Retrieved from http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.170.2962&rep=rep1&type=pdf

Elliot, B. (2015). Military nurses' experiences of returning from war. *Journal of Advance*

Nursing, *71*(5), 1066–75. doi:10.1111/jan.12588

Emerson, R., Fretz, R., & Shaw, L. (1995). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.

Fainaru, S. (2005, June 26). Silver stars affirm one unit's mettle. *Washington Post.* Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/06/25/AR2005062501263.html

Fanning, E. K., Milley, M. A., & Dailey, D. A. (2015). Full integration of women in the Army. Washington, DC: Department of Defense.

Fargo, J., Metraux, S., Byrne, T., Munley, E., Montgomery, A. E., Jones, H., . . . Culhane, D. (2012). Prevalence and risk of homelessness among US veterans. *Preventing Chronic Disease, 9,* 110–112. doi:10.5888/pcd9.110112

Finlay, A. K., Smelson, D., Sawh, L., McGuire, J., Rosenthal, J., Blue-Howells, J., . . . Bowe, T. (2016). US department of veterans affairs veterans justice outreach program: Connecting justice-involved veterans with mental health and substance use disorder treatment. *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, *27*(2), 203-222. doi:10.1177/0887403414562601

Fisher, D. R. (1995). Trailblazers: US World War II military women. *Military Review, 75*(4), 88. Retrieved from http://web.ebscohost.com.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/ehost/detail?vid=8&hid=24&sid=714a5f48-f937-453e-b93e-0cc4a890398a%40sessionmgr11&bdata=JnNpdGU9ZWhvc3QtbGl2ZSZzY29wZT1zaXRl#db=a9h&AN=9511250964

Fochtman, D. (2008). Phenomenology in pediatric cancer nursing research. *Journal of Pediatric Oncology Nursing, 25*(4), 185-192. doi:10.1177/1043454208319186

Fontana, A. & Frey, J.H. (2000). The interview. From structured questions to negotiated text. In Y. S. Lincoln & N. K. Denzin (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 645–672). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Fossey, E., Harvey, C., McDermott, F., & Davidson, L. (2002). Understanding and evaluating qualitative research. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry, 36*(6), pp. 717–32. doi:10.1046/j.1440-1614.2002.01100.x

Foster, A., O'Halloran, R., Rose, M., & Worrall, L. (2016). "Communication is taking a back seat": Speech pathologists' perceptions of aphasia management in acute hospital settings. *Aphasiology, 30*(5), 585-608. doi:10.1080/02687038.2014.985185

Frankfurt, S. & Frazier, P. (2016). A review of research on moral injury in combat veterans. *Military Psychology, 28*(5), 318-330. doi:org/10.1037/mil0000132

Fraser, J., Fahlman, D., Arscott, J., & Guillot, I. (2018). Pilot testing for feasibility in a study of student retention and attrition in online undergraduate programs. *International Review of Research in Open & Distance Learning, 19*(1), 260-278. Retrieved from https://web-a-ebscohostcom.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=5b880fe0-d473-4a02-bafa-a3b8ac08efa0%40sessionmgr4008

Frayne, S. M., Carney, D. V., Bastian, L., Bean-Mayberry, B., Sadler, A. Klap, R., . . . Yano, E. M. (2013). The VA women's health practice-based research network:

Amplifying women veterans' voices in VA research. *Journal of General Internal Medicine, 28*(Suppl 2), S504–509. doi:10.1007/s11606-013-2476-3

Frayne, S. M., Phibbs, C. S., Saechao, F., Maisel, N. C., Friedman, S.A., Finlay, A., . . . Haskell, S. (2014). *Sourcebook: Women veterans in the veterans' health administration (Volume No. 3). Sociodemographics, utilization, costs of care, and health profile*. Washington, DC: Women's Health Evaluation Initiative, Women's Health Services, Veterans Health Administration, Department of Veterans Affairs. Retrieved from https://www.womenshealth.va.gov/WOMENSHEALTH/docs/Sourcebook_Vol_3_FINAL.pdf

Freedman, J. (2014). Witnessing and positioning: Structuring narrative therapy with families and couples. *Australian & New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy, 35*(1), 20-30. doi:10.1002/anzf.1043

Freedman J., & Combs, G. (1996). *Narrative therapy: The social construction of preferred realities*. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.

Fry, A. H. (2016). *Combat Exposure, Morality, Guilt and Shame in Military Personnel* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (Order No. 10181521)

Gale, N. K., Heath, G., Cameron, E., Rashid, S., & Redwood, S. (2013). Using the framework method for the analysis of qualitative data in multi-disciplinary health research. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, *13*(1), 1–8. doi:10.1186/1471-2288-13-117

Gallegos, A. M., Streltzov, N. A., & Stecker, T. (2016). Improving treatment engagement for returning operation enduring freedom and operation Iraqi freedom veterans with posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, and suicidal ideation. *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, 204*(5), 339-343. doi:10.1097/NMD.0000000000000489

Gearing, R. E. (2004). Bracketing in research: A typology. *Qualitative Health Research, 14*(10), 1429-1452. doi:10.1177/1049732304270394

Geiling, J., Rosen, J. M., & Edwards, R. D. (2012). Medical costs of war in 2035: Long-term care challenges for veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan. *Military Medicine, 177*(11), 1235-1244. doi:10.7205/MILMED-D-12-0003

Gläser, J., & Laudel, G. (2013). Life with and without coding: Two methods for early-stage data analysis in qualitative research aiming at casual explanations. *Qualitative Social Research, 14*(2), 1-37. Retrieved from http://www.qualitative-research.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1886/3529

Godfrey, K. M., Mostoufi, S., Rodgers, C., Backhaus, A., Floto, E., Pittman, J., & Afari, N. (2015). Associations of military sexual trauma, combat exposure, and number of deployments with physical and mental health indicators in Iraq and Afghanistan veterans. *Psychological Services, 12*(4), 366-377. doi:10.1037/ser0000059

Golafshani, N. (2003). Understanding Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research. *The Qualitative Report, 8*(4), 597-606. Retrieved from http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol8/iss4/6

Goldberg, E. R. (2016). A sisterhood of arms: Envisioning conscription and selective Service post-gender integration of combat arms. *Buffalo Law Review, 64*, 1135-1182. Retrieved from http://www.buffalolawreview.org/past_issues/64_5/Goldberg.pdf

Goldstein, L. A., Dinh, J., Donalson, R., Hebenstreit, C. L., & Maguen, S. (2017). Impact of military trauma exposures on posttraumatic stress and depression in female veterans. *Psychiatry Research, 249*, 281-285. doi:10.1016/j.psychres.2017.01.009

Gould, M., Alder, A., Zamorski, M., Castro, C., Hanily, N., Steele, N., Kearney, S., & Greenberg, N. (2010). Do stigma and other perceived barriers to mental health care differ across Armed Forces? *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine, 103*(4), 148-156. doi:10.1258/jrsm.2010.090426

Grieger, T.A. (2018). Modern history of military and veteran mental health Care. In: L. W. Roberts & C. H. Warner (Eds.), *Military and veteran mental health*: *A comprehensive guide*. New York, NY: Springer Science+Business Media, LLC.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105-117). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hahn, C. (2008). Techniques and tips for qualitative researchers: Doing qualitative research with excellence and efficiency using your computer. Retrieved from http://qrtips.com/Index.html

Hamblya, J. L., Khana, S., McDermottc, B., Borb, W., & Haywood, A. (2017). Instruments for evaluating pharmacotherapy intervention efficacy in violent and

aggressive behavior and conduct disorder in youth. *Aggression and Violent Behavior, 34*, 84-95. doi:10.1016/j.avb.2017.04.004

Hancock, M. E., Amankwaa, L., Revell, M. A., & Mueller, D. (2016). Focus group data saturation: A new approach to data analysis. *The Qualitative Report, 21*(11), 2124-2130. doi:10.1177/1468794107085301

Hansen, J. T. (2015). The relevance of postmodernism to counselors and counseling practice. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling, 37,* 355-363. doi:10.17744/mehc.37.4.07

Hardison, C. M., Hosek, S. D., & Saavedra, A. R. (2015). Establishing gender-neutral standards for closed occupations: A review of the service efforts to data. (RR-1340/2-OSD). Office of the Secretary of Defense, Washington, DC: RAND National Defense Research Institute.

Harris, A. H. S., Chen, C., Mohr, B. A., Adams, R. S., Williams, T. V., & Larson, M. J. (2014). Predictors of Army National Guard and Reserve members' use of veteran health administration health care after demobilizing from OEF/OIF deployment. *Military Medicine, 179*(10), 1090-1098. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.7205/MILMEDD-13-00521

Hatch, J. A. (2002). *Doing Qualitative Research in Education Settings.* Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Healy, M., & Perry, C. (2000). Comprehensive criteria to judge validity and reliability of qualitative research within the realism paradigm. *Qualitative Market Research, 3*(3), 118-126. doi:10.1108/13522750010333861

Hedtke, L. (2014). Creating stories of hope: A narrative approach to illness, death and grief. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy, 35*(1), 4-19. doi:10.1002/anzf.1040

Heikkinen, H. L. T., de Jong, F. P. C. M., & Vanderlinde, R. (2016). What is (good) Practitioner research? *Vocations and Learning, 9* (1), 1-19. doi:10.1007/s12186-0169153-8

Hemme, F., Morais, D. G., Bowers, M. T., & Todd, J. S. (2017). Extending sport-based entrepreneurship theory through phenomenological inquiry. *Sport Management Review, 20*(1), 92-104. doi:10.1016/j.smr.2016.07.005

Henderson, E. C. (2015). Women home from war. In E. C. Ritchie, A. L. Naclerio (Eds.), *Women at war* (pp. 157-177). NY: Oxford University Press.

Herman, A., & Yarwood, R. (2014). From services to civilian: The geographies of veterans' post-military lives. *Geoforum, 53*, 41-50. doi:10.1016/j.geoforum.2014.02.001

Hilal, A. H., & Alabri, S. S. (2013). Using NVivo for data analysis in qualitative research. *International Interdisciplinary Journal of Education, 2*(2), 181-186. Retrieved from http://www.iijoe.org/v2/IIJOE_06_02_2013.pdf

Hoge, C. W., Clark, J. C., & Castro, C. A. (2007). Commentary: Women in combat and risk of post-traumatic stress disorder and depression. *International Journal of Epidemiology, 36*(2), 327-329. doi:10.1093/ije/dym013

Hoge, C. W., Grossman, S. H., Auchterlonie, J. L., Riviere, L. A., Milliken, C. S., & Wilk, J. E. (2014). PTSD treatment for soldiers after combat deployment: Low

utilization of mental health care and reasons for dropout. *American Journal of Psychiatry Services, 65*(8), 997-1004. doi:10.1176/appi.ps.201300307

Holm, J. (1992). *Women in the military: An unfinished revolution* (Rev. ed.). NY: The Random House Ballantine Publishing Group.

Holmstedt, K. (2009). *The girls come marching home: Stories of women warriors returning from the war in Iraq*. Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books.

Holmstedt, K. (2007). *Band of sisters: American women at war in Iraq*. Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books.

Hom, M. A., Stanley, I. H., Schneider, M. E., & Joiner, T. E. (2017). A systematic review of help-seeking and mental health service utilization among military service members. *Clinical Psychology Review, 53*, 59-78. doi:10.1016/j.cpr.2017.01.008

Hope, K. W., & Waterman, H. A. (2003). Praiseworthy pragmatism? Validity and action research. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 44*(2):120-127. doi:10.1046/j.1365-2648.2003.02777.x

Houghton, C., Casey, D., Shaw, D., & Murphy, K. (2013). Rigour in qualitative case-study research. *Nurse Researcher, 20*(4), 12-17. doi:10.7748/nr2013.03.20.4.12.e326

Iacono, V. L., Symonds, P. & Brown, D. H. K. (2016). Skype as a tool for qualitative research interviews. *Sociological Research Online, 21*(2), 1-15. doi:10.5153/sro.3952

Ingram, H. M., & Schneider, A. L. (2005). Public policy and the social construction of deservedness. In A. L. Schneider and H. M. Ingram (Eds.), *Deserving and*

entitled: Social constructions and public policy (pp. 1-28). State University of New York Press.

Ingram, H., Schneider, A. L., & deLeon, P. (2007). Social construction and policy design. In P. A. Sabatier (Ed.), *Theories of the policy process*, (pp. 93-126). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Institute of Medicine. (2013). *Returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan: Assessment of readjustment needs of veterans, service members, and their families*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. Retrieved from https://www.iom.edu/~/media/Files/Report%20Files/2013/Returning-Home-Iraq-Afghanistan/Returning-Home-Iraq-Afghanistan-RB.pdf

Institute of Medicine. (2010). *Returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan: Preliminary assessment of readjustment needs of veterans, service members, and their families*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. Retrieved from http://www/nap.edu/catalog/12812.html

Interian, A., Kline, A., Callahan, L., & Losonczy, M. (2012). Readjustment stressors and early mental health treatment seeking by returning National Guard soldiers with PTSD. *Psychiatric Services, 63*(9), 855–861. doi:10.1176/appi.ps.201100337

International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences. (2008). *Social constructs*. Farmington Hills, MI: Thomson-Gale Publisher. Retrieved from http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-3045302485.html

Iskra. D. (2011, August 24). *Women are heroes, too*. Retrieved from http://battleland.blogs.time.com/2011/08/24/women-are-heroes-

too/#disqus_thread

Jacob, S. A., & Furgerson, S. P. (2012). Writing interview protocols and conducting interviews: Tips for students new to the field of qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report, 17*(42), 1-10. Retrieved from http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol17/iss42/3

Jarzabkowski, P., Bednarek, R. & Le, J. K. (2014). Producing persuasive findings: Demystifying ethnographic textwork in strategy and organization research. *Strategic Organization, 12*(4), pp. 274-287. doi:10.1177/1476127014554575

Johnson, R. B. (1997). Examining the validity structure of qualitative research. *Education, 118*(2), 28-292. Retrieved from https://www.researchgate.net/publication/246126534_Examining_the_Validity_Structure_of_Qualitative_Research

Johnson, S. (2003). Women and war. *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy, 15*(1), 75-77. Retrieved from http://web.b.ebscohost.com.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=6&sid=17540af2-3592-47d9-8e21-69a2d4bfca09%40sessionmgr104

Jones, K. (2014). *Comparing perceptions among professors and veterans at a community college* (Doctoral dissertation). Retrieved from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (Order No. 3631511)

Jones, K. C. (2013). Understanding student veterans in transition. *Qualitative Report, 18*(37), 1– 14. Retrieved from http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR18/jones74.pdf

Junger, S. (2015, June). How PTSD became a problem far beyond the battlefield. *Vanity*

Fair. Retrieved from http://www.vanityfair.com/news/2015/05/ptsd-war-home-sebastian-junger

Kaivo-oja, J. (2017). Towards better participatory processes in technology foresight: How to link participatory foresight research to the methodological machinery of qualitative research and phenomenology? *Futures, 86*, 94–106. doi:10.1016/j.futures.2016.07.004

Kamarck, K. (2016). Women in combat: Issues for congress (Report No. 7-5700). Washington, D.C: Congressional Research Service. Retrieved from https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R42075.pdf

Kanel, K. L. (2015). Veterans' mental health: challenges and issues of college enrolled OIF and OEF veterans. *Social Work in Mental Health, 13*(2), 95–107. doi:10.1080/15332985.2013.812541

Katz, L., Bloor, L., Cojucar, G., & Draper, T. (2007). Women who served in Iraq seeking mental health services: Relationships between military sexual trauma, symptoms, and readjustment. *Psychological Services, 4*(4), 239−249. doi:10.1037/1541-1559.4.4.239

Katz, L.S., Cojucar, G., Davenport, C., Clarke, S., & Williams, J.C. (2012). War experiences inventory: Initial psychometric and structural properties. *Military Psychology, 24*(1), 48-70. doi:10.1080/08995605.2012.642291

Katz, L. S., Cojucar, G., Davenport, C. T., Pedram, C., & Lindl, C. (2010). Post-deployment readjustment inventory: Reliability, validity, and gender differences. *Military Psychology, 22*(1), 41-56. doi:10.1080/08995600903249222

Kelle, U. (1997, August). Computer-assisted analysis of qualitative data. Paper prepared for the discussion paper series of the LSE Methodology Institute, University of Bremen, Germany. Retrieved from http://www.lse.ac.uk/methodology/pdf/QualPapers/UKELLE.pdf

Kelly, K.G. (2018). Whatever gets you through the night: Poetry and combat trauma. In S. L. Kleppe & A. Sorby (Eds), *Poetry and pedagogy across the lifespan: Disciplines, classrooms, contexts.* (pp. 95-115). New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, Cham

Kelly, U. A., Skelton, K., Patel, M., & Bradley, B. (2011). More than military sexual trauma: Interpersonal violence, PTSD, and mental health in women veterans. *Research in Nursing & Health, 34*, 457–467. doi:10.1002/nur.20453

Kennedy, C. H., & Malone, R. C. (2009). Integration of women into the modern military. In S. M. Freeman, B. A., Moore, & A. Freeman (Eds.), *Living and surviving in harm's way: A psychological treatment handbook for pre- and post- deployment of military personnel* (pp. 67-81). New York: Routledge.

Kim, Y. (2011). The pilot study in qualitative inquiry: Identifying issues and learning lessons for culturally competent research. *Qualitative Social Work, 10*(2), 190-206. doi:10.1177/1473325010362001

Kim, P. Y., Britt, T. W., Klocko, R. P., Riviere, L. A., & Adler, A. B. (2011). Stigma, negative attitudes about treatment, and utilization of mental health care among soldiers. *Military Psychology, 23*(1), 65-81. doi:10.1080/08995605.2011.534415

Kim, P. Y., Thomas, J. L., Wilk, J. E., Castro, C. A., & Hoge, C. W. (2010). Stigma,

barriers to care, and use of mental health services among active duty and National Guard soldiers after combat. *Psychiatric Services, 61*(6), 582-588. doi:10.1176/ps.2010.61.6.582

King, A. (2013) Women in combat, *The RUSI Journal, 158*(1), 4-11, doi:10.1080/03071847.2013.774634

King, M. W., Street, A. E., Gradus, J. L., Vogt, D. S., & Resick, P. A. (2013). Gender differences in posttraumatic stress symptoms among OEF/OIF veterans: An item response theory analysis. *Journal of Traumatic Stress, 26*(2), 175–183. doi:10.1002/jts.21802

Kitto, S., Nordquist, J., Peller, J., Grant, R., & Reeves, S. (2013). The disconnections between space, place and learning in interprofessional education: An overview of key issues. *Journal of Interpersonal Care, 27*(S2), 5-8. doi:10.3109/13561820.2013.801410

Kleiman, S. (2004). Phenomenology: To wonder and search for meanings. *Nurse Researcher, 11*(4), 7-19. doi:10.7748/nr2004.07.11.4.7.c6211

Kline, A., Ciccone, D. S., Weiner, M., Interian, A., St. Hill, Lauren, Falca-Dodson, M., . . . Losonczy, M. (2013). Gender differences in the risk and protective factors associated with PTSD: A prospective study of National Guard troops deployed to Iraq. *Psychiatry: Interpersonal & Biological Processes, 76*(3), 256–272. doi:10.1521/psyc.2013.76.3.256

Koblinsky, S. A., Schroeder, A. L., & Leslie, L. A. (2017). “Give us respect, support and understanding:” Women veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan recommend strategies

for improving their mental health care. *Social Work in Mental Health, 15*(2), 121-142. doi:10.1080/15332985.2016.1186134

Kodish, S. & Gittelsohn, J. (2011). Systematic data analysis in qualitative health micronutrient powder uptake at Kakuma refugee camp. *Sight and Life 4*(3), 61-63. Retrieved from http://www.sightandlife.org/fileadmin/data/Magazine/Archive/2010/Sight%20and%20Life%20Magazine%2003%202010.pdf

Koenig, C. J., Maguen, S., Monroy, J. D., Mayott, L., & Seal, K. H. (2014). Facilitating culture-centered communication between health care providers and veterans transitioning from military deployment to civilian life. *Patient Education and Counseling*, 95(3), 414–420. doi:10.1016/j.pec.2014.03.016

Koo, K. H., & Maguen, S. (2014). Military sexual trauma and mental health diagnoses in female veterans returning from Afghanistan and Iraq: Barriers and facilitators to veterans affairs care. *Hastings Women's Law Journal, 25*, 27–38. Retrieved from http://www.lexisnexis.com.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/lnacui2api/results/listview/delPrep.do?cisb=&risb=21_T26220668585&mode=delivery_DnldRender

Kornbluh, M. (2015). Combatting challenges to establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 12*(4), 397-414, doi:10.1080/14780887.2015.1021941

Korstjens, I., & Moser, A. (2018). Series: Practical guidance to qualitative research. Part 4: Trustworthiness and publishing. *European Journal of General Practice, 24*(1), 120-124. doi:10.1080/13814788.2017.1375092

Kulka, R. A., Schlegner, W. S., Fairbank, J. A., Hough, R. L., Jordan, B. K., Marmar, C. R., & Wiess, D. S. (1988). Contractual report of findings from the national Vietnam veterans' readjustment study: Volumes 1 – 4 (PB 90 – 163203). North Carolina, Research Triangle Institute. Retrieved from http://www.ptsd.va.gov/professional/articles/article-pdf/nvvrs_vol1.pdf

Lafferty, C. L., Alford, K. L., Davis, M. K., & O'Connor, R. (2008). *"Did you Shoot anyone?" A practioner's guide to combat veteran workplace and classroom reintegration*. Retrieved from http://vets.arizona.edu/clearinghouse/documents/practitioners_guide.pdf

Lam, C. A., Sherbourne, C., Gelberg, L., Lee, M. L., Huynh, A. K., Chu, K., . . . Farmer, M. M. (2017). Differences in depression care for men and women among veterans with and without psychiatric comorbidities. *Women's Health Issues, 27*(2), 206-213. doi:10.1016/j.whi.2016.11.001

Lambert, C., & Donovan, J. (2016). College health care providers' student-centered care. *The Qualitative Report, 21*(10), 1979-1998. Retrieved from http://nsuworks.nova.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2556&context=tqr

Larson, M. J., Mohr, B. A., Adams, R. S., Wooten, N. R., & Williams, T. V. (2014). Missed opportunity for alcohol problem prevention among army active duty service members post-deployment. *American Journal of Public Health*, *104*(8), 1402-1412. Retrieved from http://web.a.ebscohost.com.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=8&sid=31a47615-7725-461d-bb0a-6e8102a3cf50%40sessionmgr4008

LeCompte, M. D., & Goetz, J. P. (1982). Problems of reliability and validity in ethnographic research. *Review of Educational Research, 52*(1), 31-60. Retrieved from http://www.colorado.edu/education/sites/default/files/attached-files/LeCompte_Goetz_Problems_of_Reliability_Validity_in_Ed_Re.pdf

Leedy, P. D. & Ormrod, J. E. (2010). *Practical research: Planning and design* (9th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

Lehavot, K., Hoerster, K. D., Nelson, K. M., Jakupcak, M., & Simpson, T. L. (2012). Health indicators for military, veteran, and civilian women. *American Journal of Preventive Medicine, 42* (5), 473-480. doi:10.1016/j.amepre.2012.01.006

Lehavot, K., Litz, B., Millard, S. P., Hamilton, A. B., Sadler, A., & Simpson, T. (2017). Study adaptation, design, and methods of a web-based PTSD intervention for women veterans. *Contemporary Clinical Trials*, *53*, 68-79. doi:10.1016/j.cct.2016.12.002

Leonard, S. N., Fitzgerald, R. N., & Riordan, G. (2015). Using developmental evaluation as a design thinking tool for curriculum innovation in professional higher education. *Higher Education Research & Development, 35*(2), 309-321. doi:10.1080/07294360.2015.1087386

Leonard, S. N., & Roberts, P. (2014). Performers and postulates: The role of evolving socio-historical contexts in shaping new teacher professional identities. *Critical Studies in Education, 55*(3), 303-318. doi:10.1080/17508487.2014.904808

Leslie, L. A., & Koblinsky, S. A. (2017). Returning to civilian life: Family reintegration challenges and resilience of women veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars.

Family Social Work, 20(2), 106-123. doi: 10.1080/10522158.2017.1279577

Leung, L. (2015). Validity, reliability, and generalizability in qualitative research. *Journal of Family Medicine and Primary Care, 4*(3), 324-327. doi:10.4103/2249-4863.161306

Lewins, A., & Silver, C. (2007). *Using software in qualitative research: A step-by-step guide* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc.

Lewis, S. (2015). Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches. *Health Promotion Practice*, *16*(4), 473 –475. doi:10.1177/1524839915580941

Lincoln, Y. S. & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic Inquiry.* Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.

Lingis, A. (2017). What is given in experience: The phenomenological account. *Qualitative Health Research, 27*(1). 805-809. doi:10.1177/1049732317698959

Lo, C. O. (2014). Enhancing groundedness in realist grounded theory research. *Qualitative Psychology, 1*(1), 61-76. doi:10.1037/qup0000001

Löfgren, K. (2013). *Qualitative analysis of interview data: A basic step-by-step guide*. Retrieved form http://www.allreadable.com/5d949cA2

Lofland, J., Snow, D., Anderson, L., & Lofland, L. (2006). *Analyzing social settings: a guide to qualitative observation and analysis* (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Wadsworth.

Lopez, K. A., & Willis, D. G. (2004). Descriptive versus interpretive phenomenology: Their contributions to nursing knowledge. *Qualitative Health Research, 14*(5), 726-735. doi:10.1177/1049732304263638

Lorber, J. (1994). Night to his day: The social construct of gender. In P. S. Rothenberg (Ed.), *Race, class, and gender in the United States* (pp. 54-65). New York: Worth Publishers.

Luxton, D.D., Skopp, N.A., & Maguen, S., 2010. Gender differences in depression and PTSD symptoms following combat exposure. *Depress Anxiety, 27*(11), 1027–1033. doi:10.1002/da.20730

Lyle, A. (2013, March 19). First lady recognizes women veterans, addresses unemployment. *American Forces Press Service*. Retrieved from https://www.militaryspot.com/news/first- lady-recognizes-women-veterans-addresses-unemployment

Mackenzie, M. H. (2012). Let women fight: Ending the U.S. military's combat ban. Foreign Affairs, 91(6), 32-42. Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/docview/1223496271?accountid=14872

MacManus, D., Dean, K., Jones, M., Rona, R. J., Greenberg, N., Hull, L., . . . Fear, N. T. (2013). Violent offending by UK military personnel deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan: A data linkage cohort study. *The Lancet, 381*(9870), 907-17. doi:http://dx.doi.org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.1016

Maffucci, J., & Frazier, C. (2015). 7th annual IAVA member survey: The most comprehensive look into the lives of post-9/11 veterans. Iraq and Afghanistan veterans of America. Retrieved from https://iava.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/IAVA_MemberSurvey_Final_single_pgs.pdf

Maguen, S., Cohen, B., Ren, L., Bosch, J., Kimerling, R., & Seal, K. (2012). Gender differences in military sexual trauma and mental health diagnoses among Iraq and Afghanistan veterans with posttraumatic stress disorder. *Women's Health Issues, 22*(1), 61-66. doi:10.1016/j.whi.2011.07.010

Maguen, S., Luxton, D. D., Skopp, N. A., & Madden, E. (2012). Gender differences in traumatic experiences and mental health in active duty soldiers redeployed from Iraq and Afghanistan. *Journal of Psychiatric Research, 46*(3), 311-316. doi:10.1016/j.jpsychires.2011.11.007

Maguen, S., Ren, L., Bosch, J., Marmar, C., & Seal, K. (2010). Gender differences in mental health care. *American Journal of Public Health, 100*(12), 2450-2456. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2009.166165

Manderscheid, R. W. (2007). Helping veterans return: Community, family, and job. *Archives of Psychiatric Nursing, 21*(2), 122-124. doi:10.1016/j.apnu.2006.12.006

Mankowski, M., Haskell, S. G., Brandt, C., & Mattocks, K. M. (2015). Social support throughout the deployment cycle for women veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. *Social Work in Health Care, 54*(4), 287-306. doi:10.1080/00981389.2014.990130

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2016). *Designing qualitative research* (6th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2006). *Designing qualitative research* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Martin, P. Y. (2004). Gender as social institution. Social Forces 82(4), 1249-75. Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/docview/229850961?accountid=14872

Matsakis, A. (2007). Back from the front: Combat, trauma, love, and the family. Baltimore, MD: Sidran Institute Press.

Mattocks, K. M., Haskell, S. G., Krebs, E. E., Justice, A. C., Yano, E. M., & Brandt, C. (2012). Women at war: Understanding how women veterans cope with combat and military sexual trauma. Social Science & Medicine, 74(4), 537-545. doi:10.1016/j.socscimed.20111.10.039

McSally, M. E. (2007). Women in combat: Is the current policy obsolete? Duke Journal of Gender Law & Policy, 14(2), 1011-1059. Retrieved from http://scholarship.law.duke.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1133&context=djglp

Metraux, S., Cusack, M., Byrne, T. H., Hunt-Johnson, N., & True, G. (2017). Pathways into homelessness among post-9/11-era veterans. Psychological Services, 14(2), 229-237. doi:10.1037/ser0000136

Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (1994). Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook (2nd ed.). Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.

Mithers, C. L. (1986). Missing in action: Women warriors in Vietnam. Cultural Critique, 3(3), 79-90. doi:10.2307/1354166

Mobbs, M. C., & Bonanno, G. A. (2018). Beyond war and PTSD: The crucial role of transition stress in the lives of military veterans. Clinical Psychology Review,

59, 137-144. doi:10.1016/j.cpr.2017.11.007

Monahan, E. M., & Neidel-Greenlee, R. (2010). A few good women: America's military Women from World War I to the War in Iraq and Afghanistan. New York: Anchor Books.

Morgan, S. J., Pullon, S. R. H., Macdonald, L. M., McKinlay, E.M., & Gray, B. V. (2017). Case study observational research: A framework for conducting case study research where observation data are the focus. Qualitative Health Research, 27(7), 1060-1068. doi:10.1177/1049732316649160

Morgan, S., Pullon, S., & McKinlay, E. (2015). Observation of interprofessional collaborative practice in primary care teams: An integrative literature review. International Journal of Nursing Studies, 52, 1217–1230. doi:10.1016/j.ijnurstu.2015.03.008

Morse, J. (2015). Critical analysis of strategies for determining rigor in qualitative inquiry. Qualitative Health Research, 25(9), 1212-1222 doi:10.1177/1049732315588501Morse, J. (2003). Perspectives of the observer and observed. Qualitative Health Research, 13(2), 155-157. doi:10.1177/1049732302234595

Moustakas, C. (1994). Phenomenological research methods. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Mulhall, E. (2009, October). Women warriors supporting she 'who has borne the battle.' (Issue Report). Washington, DC: Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America. Retrieved from http://media.iava.org/IAVA_WomensReport_2009.pdf

Murdoch, M., Bradley, A., Mather, S. H., Klein, R. E., Turner, C. L., & Yano, E. M. (2006). Women and war: What physicians should know. *Journal of General Internal Medicine, 21*(S3), S5-10. doi:10.1111/j.1525-1497.2006.00368.x

Myre, G. (2013). Women in combat: 5 key questions. National Public Radio. Retrieved from http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2013/01/24/170161752/women-in-combat-five-key-questions

Naifeh, J. A., Colpe, C. L. J., Aliaga, P. A., Sampson, N. A., Heeringa, S. G., Stein, M. B., . . . Zaslavsky, A. M. (2016). Barriers to initiating and continuing mental health treatment among soldiers in the army study to assess risk and resilience in service members (Army STARRS). *Military Medicine, 181*(9), 1021-1032. doi:10.7205/MILMED-D-15-00211

Nash, W. P. (2006). Stressors of war. In C. R. Figley & W. P. Nash (Eds.), *Combat stress injury: Theory, research, and management* (pp. 11–31). London, UK: Brunner-Routledge.

Naphan, D., & Elliot, M. (2015). Role exit from the military: Student veterans' perceptions of transitioning from the U.S. military to higher education. *The Qualitative Report, 20*(2), 36-48. Retrieved from http://nsuworks.nova.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2094&context=tqr

Neshkova, M. I., & Guo, H. D. (2016). Policy target populations and public participation in agency decision making. *International Public Management Journal*, pp. 1-29. doi:10.1080/10967494.2016.1160012

Neuman, W. L. (2005). Social research methods: Qualitative and quantitative *Approaches* (6th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Nicholson-Crotty, S., & Meier, K. J. (2005). From perception to public policy: Translating social constructions into policy designs. In A. L. Schneider and H. M. Ingram (Eds.), *Deserving and entitled: Social constructions and public policy* (pp. 223-242). State University of New York Press.

Nowlin, M. C. (2011). Theories of the policy process: State of the research and emerging trends. *Policy Studies Journal*, *39*(S1), 41-60. doi:10.1111/j.1541-0072.2010.00389_4.x

O'Connor H., Gibson N. (2003). A step-by-step guide to qualitative data analysis. *Pimatiziwin: A Journal of Aboriginal and Indigenous Community Health*, *1*(1), 64-90. Retrieved from http://www.pimatisiwin.com/uploads/1289566991.pdf

Office of Policy and Planning. (2007). *Women veterans: Past, present and future*. Washington, DC: Author.

Olson, J. D., McAllister, C., Grinnell, L. D., Walters, K. G., & Appunn, F. (2016). Applying constant comparative method with multiple investigators and inter-coder reliability. *The Qualitative Report, 21*(1), 26-42. Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/docview/1761256702?accountid=14872

Ormerod, R. J. (2013). The history and ideas of sociological functionalism. Part C: Criticism of Parson's functionalism; modern social theory; the relevance for OR. Retrieved from

https://scholar.google.com/scholar?q=related:GJwgVhwkuDYJ:scholar.google.com/&hl=en&as_ sdt=0,21&as_ylo=2013

Ormston, R., Spencer, L., Barnard, M., & Snape, D. (2014). The foundations of qualitative research. In J. Ritchie, J. Lewis, C. M. Nicholls, & R. Ormston (Eds.), *Qualitative research practice: A guide for social science students and researchers*, (pp. 1-25). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Ouimette, P., Vogt, D., Wade, M., Tirone, V., Greenbaum, M. A., Kimerling, R., . . . Rosen, C. S. (2011). Perceived barriers to care among veterans' health administration patients with posttraumatic stress disorder. *Psychological Services, 8*(3), 212-223. doi:10.1037/a0024360

Oxford University. (2005). Introduction: What is social theory? In A. Harrington (Ed.) *Modern social theory: An introduction* (2nd ed., pp. 1-12). Author. Retrieved from http://www.csun.edu/~snk1966/Harrington.pdf

Patton, M.Q. (1999). Enhancing the quality and credibility of qualitative analysis. *Health Sciences Research, 34*(5), 1189–1208.

Penner, J. L., & McClement, S. E. (2008). Using phenomenology to examine the experiences of family caregivers of patients with advanced head and neck cancer: Reflections of a novice researcher. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 7*(2), 92-101. doi:10.1177/160940690800700206

Petty, N. J., Thomson, O. P., & Stew, G. (2012). Ready for a paradigm shift? Part 2: Introducing qualitative research methodologies and methods. Manual Therapy, 17(5), 378-384. doi:10.1016/j.math.2012.03.004

Phelps, S. F. (2015). The veteran student experience and the academic librarian. The Journal of Academic Librarianship, 41(3), 236-240. doi:10.1016/j.acalib.2015.04.001

Phillippi, J., & Lauderdale, J. (2018). A guide to field notes for qualitative research: Context and conversation. Qualitative Health Research, 28(3), 381–388. doi:10.1177/1049732317697102

Pierce, P. F. (2006). The role of women in the military. In T. N. Britt, A. B. Adler & C. A. Castro (Eds.), Military life: The psychology of serving in peace and combat (Vol. 3, pp. 97-118). Westport, CT: Praeger Security International.

Pierce, J. J., Siddiki, S., Jones, M. D., Schumacher, K., Pattison, A., & Peterson, H. (2014). Social construction and policy design: A review of past applications. The Policy Studies Journal, 42(1), 1-29. doi:10.1111/psj.12040

Polit, D. F., & Beck, C. T. (2017). Nursing research: Generating and assessing evidence for nursing practice (10th ed.). Philadelphia, PA: Wolters Kluwer Health.

Polit, D. F., & Beck, C. T. (2014). Essentials of nursing research: Appraising evidence for nursing practice (8th ed.). Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.

Polit, D. F., & Beck, C. T. (2007). Nursing research: Generating and assessing evidence for nursing practice (8th ed.). Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.

Poliforni, E. C., & Welch, M. (1999). Perspectives on philosophy of science in nursing: An historical and contemporary anthology. Philadelphia, PA: Lippincott Williams & Wilkins.

Porcari, C., Koch, E. I., Hoodin, F., Ellison, G., McSweeney, L., & Rauch, S. A. M.

(2017). Predictors of help-seeking intentions in operation enduring freedom and operation Iraqi freedom veterans and service members. *Military Medicine, 182*(5), 1640-1647. doi:10.7205/MILMED-D-16-00105

Psychology and the War: Notes. (1943). *Psychological Bulletin, 40*(4), 300-304. doi.org.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/10.1037/h0051189

Ray-Sannerud, B. N., Bryan, C. J., Perry, N. S., & Bryan, A. O. (2015). High levels of emotional distress, trauma exposure, and self-injurious thoughts and behaviors among military personnel and veterans with a history of same sex behavior. *Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity, 2*(2), 130–137. doi:10.1037/sgd0000096

Returning home from Iraq and Afghanistan: Assessment of readjustment needs of veterans, service members, and their families. (2013). *Military Medicine, 179*(10), 1053-1055. doi:10.7205/MILMED-D-14-00263

Rho, E., Lim, C., & Hong, S. (2016). Behavioral intention to participate in a public program: Examining the roles of motivational and policy design factors. *International Review of Public Administration, 21*(3), 233-249. doi:10.1080/12294659.2016.1237090

Risman, B. J. (2004). Gender as a social structure: Theory wrestling with activism. *Gender and Society, 18*(4), 429-450. doi:10.1177/089124320265349

Rivers, F. M., Dukes, S., Hatzfeld, J., Yoder, L. H., Gordon, S., & Simmons, A. (2017). Understanding post-deployment reintegration concerns among en route care nurses: A mixed-methods approach. *Military Medicine, 182*(3/4 Supplement),

243-250. doi:10.7205/MILMED-D-16-00209

Rivers, F. M., Gordon, S., Speraw, S., & Reese, S. (2013). U.S. Army nurses' reintegration and homecoming experiences after Iraq and Afghanistan. *Military Medicine, 178*(2), 166–172. doi:10.7205/MILMED-D-12-00279

Roberts, D. L., Kovacich, J., & Rivers, M. L. (2018). The comprehensive female soldier support model, *Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy, 24*(1), 1-19, doi:10.1080/08854726.2017.1312817

Roberts, P., Priest, H., & Traynor, M. (2006). Reliability and validity in research. *Nursing Standard, 20*(44), 41-45. doi:10.7748/ns2006.07.20.44.41.c6560

Rogers, R. (2018). Coding and writing analytic memos on qualitative data: A review of Johnny Saldaña's the coding manual for qualitative researchers. *The Qualitative Report, 23*(4), 889-892. Retrieved from https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol23/iss4/12

Rolfe, G. (2006). Validity, trustworthiness and rigour: Quality and the idea of qualitative research. *Journal of Advanced Nursing, 53*(3), 304-310. doi:10.1111/j.1365-2648.2006.03727.x

Romaniuk, M., & Kidd, C. (2018). The psychological adjustment experience of reintegration following discharge from military service: A systemic review. *Journal of Military & Veterans' Health*, *26*(2), 60–73. Retrieved from https://jmvh.org/

Roulo, C. (2013, January 24). *American Forces Press Service*. Retrieved from http://archive.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=119098

Russell, C., Gregory, D., Ploeg, J., DiCenso, A., & Guyatt, G. (2005). Qualitative research. In A. DiCenso, G. Guyatt, & D. Ciliska (Eds.), *Evidence-based nursing: A guide to clinical practice* (pp. 120–136). St. Louis, MO: Elsevier Mosby.

Saldaña, J. (2015). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc.

Saldaña, J. (2009). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc.

Salkind, N. J. (2006). *Exploring research* (6th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall.

Sandelowski, M., & Barroso, J. (2002). Reading qualitative studies. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 1*(1), 74-108. Retrieved from https://journals.library.ualberta.ca/ijqm/index.php/IJQM/issue/view/385

Sandelowski, M. (1986). The problem of rigor in qualitative research. *Advances in Nursing Science, 8*(3), 27-37. doi:10.1097/00012272-198604000-00005

Saunders, B., Sim, J., Kingstone, T., Baker, S., Waterfield, J., Bartlam, B., . . . Jinks, C. (2018). Saturation in qualitative research: Exploring its conceptualization and operationalization. *Quality and Quantity, 52*(4), 1893-1907. doi:10.1007/s11135-017-0574-8

Savage, J. (2000). Participative observation: Standing in the shoes of others? *Qualitative Health Research, 10*(3), 324-339. doi:10.1177/104973200129118471

Scarborough, R., & Curl, J. (2005, January 12). Despite pressure, Bush pledges “no women in combat.” *The Washington Times*. Retrieved from

http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2005/jan/13/20050113-091120-8742r/print/

Schaefer, A. G., Wenger, J. W., Kavanagh, J., Wong, J. P., Oak, G. S., Trail, T. E., Nichols, T. (2015). Implications of integrating women into the marine corps infantry. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. Retrieved from https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1103.html

Schlenger, W. E., Corry, N. H., Kulka, R. A., Williams, C. S., Henn-Haase, C., & Marmar, C. R. (2015). Design and methods of the national Vietnam veterans longitudinal study. *International Journal of Methods in Psychiatric Research*, *24*(3), 186-203. doi:10.1002/mpr.1469

Schneider, A. L., Ingram, H., & deLeon, P. (2014). Democratic policy design: Social construction of target populations. In P. A. Sabatier and C. M. Weible (Eds.), *Theories of the Policy Process* (3rd ed., pp. 105-149). Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Schneider, A. L., & Ingram, H. (2005). Public policy. In J. Rabin (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of public administration and public policy* (First Update Supplement, pp. 204-208). New York: Taylor & Francis Group.

Schneider, A. L., & Ingram, H. M. (1997). *Policy design for democracy*. University Press of Kansas.

Schneider, A. L., & Ingram, H. (1993). Social construction of target populations: Implications for politics and policy. *The American Political Science Review*, *87*(2), 334-347. doi:10.2307/2939044

Schneider, A. L., & Sidney, M. (2009). What is next for policy design and social construction theory? *The Policy Studies Journal, 37*(1), 103 – 119. doi:10.1111/j.1541-0072.2008. 00298.x

Schreiber, M., & McEnany, G. P. (2015). Stigma, American military personnel and mental health care: Challenges from Iraq and Afghanistan. *Journal of Mental Health, 24*(1), 54–59. doi:10.3109/09638237.2014.971147

Seamone, E. R., McGuire, J., Sreenivasan, S., Clark, S., Smee, D., & Dow, D. (2014). Moving upstream: Why rehabilitative justice in military discharge proceedings serves a public health interest. *American Journal of Public Health, 104*(10), 1805–1811. doi:10.2105/AJPH.2014.302117

Secretary of the Air Force. (2000). *Military Operations Other Than War Air Force Doctrine: Document 2-3*. Washington, DC: U.S. Air Force.

Secretary of the Army. (2016). Army directive 2016-01: Expanding positions and changing the Army policy for the assignment of female soldiers. Washington, DC: Author. Retrieved from http://sill-www.army.mil/eo/docs/4a.pdf

Sherman, M. D., Zanotti, D. K., & Jones, D. E. (2005). Key elements in couples' therapy with veterans with combat-related posttraumatic stress disorder. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice, 36*(6), 626–633. doi:10.1037/0735-7028.36.6.626

Sherrow, V. (2007). *Point/counterpoint: Women in the military*. New York: InfoBase Publishing. Retrieved from http://web.ebscohost.com.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook/nlebk

_223628_AN?sid=534d4e47-6e28-415d-a7bc
5f49f27c88c4@sessionmgr112&vid=5

Simon, M. K., & Goes, J. (2013). Validity and reliability in qualitative studies. Retrieved from http://www.dissertationrecipes.com/reliability-validity-qualitative-studies/

Simon, M. K. (2011). Qualitative research: The "l" side in the paradigm war. Retrieved from http://www.dissertationrecipes.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/Qualitative-Paradigm.pdf

Slone, L. B., & Friedman, M. J. (2008). *After the war zone: A practical guide for returning troops and their families*. Philadelphia, PA: Da Capo Press.

Slone, L. B., Pomerantz, A. S., & Friedman, M. J. (2009). Vermont: A case history for supporting National Guard troops and their families. *Psychiatric Annals, 39*(2), 89-95. Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/docview/217042686?accountid=14872

Smith, R. P. (2013). The economic costs of military conflict. *Journal of Peace Research, 51*(2), 245-256. doi:10.1177/0022343313496595

Smith K. B., & Larimer, C. W. (2009). *The public policy theory primer*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Smith, J., & Noble, H. (2014). Bias in research. *Evidence Based Nursing, 17*(4), 100-101. doi:10.1136/eb-2014-101946

Speziale, H. J. S., & Carpenter, D. R. (2007). *Qualitative research in nursing: Advancing the humanistic imperative* (4th ed.). Baltimore, MD: Lippincott Williams &

Wilkins.

Sreenivasan, S., Garrick, T., McGuire, J., Smee, D. E., Dow, D., & Woehl, D. (2013). Critical concerns in Iraq/Afghanistan war veteran-forensic interface: Combat-related post-deployment criminal violence. *Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law, 42*(2), 263-273. Retrieved from http://jaapl.org/content/jaapl/41/2/263.full.pdf

Stainback, K., Kleiner, S., & Skaggs, S. (2016). Women in power: Undoing or redoing the gendered organization. *Gender & Society, 30*(1), 109-135. doi:10.1177/0891243215602906

Starks, H., & Trinidad, S. B. (2007). Choose your method: A comparison of phenomenology, discourse analysis, and grounded theory. *Qualitative Health Research, 17*(10), 1372-1380. doi:10.1177/1049732307307031

Stenbacka, C. (2001). Qualitative research requires quality concepts of its own. *Management Decision, 39*(7), 551-556. doi:10.1108/EUM0000000005801

Stiles, W. B. (1993). Quality control in qualitative research. *Clinical Psychology Review, 13*(6), 593-618. doi:10.1016/0272-7358(93)90048-Q

Street, A. E., Gradus, J. L., Giasson, H. L., Vogt, D., & Resick, P. A. (2013). Gender differences among veterans deployed in support of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. *Journal of General Internal Medicine, 28*(Suppl 2), S556-S562. doi:10.1007/s11606-013-2333-4

Strong, J. D. (2013). *Women at war: A qualitative study of combat experiences of female veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan* (Order No. 3606567). Available from ProQuest

Dissertations & Theses Global. (1478021581). Retrieved from http://search.proquest.com.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/docview/1478021581?accountid=14872

Suddeath, E. G., Kerwin, A. K., & Dugger, S. M. (2017). Narrative family therapy: Practical techniques for more effective work with couples and families. *Journal of Mental Health Counseling, 39*(2), 116-131. doi:10.17744/mehc.39.2.03

Tapp, D., & Lavoie, M. (2017). The human becoming theory as a reinterpretation of the symbolic interactionism: a critique of its specific nature and scientific underpinnings. *Nursing Philosophy*, *18*(2), 1-13. doi:10.1111/nup.12123

The American Legion. (2007). *Guide for Women veterans: Identifying risks, services, and prevention*. Retrieved from http://www.legion.org/documents/legion/pdf/womensguide.pdf

The National Center on Family Homelessness. (2011, April 29). *Chicagoland female veterans: A qualitative study of attachment to the labor force*. Retrieved from http://www.familyhomelessness.org/media/248.pdf

Thomas, D. R. (2017). Feedback from research participants: Are member checks useful in qualitative research? Qualitative Research in Psychology, 14(1), 23-41, doi:10.1080/14780887.2016.1219435

Thomas, E. & Magilvy, J. K. (2011). Qualitative rigor or research validity in qualitative research. *Journal for Specialists in Pediatric Nursing,* 16(2), 151-155. doi:10.1111/j.1744-6155.2011.00283.x

Thomas, K. H., Albright, D., Shields, M., Kaufman, E., Michaud, C., Plummer-Taylor,

S., & Hamner, K. (2016). Predictors of depression diagnoses and symptoms in United States female veterans: Results from a national survey and implications for programming.

Journal of Military and Veterans' Health, 24(3), 6–17. Retrieved from http://jmvh.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/AMMA-JMVH-July-2016_print-1.pdf

Thomas, K. H., Haring, E. L., McDaniel, J., Fletcher, K. L., & Albright, D. L. (2017). Belonging and support: Women veterans' perceptions of veteran service organizations. *Journal of Veterans Studies, 2*(2), 1-12. Retrieved from file:///C:/Users/joani/AppData/Local/Packages/Microsoft.MicrosoftEdge_8wekyb3d8bbwe/TempState/Downloads/112-312-1-PB.pdf

Thomas, K. H., & Plummer-Taylor, S. (2015). Bulletproofing the psyche: Mindfulness interventions in the training environment to improve resilience in the military and veteran communities. *Advances in Social Work, 16*(2), 312–322. doi:10.18060/18537

Thomas, K. H., Turner, L. W., Kaufman, E., Paschal, A., Knowlden, A. P., Birch, D. A., & Leeper, J. (2015). Predictors of depression diagnoses and symptoms in veterans: Results from a national survey. *Military Behavioral Health, 3*(4), 255–265. doi:10.1080/21635781.2015.1085928

TRADOC Analysis Center (2015). *Gender integration study*. Fort Leavenworth, KS: Author. Retrieved from https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/wisr-studies/Army%20-%20Gender%20Integration%20Study3.pdf

Trafimow, D. (2014). Considering quantitative and qualitative issues together. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 11*(1), 15–24. doi:10.1080/14780887.2012.743202288454

Treadwell, M. E. (1954). *United States army in world war II: Special studies: The women's army corps*. Washington, DC: Center of Military History United States Army. Retrieved from http://www.history.army.mil/books/wwii/Wac/ch01.htm

Trego, L., Wilson, C., & Steele, N. (2010). A call to action for evidence-based military addresses sex and gender in health and illness. *Biological Research for Nursing, 12*(2), 171-177. doi:10.1177/1099800410375299

Trochim, W. M. (2006). The research methods knowledge base. Retrieved from http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/

Tuckett, A. G. (2005). Part II. Rigour in qualitative research: Complexities and solutions. *Nurse Researcher, 13*(1), 29-42. Retrieved from https://web-a-ebscohost-com.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=3&sid=db1e6d75-e712-49b0-ae82-af179458cbd6%40sessionmgr4006

Ulmer, W. F. (2018). Leaders, managers, and command climate. In R. L. Taylor, W. E. Rosenbach, & E. B. Rosenbach (Eds.), *Military leadership: In pursuit of excellence* (pp. 97-106). New York, NY: Routledge.

Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness. (2012). *Report to congress on the review of laws, policies, and regulations restricting the service of female members in the U.S. armed forces*. Retrieved from file:///C:/Users/joani/AppData/Local/Packages/Microsoft.MicrosoftEdge_8wekyb

3d8bbwe/TempState/Downloads/ADA556468.pdf

University of California. (2017). What is social construction theory? Retrieved from https://www.reference.com/world-view/social-construction-theory-bf47686e95205f0e

US Army Official Report on 507th Maintenance Co.: An Nasiriyah, Iraq. (2003). *Attack on the 507th Maintenance Company: 23 March 2003 – An Nasiriyah, Iraq* (Executive Summary). Retrieved from http://www.readbag.com/metavr-casestudies-aar507ambush

Valcore, J. L., & Dodge, M. (2016, June 14). How hate crime legislation shapes gay and lesbian target groups. *Criminal Justice Policy Review,* Advance online publication, 1-23. doi:10.1177/0887403416651924

Van Kaam, A. L. (1959). Phenomenal analysis: Exemplified by a study of the experience of "really feeling understood." *Journal of Individual Psychology, 15*(1), 66-72. Retrieved from http://www.adlerjournals.com/_private/JIP/JIP%20v15%20n1/Phenomenal_Analysis_Exemplified_by_Study--VanKaam.pdf

van Manen, M. (2017a). But is it phenomenology? *Qualitative Health Research, 27*(6), 775–779. doi:10.1177/1049732317699570

van Manen M. (2017b). Phenomenology in its original sense. *Qualitative Health Research*, *27*(6), 810-825. doi:10.1111/nhs.12274

van Manen, M. (2007). Phenomenology of practice. *Phenomenology & Practice, 1*(1), 11-30. Retrieved from

https://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/pandpr/article/view/19803/15314

van Manen, M. (1997). *Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy* (2nd ed.). Ontario, Canada: The Althouse Press.

Venkatesh, V., Brown, S. A., & Bala, H. (2013). Bridging the qualitative-quantitative divide: Guidelines for conducting mixed methods research in information systems. *Management Information Systems Quarterly, 37*(1), 21-54. Retrieved from http://site.iugaza.edu.ps/kdahleez/files/2014/02/44-BRIDGING-THE-QUALITATIVE-QUANTITATIVE-DIVIDE-GUIDELINES-FOR-CONDUCTING-MIXED-METHODS-RESEARCH-IN-INFORMATION-SYSTEMS-2013.pdf

Veterans' Health Administration. (2013). A profile of women veterans today. Retrieved from https://www.womenshealth.va.gov/WOMENSHEALTH/docs/ProfileSheet_073113_508c.pdf

Veterans' Health Administration. (2012). A profile of women veterans today. Retrieved from https://www.womenshealth.va.gov/WOMENSHEALTH/docs/WV_Profile_FINAL.pdf

Vogt, D., Perkins, D. F., Copeland, L. A., Finley, E. P., Jamieson, C. S., Bradford, B., . . .Lederer, S. (2018). The veterans metrics initiative study of US veterans' experiences during their transition from military service. *BMJ Open, 8*(6), 1-10.

doi:10.1136/bmjopen-2017-020734

Walden University Research Center for Quality Research. (2017). *Phenomenological research*. Retrieved from http://academicguides.waldenu.edu/researchcenter/resources/Design

Wall, C., Glenn, S., Mitchinson, S., & Poole, H. (2004). Using a reflective diary to develop bracketing skills during a phenomenological investigation. *Nurse Researcher, 11*(4), 20-29. doi.org/10.7748/nr2004.07.11.4.20.c6212

Wallace, R. A., & Wolf, A. (2005). *Contemporary social theory: Expanding the classical tradition* (6th ed.). New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

Wands, L. (2013). "No one gets through it OK": The health challenge of coming home from war. *Advances in Nursing Science, 36*(3), 186-199. doi:10.1097/ANS.0b013e31829edcbe

Wang, L., Seelig, A., Wadsworth, S. M., McMaster, H., Alcaraz, J. E., & Crum-Cianflone, N. F. (2015). Associations of military divorce with mental, behavioral, and physical health outcomes. *BMC Psychiatry, 15*(1), 1-12. doi:10.1186/s12888-015-0517-7

Washington, D. L., Bean-Mayberry, B., Riopelle, D., & Yano, E. M. (2011). Access to care for women veterans: Delayed healthcare and unmet need. *Journal of General Internal Medicine, 26*(S2), 655-661. doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/s11606-011-1772-z

Washington, D. L., & Yano, E. M. (2013). PTSD: Women veterans' prevalence of PTSD care. *Journal of General Internal Medicine, 28*(10), 1265–1265.

doi:10.1007/s11606-013-2488-z

Weiztman, E. A. (2000). “Software and qualitative research.” In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln, Handbook of Qualitative Research (2nd ed., pp. 803-820). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

White, J. (2005, May 5). Army to issue combat badge for soldiers not in infantry. The Washington Post. Retrieved from http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/05/04/AR2005050402147.html

Whittemore, R., Chase, S. K., & Mandle, C. L. (2001). Validity in qualitative research. Qualitative Health Research, 11(4), 522-537. doi:10.1177/104973201129119299

Wiedemann, G. (2013). Opening up to big data: Computer-assisted analysis of textual data in social sciences. Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 14(2), 1-24. Retrieved from http://eds.a.ebscohost.com.ezp.waldenulibrary.org/eds/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=2203c978-b203-40b7-b9d6-c0a0bc66f3cc%40sessionmgr4008&hid=4213

Wiersma, W. (2000). Research methods in education: An introduction. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Williamson, M. L. C., Holliday, R., Holder, N., North, C. S., & Suris, A. (2017). A reexamination of military sexual trauma and posttraumatic stress disorder. Psychiatric Annals, 47(3), 134-138. doi:10.3928/00485713-20170206-01

Willis, D. G., Sullivan-Bolyai, S., Knafl, & Cohen, M. Z. (2016). Distinguishing features and similarities between descriptive phenomenological and qualitative description research. Western Journal of Nursing Research, 38(9), 1185-1204.

doi:10.1177/0193945916645499

Winslow, D. (n.d.). Gender and military sociology. Retrieved from http://www.fhs.se/Documents/Externwebben/om-fhs/Organisation/ILM/Sociologi%20och%20ledarskap/Dokument/Gender%20and%20Military%20Sociology_webb.pdf

Wise, J. E. Jr., & Baron, S. (2006). *Women at war: Iraq, Afghanistan, and other conflicts*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press.

Woodley, X. M., & Lockard, M. (2016). Womanism and snowball sampling: Engaging marginalized populations in holistic research. *The Qualitative Report, 21*(2), 321-329. Retrieved from http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol21/iss2/9

Women's Army Corps Veterans' Association. (2015). Pallas Athene Insignia & Award. Retrieved from http://www.armywomen.org/award.shtml

Women In International Security. (2017). Women in ground combat: Facts and figures. Washington, DC: Author.

Women In the Army - The Official Homepage of the United States Army. (n.d.). Women in the Army: History. Retrieved from https://www.army.mil/women/history/

Women's Research and Education Institute. (n.d.). Did you know? Facts about women in the military: Historical facts about American women and the military. Retrieved from http://www.wrei.org/WomeninMilitary_DidYouKnow.htm

Women Veterans Report: The past, present, and future of women veterans. (2017). National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, Department of Veterans Affairs, Washington, DC. Retrieved from

https://www.va.gov/vetdata/docs/SpecialReports/Women_Veterans_2015_Final.pdf

Woodhead, C., Wessely, S., Jones, N., Fear, N. T., & Hatch, S. L. (2012). Impact of exposure to combat during deployment to Iraq and Afghanistan on mental health by gender. *Psychological Medicine, 42*(9), 1985-1996. doi:10.1017/S003329171100290X

Wright, G. (2018). "I'm a soldier, not a gender": Iraq war literature and the double bind of being a woman in combat. *Women's Studies, 47*(6), 657-672, doi:10.1080/00497878.2018.1492406

Xu, M. A., & Storr, G. B. (2012). Learning the concept of researcher as instrument in qualitative research. *The Qualitative Report, 17*(21), 1-18. Retrieved from http://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol17/iss21/2

Yehuda, R., Hoge, C. W., McFarlane, A. C., Vermetten, E., Lanius, R. A., Nievergelt, C. M., . . . Hyman, S. E. (2015, October 8). Post-traumatic stress disorder. *Nature Reviews Disease Primers, 1*, 1-22. doi:10.1038/nrdp.2015.57

Yin, R. K. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Yüksel, P., & Yıldırım, S. (2015). Theoretical frameworks, methods, and procedures for conducting phenomenological studies in educational settings. *Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry, 6*(1), 1-17. Retrieved from http://dergipark.ulakbim.gov.tr/tojqi/article/view/5000093521/5000087062

Zagorski, N. (2016). Women in combat positions may face different mental health

challenges. *Psychiatric News, 51*(22), 17. doi:10.1176/appi.pn.2016.11a3

Appendix A: Phenomenological Reduction

"The superiority of the male is indeed overwhelming: Perseus, Hercules, David, Achilles, Lancelot, the French warriors Du Geslin and Bayard, Napoleon – so many men for one Joan of Arc."

(de Beauvoir, 1949)

My interest in studying single women following their deployment developed from my own experiences as a single woman growing up in the military. I joined the Army in 1978, at the age of 18, and remained on active duty until I retired 20-years later in 1998. My career began as a member of the Women Army Corps (WAC), established in 1943. I am honored to have been the very last cycle of women who would be called a WAC. As I begin basic training, several significant events stood out. For instance, WACs received a U.S. insignia worn on the right lapel and the Pallas of Athene, the WAC insignia, worn on the left lapel. The Pallas of Athene indicated the wearer was branch immaterial personnel who were not assigned to a particular branch of the Army (medical, engineer, quartermaster, etc.). This was normal during that era, especially in basic training. The moment those two small insignias were issued, especially the Pallas of Athene, I knew I would spend the next 20-years in the military because I felt a sense of belonging. More importantly, I would be part of something larger than myself.

The Pallas of Athene represented a Roman and Greek Goddess associated with an impressive variety of womanly virtues. She was the goddess of handicrafts, wise in industries of peace and arts of war, also the goddess of storms and battle, who led through victory to peace and prosperity to symbolize the work and purpose of the WAC

(Women's Army Corps Veterans' Association, 2015). At the onset of my enlistment and throughout my career, women were prohibited from serving in ground combat units, yet ironically the military issued WACs an insignia that associated them with being a warrior. When I joined the military, I developed strong bonds with fellow service members (SMs), particularly with other single women with whom I often went on support or peacekeeping missions with. Generally, depending on the skill sets needed for the mission, only a small number of women were assigned to these missions. Because of our small number we were certainly at a disadvantage.

In retrospect, perhaps because our numbers were always small this made it easier for men to forget women also supported combat and peacekeeping missions. At times, this type of behavior was annoying because the women who were on these missions worked just as hard as the men and were just as efficient at whatever task assigned. After all, to ensure success, we received the same level of training and preparation as our male counterparts. In retrospect, it was through these strong bonds with other single women that we looked out for and supported one another in reaching and achieving our maximum potential. No matter the issue, these were women you could always count on whether it was motivation to pass the 7-event Army Physical Fitness Test (it is only 3-events now), encouragement to complete a long endurance run, or a 12-mile road march in under 4-hours, assistance preparing for the promotion board, or soldier and non-commissioned officer of the year board, give aid and comfort as needed, or simply a shoulder to lean on or cry on if necessary. We were just as committed to our professional and personal growth and development as the men were.

I truly believe it was my upbringing that prepared me for the rigors of military life, especially growing up with five older brothers, three of whom were drafted during the Vietnam era. In addition, I firmly believe my mother was a Drill Sergeant in a former life. In fact, as I reflect back, my basic training leadership did not come close to matching the level of good order and discipline my mother commanded and demanded. In 1978, at the age of 18, my decision to join the military provided me a foundation that allowed me to acquire the training and knowledge that would later lead to a fulfilling career in the military for the next 20-years. Today, I still have deep ties connecting me to the military, its culture and way of life. Currently, at the time of this writing, I am employed by the Department of the Army as the Executive Officer of the U.S. Army Medical Department Activity located on Fort George G. Meade, Maryland. It is on this premise that I continue to have an even deeper interest in the well-being of single female SMs, especially those returning from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan.

I was on active duty during the First Gulf War, but never deployed. Although I volunteered multiple times, my branch manager denied the request on each occasion. Prior to the start of the war, I was stationed in Korea and could not understand why the branch manager would not simply assign me to a unit already on the ground in Iraq. To me this seemed perfectly logical, especially since I only had 2-months remaining in Korea and did not have a return assignment at the time. I wanted to deploy because several friends and two of my sisters, Terry and Andrea, were deploying. As the eldest sibling, I felt I should have been downrange with them. Nevertheless, after the fifth time requesting to deploy, my branch manager finally informed me that in support of the war

efforts my skills were better utilized getting others ready for deployment. Although I was not happy with the decision, I accepted my fate, saluted the flag, and accepted my next assignment, which sent me to Fort Sam Houston, Texas.

As a former Drill Sergeant, during the early stages of war preparation I served as a small arms weapons instructor for military personnel serving in the Reserve component, assisting them with weapons qualification. Subsequently, once this task was completed, my follow-on assignment as a service school instructor for Preventive Medicine (PM) Technicians who would later deploy. During the First Gulf War, before VTCs (video and teleconferences), smart phones, skype, text messaging, and email, I like many of my peers, kept up with the tempo of the war through the media. Whenever I could, I connected via telephone with my sisters, which was not too often. Terry was in the Army, assigned to Fort Bragg, NC as a supply sergeant, married with children. Andrea was in the Navy assigned to Norfolk Naval Base, VA as an operations specialist, single, unmarried, and no children at the time. Although I worried about them both during their deployment, I must admit I worried about Terry the most and made every effort to contact her as often as I could.

In retrospect, I worried about her more because she had a family with two very young children at home, a 4-year old and a newborn. I thought about the lost her immediate family, especially her children, would experience should anything were to happen to her. Looking back, I stayed in contact with her more because it was easier to contact someone downrange in the Army than a Navy SM. This was especially true, because I too was in the Army with access to various modes of communication

equipment used by the Signal Command to contact deployed Army personnel. It seemed as though I did not want to get off the phone with her each time we spoke. Although I knew she had a very robust family support system from both sides of the marriage and as the supply sergeant she had the means to get whatever she needed, yet I wanted to ensure she was safe and worried about her constantly.

Communicating with Andrea, who was in the Navy, was more problematic and sporadic, as it most often occurred via snail mail. When we did communicate via phone, she had to make the connection because her deployment experience primarily kept her on a ship. Because she was on a ship in the ocean, I assumed she was safe until it registered in my head a SCUD missile could be launched at the ship. With the possibility of missiles containing biological and chemical warheads, I begin worrying about Andrea even more. For instance, her state of mind, well-being, and whether she knew that her family thought about her constantly and was concerned for her safety in as much as we were concerned about Terry, whose unit was on the ground in Iraq. Although Andrea did not have children or a spouse, I now know that her experience of being in a hostile combat environment was no less traumatic for her than it was for my sister Terry.

My concern for both of my sisters was not just because they were my sisters, but also because we shared a unique profession, we were defenders of the nation, Soldiers, and Sailors who happen to be women, married, and single. Based on my discovery from the literature review, unwittingly I can clearly see now that I too like many, demonstrated by my actions, thought married SMs and SMs with children should perhaps garner more attention and concern regarding their well-being and readjustment following deployment

than single SMs warrant. I cannot state with any degree of certainty or evidence why this appears to be the norm. Although the First Gulf War was brief, lasting only six weeks and four days, 13 January – 28 February 1991, it put a lot of publicity on what women in the military were doing. This would be the first time in history thousands of women deployed, approximately 41,000 (Bellafaire, 2016, "1990s Deployments," para. 1; Holm, 1992). Among the women deployed 58% were single and 75% without children (Carney, et al., 2003). Although a significant percentage of women deployed were single without children, many in my unit still referred to the First Gulf War as the mommy war because many women were married, or single with children and had to leave their spouses, or children behind. Granted, fathers have been leaving their children and spouses behind for centuries to go off to war and defend the nation's interest. However, this was the first-time thousands of women deployed at one time.

On the other hand, what we learned from the First Gulf War is that the dynamics are different when it involves women having to leave spouses and children to go off to war. Following the war, the streets of major cities held parades with SMs marching in formation and held as heroes. I like most SMs was drawn into the celebrations not only because the war was so brief, but most importantly the loss of life was minimum. This was definitely cause to celebrate especially since the war did not involve the use of biological and chemical warfare as we were originally led to believe. After the war was over my sisters returned home to their normal duties and lives, yet the return to normal can often be difficult to manage after a combat mission. Shortly after my siblings returned home, I had a chance to meet with them and listened while they shared their

experiences of being deployed in a combat zone. What stood out the most is the reintegration and readjustment phase of their shared experiences of returning home and to their units. After the First Gulf War, the reintegration and readjustment phase for single women in particular was even more difficult, because outside of street parades in which entire units were recognized, women received no recognition for their combatant status.

Just as in previous wars, supporting the deployment efforts to Iraq and Afghanistan in the face of shrinking resources, the Army relied more on women as an undeniable asset the military cannot do without, even in combat operations. Once again, I turned my interest to the readjustment experiences and needs of single women returning from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. Equally important, capturing and sharing their experiences might prove instrumental in supporting other single women deploying in support of combat operations. As I considered what this subpopulation of the military might face in future conflicts, I discovered I must hear directly from those who served in combat if I am to understand fully the true meaning and essence of this phenomenon. It is with this insight and professional experience that I interviewed 13 participants who met the criteria for this study and whose experience supported answering the research question. In an effort to understand the single female SM point of view of the experience, the meaning and essence of their stories, themes, memories, tone, thoughts, things observed during the interview, and reflections will be used to uncover the true essence of the readjustment experiences and needs of single women returning from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol Project: The Readjustment Experiences of Single Women Returning from Combat in Iraq and Afghanistan

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer:

Interviewee:

Rank and Position of the Interviewee:

Description of the Project:

After deployment, the period of reintegration and reunion with family and friends can be a time of joy, celebration, and relief. At the same time, however, it can be difficult and challenging. I am seeking to understand the readjustment experiences and needs of single women returning from combat. However, it is imperative to note the post-deployment concerns of female veterans are no worse than they are for men, though they may differ on particular issues such as their roles and responsibilities while serving in a combat zone. Still, single women exposed to various war stressors may potentially be left without adequate resources, coping skills, and social support systems to readjust to their former lives. In addition, as combat positions once closed to women open, the findings of this study may identify practical measures to support the personal well-being of thousands of single female veterans facing future combat operations. This area of research may also offer single women returning from deployment coping strategies to sustain healthy social networks and relationships and encourage them to seek help, as needed, in the readjustment phase while still serving on active duty, or within their communities well after their transition from the military.

Research Question:

How do single women returning from combat perceive their social construction has change, as it relates to their readjustment experience and needs, compared to males in their unit, or communities as they transition from the military?

Interview Questions:

1. As a single woman, how would you fully describe what your social interactions have been like with others, especially men, since your return from Iraq or Afghanistan, including your thoughts, feelings, and perceptions?

2. What has your readjustment been like in the sense of your everyday social activities?

3. Who, if anyone, has influenced or affected your readjustment? Describe what he or she did.

4. What value can be derived from your readjustment experiences that may help other single women returning from future combat zones?

5. What do you wish others knew or could understand about your life and readjustment goals following deployment?

6. What would you like to say to health care professionals, your family and friends, military leaders, and policy makers regarding the readjustment experiences and needs of single women returning from combat?

7. What was your traditional support system like prior to your deployment?

8. Describe how your support system has changed, if at all, since you returned from deployment.

9. Since your deployment, how would you describe your relationship with close friends, immediate and extended family?

10. What resources have you sought out? Which of those were helpful? Which were the least helpful?

11. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about your readjustment experience?

Thank you for participating in the study. Your confidentiality and anonymity will be protected and maintained throughout the data collection process. Measures to maintain confidentiality will include, but are not limited to, securing the data in a controlled environment within a locked file cabinet and password protected computer files with access limited to me, Ms. Joanie Rainey. In addition, a follow-on review will be necessary via email to ensure accuracy in the transcription of your interview, credibility, and interpretation of the findings resulting from the data analysis.

Appendix C: Demographics and Other Pertinent Information

1. Career path:
   a. Commissioned
   b. Enlisted

2. Rank/Grade:
   a. Private – Specialist (E-1 – E-4)
   b. Sergeant – Staff Sergeant (E-5 – E-6)
   c. Sergeant First Class – Command Sergeants Major (E-7 – E-9)
   d. 2nd Lieutenant – Captain (O-1 – O-3)
   e. Major – Colonel (O-4 – O-6)
   f. General Officer (O-7 – Higher)
   g. Warrant Officer (W-1 – W-5)

3. Please Specify What Your MOS (Military Occupational Specialty), or AOC (Area of Concentration) is (e.g., 68S – Preventive Medicine Specialist, or 67E – Pharmacy):

4. What branch of service are you in?
   a. Army
   b. Air Force
   c. Navy
   d. Marine Corps
   e. Coast Guard

5. Current length of military service:
   a. 1-5-years
   b. 5-10-years
   c. 11-15-years
   d. 16-20-years
   e. 21-or more years

6. Did you deploy?
   a. Yes
   b. No

7. Where did you deploy?
   a. Iraq
   b. Afghanistan
   c. Both

8. Have you been on multiple deployments?
   a. Yes
   b. No

9. How many times did you deploy?
   a. 1-2
   b. 3-4
   c. 5-6

10. Length of military service at the time of deployment:
    a. 6 months-1-year
    b. 1-5-years
    c. 6-10-years
    d. 11-15-years
    e. 16-20-years
    f. 21-or more years

11. What was the length of each deployment?
    a. less than 6 months
    b. 6 months - 1-year
    c. 1-year – 18-months
    d. If longer than 18-months, how long? _____

12. How old were you when you first deployed? _____

13. Currently, how old are you?
    a. 18 - 25
    b. 26 - 35
    c. 36 - 45
    d. 46 - 55
    e. > 55

14. Before your deployment, describe your initial idea(s) of what you anticipated deployment to be like.

15. What type(s) of activities, not related to your specific MOS or AOC, were you engaged in while deployed?

16. What sights, sounds, conversations, or other experiences contributed to your perceptions of being deployed in a combat environment in Iraq or Afghanistan?

17. If you could make recommendations on how to improve deployments in a combat environment for single women, what recommendations would you make, and why? To whom would you make these recommendations to (e.g., military leaders, policy makers, religious leaders, health care professionals, etc.)? Why?

Appendix D: Interview Script

(This script will be read to each participant before starting the interview process)

Thank you for participating in the study. As a matter of protocol, I will review the informed consent letter to ensure you understand your rights and the process of the study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to participate, or withdraw from the study later, you can do so without penalty or loss of benefit, if any. The results of the research study may be published, but your identity will remain confidential and your name will not be disclosed to outside parties. Do you have any questions, or concerns about the informed consent?

We will conduct an audiotaped open-ended, semistructured interview about the readjustment experience of single women returning from combat in Iraq and Afghanistan. The interview will take approximately 60-90 minutes. Your confidentiality and privacy will be protected and maintained throughout the interview and data collection process. Measures to maintain confidentiality will include, but are not limited to, securing the data in a controlled environment inside a locked file cabinet and computer files will password protected. Both forms of security will only be accessible to me, Ms. Joanie Rainey. In addition, a follow-on review of the transcribed interview will be necessary to ensure the accuracy, credibility, and interpretation of the findings resulting from the data analysis.

Appendix E: Military and Family Life Counseling Resource Information

Following the interview process should you need the support or assistance of a licensed professional counselor please contact Military OneSource, the Military and Family Life Counseling Program, where you will find confidential help available.

Military OneSource offers a call center as well as online support to connect you to a program or professional to make sure you receive the assistance you need. They are available 24/7 online and by telephone no matter where you serve or live, you always have support. As a DOD health care beneficiary (e.g., active duty military, retiree, etc.) you are entitled to medical care within the Military Health Care System.

To learn more about who they serve and eligibility requirements, contact them at 1-800-342-9647 to speak with a consultant, or see what services they offer at: http://www.militaryonesource.mil/confidential-help/mflc.

Appendix F: Glossary of Acronyms

AD: Active Duty

AOC: Area of Concentration

CZ: Combat Zone

DOD: Department of Defense

MOS: Military Occupational Specialty

OEF: Operation Enduring Freedom

OIF: Operation Iraqi Freedom

SM: Service Member

WAC: Women's Army Corps

WAAC: Women's Auxiliary Army Corps